



City of Ypsilanti

Planning and Development Department

Date: December 11, 2008

2008 Annual Report Planning Commission Ypsilanti, Michigan

INTRODUCTION

The Planning Commission of the City of Ypsilanti is governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, State of Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, and by the City of Ypsilanti's Zoning Ordinance.

In 2008, the Planning Commission's membership was as follows:

Roderick Johnson (chair)
Roberta Wojcik-Andrews
Daniel Lautenbach
Brian McClemens
Kevin Smith

Gary Clark (vice-chair)
Shamar Herron (appointed 11/2008)
Brett Lenart
Joseph Schultz (resigned 09/2008)
Cheryl Zuellig

The Commission was staffed by the City's Planner II; this position was held by Nathan Voght, AICP, until February of 2008, and by Richard Murphy through the end of 2008.

Under the Planning Enabling Act, the Commission must provide an annual report to City Council, as the legislative body of the City. This report discusses,

1. The operations of the Commission during the past year
2. The status of any on-going planning activities
3. Recommendations to the legislative body related to planning and development

PLANNING COMMISSION OPERATIONS

The Planning Commission met monthly during 2008 and held one additional special meeting at the request of an applicant. During that time, the Commission considered 26 applications, including 10 site plan reviews. Both the number of site

plans reviewed by the Commission and the total number of applications before the Commission exceeded activity levels of the past 5 years. (In 1998, for contrast, the Planning Commission reviewed 22 site plans.)

While some of the site plan reviews that came before the Planning Commission involved little construction activity, but were required as part of consideration of a Special Use Permit, others involved significant new investment. One such is American Photo Marketing's conversion of an elementary school building on West Forest into offices, photographic studio, and production space, anticipated to include a total of \$4 million in investment. Another is Hope Clinic's 10,000 square foot expansion on Harriet Street, including over \$2 million in new construction. Additional site plans reviewed by the City Planner under Sec. 122-123(b) of the Zoning Ordinance included expansion plans for Corner Health Center, on N. Huron, and rehabilitation plans for the Thompson Block (N. River Street) and Mack & Mack Building (W. Michigan).

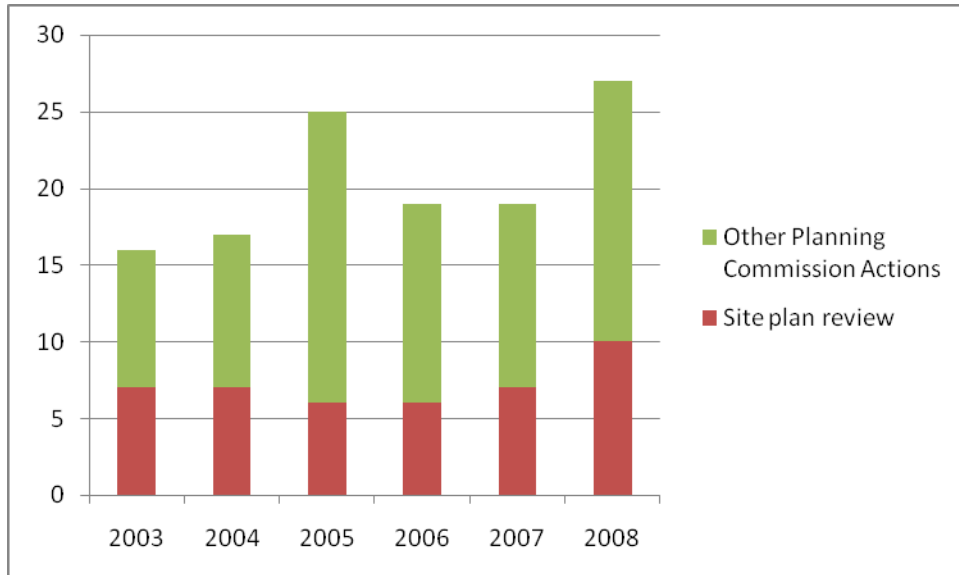
One Master Plan amendment considered and adopted by the Planning Commission in 2008 included adding a new Target Area for Central Elementary and surrounding properties that had formerly been used as Ave Maria College's campus, to facilitate reuse of that area.

The other was an amendment of the Master Plan map and Target Areas for the Water Street redevelopment area. This was in the context of the City's change in focus from a single-developer strategy for the site to a multiple-developer strategy; the updated Target Area discussed the zoning changes needed to support this approach and elaborated on the goals to be considered during these zoning changes and during review of development proposals.

Table 1: Planning Commission applications by type

Planning Commission Applications	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Site plan review	7	7	6	6	7	10
Amend approved site plan	0	0	0	0	4	1
Special use permit	3	3	6	3	3	6
Zoning map amendment	2	1	4	5	2	5
Zoning text amendment	2	1	3	1	2	2
Master plan amendment	0	2	3	2	0	2
Planned unit development	2	0	1	0	0	0
Amend approved PUD	0	1	0	0	0	1
Alley vacation	0	1	2	2	0	0
Change in non-conforming use	0	1	0	0	0	0
Allow add'l floor area in B1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total Applications	16	17	25	19	19	27

Figure 1: Planning Commission applications by year



A continuing education seminar focusing on best practices for site plan review was presented to the Planning Commission as a whole via the Michigan Association of Planning. Individual Commissioners additionally attended a Michigan Municipal League seminar on variances and ZBA procedures, or took online training modules provided by MSU Extension’s Citizen Planner program.

ONGOING PLANNING ACTIVITIES

As of the end of 2008, the Commission is in the process of preparing new zoning districts to guide development on Water Street. As the previous approach to that project was to include a Planned Unit Development for the site by a single developer, the existing zoning on the site had not been updated to support the intensity or type of development anticipated by the city. With a multiple-developer, incremental development approach, the Commission is updating the zoning to guide and support multiple, smaller developments. While the Commission still envisions the option of a PUD for larger or unanticipated development proposals, the updated zoning would provide a clear path for development plans that clearly meet the City’s goals, shortening the entitlement process for those developers.

Additionally, the Commission is in the process of updating the Zoning Ordinance and the Commission’s bylaws to comply with the new Planning Enabling Act.

COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning Commission anticipates that Water Street will occupy a significant amount of its efforts in 2009. Most immediately, this includes completing the zoning amendments for the site. As the Commission understands that several

purchase offers have been received or are under discussion, it expects to begin receiving and reviewing site plans attached to these proposals within the first half of 2009.

The Commission also expects to undertake a review of the City's Master Plan during 2009. Under the State enabling legislation, such a review is required every 5 years at a minimum; the review will provide an opportunity to compare the Plan to current conditions and needs in the community. Additionally, the City's Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC, through the Michigan Suburbs Alliance) and Certified Local Government (CLG, through the State Historic Preservation Office) expire in 2009; undertaking the Master Plan review is one of the criteria for renewal of those certifications.

Some needed updates to the plan will probably be discovered during this review, as the plan was adopted in 1998; since that time, some projects have come to fruition (such as the redevelopment of the Peninsular Paper site, or the actions taken on Water Street). The community has also experienced changes unanticipated by that plan, such as the closure of the Visteon plant and the heightened national foreclosure rate. Additionally, the review will provide an opportunity to incorporate various neighborhood or regional plans into the Master Plan, such as the *Ypsilanti Downtown Blueprint 2008*, or MDOT's *M-17/US-12BR Access Management Plan*.

The Commission has some concern that the combination of a heightened level of activity on Water Street, undertaking a Master Plan review and considering any necessary updates, renewing RRC and CLG certifications, and existing general development review activities, has the potential to exceed the City's staff resources. The Commission recommends that the City Council ensure the budget at least maintains current staffing levels, including continued matching funds for the MSUE Urban Collaborator position and intern support. The Council should additionally consider budgeting for outside support, such as contracting for service with Washtenaw County or private consulting firms, to help handle major projects.

ACTION

The Planning Commission received this report at its December 17, 2008, meeting. Commission B. Lenart (Support: G. Clark) moved to accept this report as written and recommended that it be sent to City Council and listed on the city website. The motion carried unanimously, with Commissioners McClemens and Smith absent.