



City of St. Joseph

Planning Commission (PC)

General Membership Information

Purpose of the Planning Commission

The PC exists to make recommendations on certain zoning requests. In the City of St. Joseph, the PC has many roles and functions, below are the four main functions:

1. Conduct public hearings and make recommendations to the City Commission regarding Map (rezoning) and Text Amendments; Special Use Permits and Planned Unit Developments (PUD's) requests;
2. Review sign requests per the Code of Ordinances and approve or deny;
3. Prepare and make recommendations, maintain and work on implementing the goals and objectives of the Master Plan;
4. Complete studies and make recommendations to the City Commission on changes to the Zoning Ordinance.

The ability for a municipality to create a PC is found in the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Chapter 22 of the City of St. Joseph Code of Ordinances created the PC. The Zoning Ordinance, PC Bylaws and a Code of Ethics provide additional guidance.

Planning Commission Composition

There are nine (9) voting members who are appointed by the City Commission to three (3) year terms, unless appointed to fill a vacant seat. Full term appointments are from May 1st through April 30th for three years.

The Chair and Vice-Chair are selected annually by the members of the PC.

Planning Commission Meeting Information

Regular meetings are held the first Thursday of each month, beginning at 4:30 pm in the City Commission Chambers. Applicants seeking a determination by the PC must submit an application 24 days prior to the meeting. On occasion, special meetings are scheduled. Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend to present their applications.

In addition to the PC members attending, there are typically three staff present: Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator, City Attorney and staff from the Inspection Department. During 2019, the PC met 10 times. Four requests requiring a public hearing were reviewed along with seven requests for some type of sign approval. Meetings averaged approximately two hours, but ranged between one (1) and two and one half (2.5) hours.

Planning Commission Member Responsibilities

Attend the meetings or notify staff as soon as possible when unable to attend.

Familiarize yourself with the City's Zoning Ordinance, 2016 Master Plan, Downtown Vision Master Plan 2020 along with relevant portions of the Code of Ordinances; follow the applicable provisions when reviewing and making decisions.

Follow the adopted Planning Commission Bylaws and Code of Ethics.

Attend training sessions when opportunities are available.

Complete Citizen Planner Class as offered through Michigan State University Extension.

Understand and follow the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Contact staff prior to the meeting if you believe you have a conflict of interest on a pending application.

Come to the meeting prepared – read the agenda packet prior to the meeting and visit the site.

Be fair to everyone and allow them the opportunity to speak and present evidence during the public hearing.

Listen to all public comments made and read the ones submitted in writing.

Ask questions of fellow members, applicant, audience members and staff.

Participate in deliberation of the request and in the preparation of findings based on the applicable review Standards, express your opinion.

Remember that hard decisions will have to be made and zoning is not always a popular thing.

Staff Support

The Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator is the primary contact for the PC and coordinates agendas with the Chair. The Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator informs the entire PC of the upcoming meeting status, serves as secretary for the PC, and prepares draft meeting minutes for review at the following meeting.

The Friday before the meeting, staff typically delivers the agenda packet which includes: 1) meeting agenda; 2) draft meeting minutes from last meeting; 3) staff memo; 4) photographs of the site along with an aerial and zoning maps of the surrounding area; and 5) the applicant's completed application with supporting documents. Depending on the case, written public comments received are included in the packet.

The Monday before the meeting, completed packets are typically available on the city website under "Public Hub."

Prior to the first meeting, staff will meet with each new member appointed to provide training on how the PC operates, review and provide documents, and answer any questions.