



**City of St. Joseph Michigan  
Planning Commission  
Annual Report  
Calendar Year 2017**

**Approved January 4, 2018 by  
City of St. Joseph Planning Commission**

## **Background.**

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires the Planning Commission to complete a report annually to the City Commission discussing three specific areas. Following are the three reporting areas and the Planning Commission's report for 2017:

- A. The operations of the Planning Commission during the past year.
- B. The status of any ongoing planning activities.
- C. Recommendations regarding City Commission actions related to planning and development.

On January 4, 2018, the City of St. Joseph Planning Commission reviewed the draft Annual Report. After finding it to be appropriate, they directed staff to forward the finalized document to the City Commission.

## **Planning Commission Membership, Attendance and Training.**

During the 2017 calendar year there was one resignation which was followed by an appointment to the Planning Commission. Below is a list of the members with attendance rate, appointment dates, years of service and term expiration dates.

<u>Member</u>	<u>Attendance</u> 2017	<u>Appointed</u>	<u>Years' Service</u> as of Dec 2017	<u>Term</u> Expires
Kathy Burczak	100%	5/2012	5	2020
Sean Ebbert ( <i>Vice chair</i> )	83%	3/2007	10	2019
Richard Gresens	67%	7/2015	2	2018
Patsy Hartzell ( <i>Chair</i> )	100%	7/1985	32	2020
Phil Maki	83%	1/2009	8	2019
Aaron Miller	100%	7/2005	12	2018
Becky Rice	83%	2/2006	11	2019
Jack Sanderson	75%	12/2014	3	2018
Ceile Wipper	89%	3/2017	1	2020
Cortney O'Malley-Septoski	100%	12/2014	2	2017

The Planning Commission met twelve (12) times during 2017. One special meeting was scheduled, however, cancelled prior to the meeting due to quorum issues. The meetings ranged from 1.5 and 3.75 hours, with a total of 26.25 hours during for the twelve meetings. Planning Commissioners spend additional time reviewing the agenda packets prior to the meeting and visiting the site. The overall member meeting attendance rate for the year was approximately 78%. Staff was informed of all absences prior to the meeting. Chart I shows the number of meeting each member attended in 2017.

Chart I

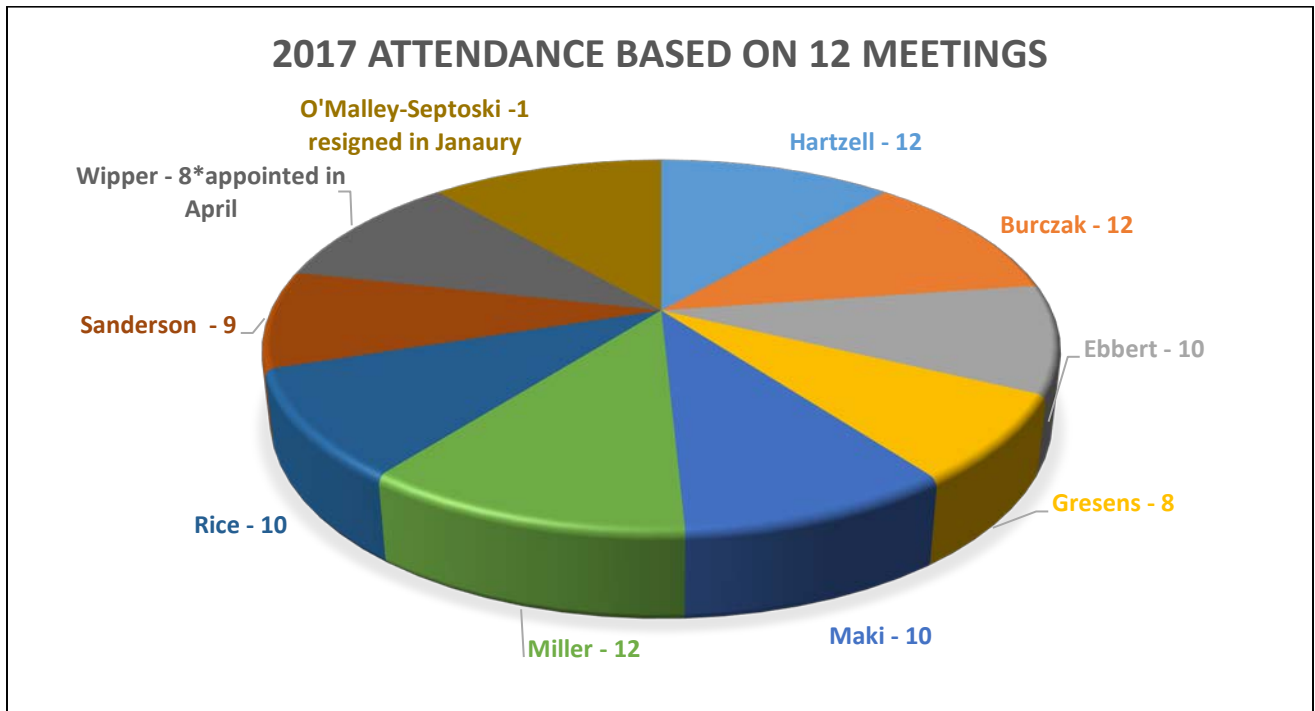
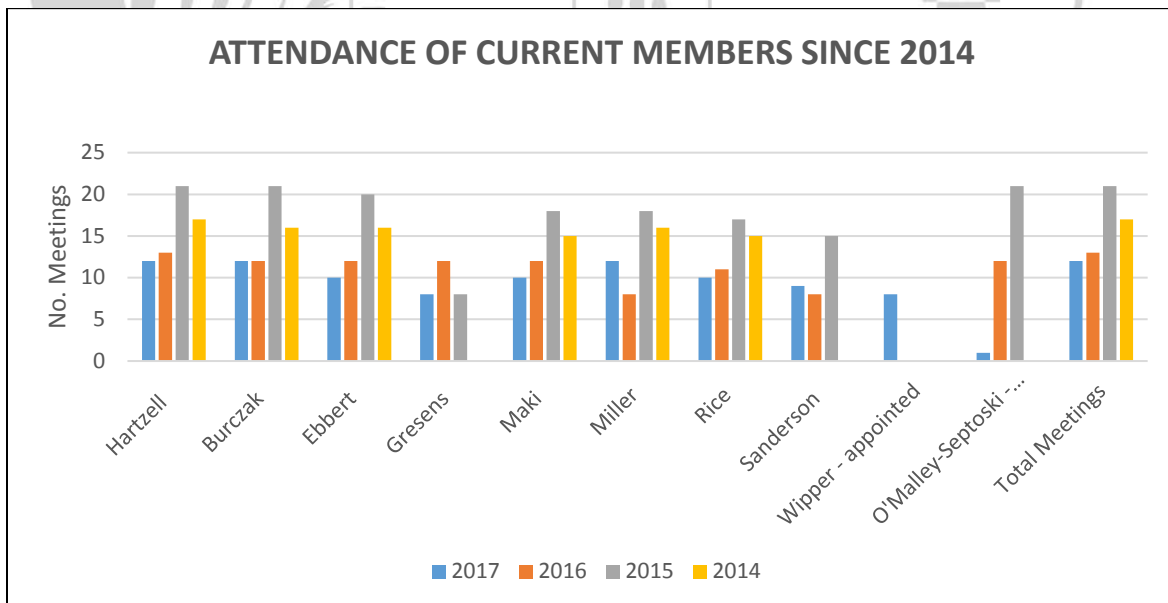


Chart II depicts attendance for the current members since 2014. It shows that members are consistently attending meetings and understand the commitment when accepting appointments. Commissioners Sanderson, Gresens, Wipper and O’Malley-Septoski were not members in 2014.

Chart II



In January, Ms. O’Malley-Septoski announced her resignation from the Commission. In April 2017, Ms. Wipper was appointed to the Planning Commission to fill the vacant unexpired term. In April 2017, the City Commission reappointed Ms. Burczak, Ms. Hartzell and Ms. Wipper to the Planning Commission, their terms will expire in May of 2020.

During the annual organizational meeting in June, Ms. Hartzell was re-appointed to serve as Chair for the 2017-18 term, while Mr. Ebbert was re-appointed as the Pro-Tem.

In April, 2017 Chair Hartzell and Ms. Burczak attended a three hour workshop created by the Michigan Association of Planners entitled Community Engagement.

In May, 2017, Ms. Wipper completed the Citizen Planner Program as presented by the Michigan State University Extension. Ms. Liz Petzke of the Zoning Board of Appeals also completed the program.

Mr. Sanderson attended two separate workshops titled Waterways, Wetlands and You Lake Michigan Shoreline Special Edition put on by the US Army Corps of Engineers in New Buffalo on July 27, 2017 and one session of the Coastal Resiliency Training Workshop titled Introduction to Coastal Dynamics and Resiliency, a 3-hour workshop in St. Joseph on October 25<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Burczak attended a two-day training program associated with the Redevelopment Ready Communities program through the State of Michigan. To maintain her designation as a Master Citizen Planner through Michigan State University Extension she attended a Climate Health Adaptation Planning workshop along with a Placemaking for Tourism. As part of her professional continuing education requirements, Ms. Burczak participated in the American Association of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting and Expo in Los Angeles.

### **Staff Support and Packet Creation.**

In 2017 the Planning Commission was staffed by Kristen Gundersen, Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator; Laurie Schmidt, City Attorney and Cecil Derringer, Chief Building Official.

All packets were created using the Accela Legislative Management Software. Once completed, packets were typically delivered to each member the Friday before the scheduled meeting and are posted to the City of St. Joseph's "Public Hub" website section the Monday before the meeting. By utilizing the software package it has allowed for the packets to be available to the public prior to the meeting in an easily searchable format that also includes the City Commission packets.

The Community Development Director attended the following training and workshops:

1. Michigan State Floodplain Conference, Lansing Michigan in late February and early March. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for designation as a Certified Floodplain Manager.
2. Medical Marijuana Facilities Workshop sponsored by Michigan State University Extension, East Lansing, February (session occurred in the evening during the Michigan State Floodplain Conference).
3. Community Engagement workshop, sponsored by the City of St. Joseph in April.
4. Two, day long training programs as part of the Redevelopment Ready Communities program in May and June at Western Michigan University, Benton Harbor campus.
5. Michigan Association of Planning – Spring Institute, Lansing MI in May. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for designation as a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).

6. Waterways, Wetlands and You Lake Michigan Shoreline Special Edition sponsored by the US Army Corps of Engineers in New Buffalo on July 27, 2017
7. Michigan Association of Planning – State Conference, Mackinaw Island, MI in September. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for AICP membership.
8. Two sessions of the Coastal Resiliency Training Workshops held in October and November.
9. National Charrette Institute Bootcamp one day class in East Lansing, MI in December.
10. In addition attended several on-line webinars to maintain membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners.

The City Attorney attended several municipal law conferences and seminars and is sitting on a panel working on a model Sign Ordinance which addresses the Supreme Court ruling in 2015,

The Chief Building Official attended two annual building conferences held by the State of Michigan to help obtain continuing education credits needed for different certifications.

### **2017 Planning Commission Meeting Information and Agenda Items.**

During 2017, the City of St. Joseph Planning Commission reviewed 12 requests. In December 2017, a requested for a text amendment and a planned unit development were reviewed, however, both requests were continued to 2018. These two items have not been included in the counts because no formal action has been taken. In addition, the Planning Commission discussed the following:

1. 2016 Master Plan Information Update. During the July 2017 meeting, the Commission received the update which included the status of the many goals, objectives and tasks stated in the Master Plan.
2. Niles Avenue Study Area. In early 2017, the Commission reviewed the area along Niles Avenue, south of Napier. Staff was able to schedule a representative from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to attend the April meeting to discuss the process for making changes to the state route. No additional work has taken place on this item since the MDOT discussion.
3. Sign Ordinance Discussion/Drafting. The Planning Commission has been diligently working on updating the existing 1980 Sign Ordinance and to address the 2015 US Supreme Court ruling. Staff has been photographing existing signage, researching and drafting language for the Planning Commission to review. It is anticipated this item will be forwarded to the City Commission in 2018. Following are changes being proposed:
  - a. New Sections include: purpose statement; list of prohibited signs; review criteria for sign modifications and special sign approval over 32 square feet; maintenance; temporary signage in residential areas; permanent exempt signage and substitution clause.
  - b. Expanded Sections include: additional definitions which include pictures; detailed permitting process; modifications to how signs are reviewed (standards based on zoning district) and what is allowed.
  - c. Additional areas of review include: illumination requirements; changeable message boards; directory signs; and nonconforming signs

Following is Chart III which lists the six (6) types of action items along with special projects the Planning Commission reviewed in 2017. Requests for sign variances and special sign approvals have the largest percentage actual requests, however, time involved in the review of these applications is typically less than those requiring a public hearing. As stated above, the Planning Commission held two public hearing in December for a text amendment and a planned unit development, both requests were continued to meetings in 2018.

Chart IV provides a comparison of activity from 2014 – 2017. It appears that the number of requests being processed has remained relatively consistent.

Chart III

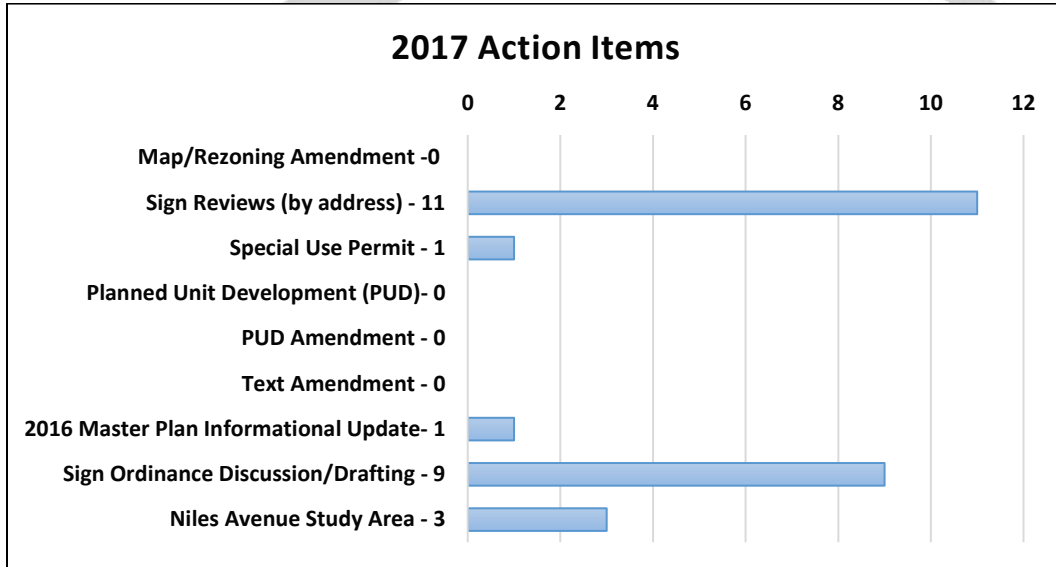
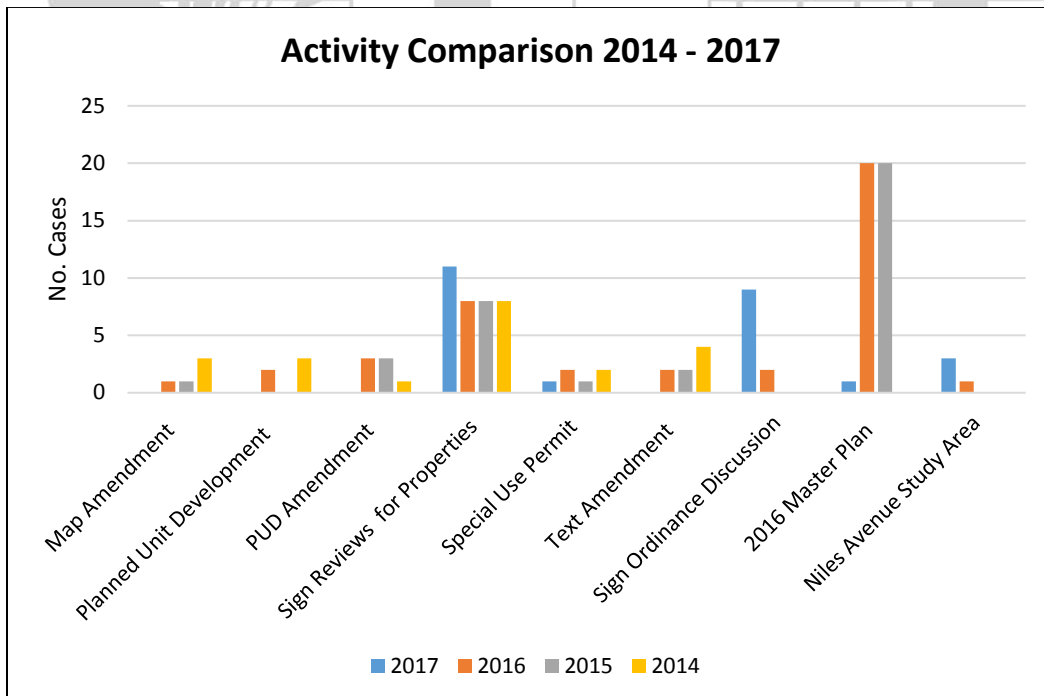


Chart IV



### Summary of Applications processed.

Following is a complete list of the applications received in 2017. This list provides the address, applicant name, brief description of request, month of review and action taken by the Planning Commission.

### Zoning Ordinance Amendments – Map Amendment (rezoning) or Text Amendments.

- Amendments to Social Institutions in CO Districts – Area Agency on Aging. – *Conducted public hearing and continued discussion to January 2018 meeting, not included in counts.*

### Planned Unit Developments.

- 707 Lake Blvd., 702, 708/712 and 720 State Street – Krasl Art Center - Planned Unit Development to site improvements allow garage storage building to be on new parcel. *Conducted public hearing and continued discussion to February 2018 meeting, not included in counts.*

### Planned Unit Development – Amendments.

None

### Special Use Permits.

- 2820 Niles Avenue – McDonald's – Special use permit for drive-through establishment. – *May recommended approval with conditions*

### Sign Variances and Special Sign Approvals (regulations found in Code of Ordinance).

- 902 Broad Street – First Baptist Church – 1) Allow LED sign; 2) increase overall height; 3) increase square footage – *discussion started in December 2016 and approved in January with conditions*
- 3029 Lakeshore Drive – The Mansion, LLC (LakeHouse Restaurant and Bar) – 1) Variance to allow LED message board; 2) variance to increase overall size of sign from 50 to 58 square feet; 3) Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet – *February approved with conditions*
- 3425 Lakeshore Drive – Four Flags Properties Inc (Lookout Point Apartments) - 1) Variance to increase number of allowed signs from 1 to 2 in residential district; 2) Variance to increase overall height of signs from 4' to 4'01/2"; 3) Variance to increase maximum square footage from 10 to 13.3 square feet - *March approved*
- 720 Pleasant Street – Universal Sign & Chemical Bank – Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet – *March and May approved*
- 300 Main Street – Universal Sign & Chemical Bank – 1) Variance to allow free-standing sign in vision triangle; 2) Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet – *March approved*
- 2409 Lakeshore Drive – Coldwell Bankers – 1) Variance to allow free-standing sign in residential district; 2) Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet – *April approved*
- 2712 Niles Avenue – Honor Credit Union – Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet for free-standing sign – *May approved*
- 222 Hilltop Road – Fleming Brothers Oil (Shell Gas Station) – Variance to allow two signs on gasoline canopy structure – *June denied*

- 2712 Niles Avenue – Honor Credit Union – Special Sign approval of a sign greater than 32 square feet for two wall signs – *July approved one greater than 32 square foot sign. Variance to increase total square footage of wall signs from 100 to 142 square feet – Denied along with one sign greater than 32 square feet*
- 2824 State Street – Lori Costanza – Variance to allow free-standing sign in residential district; 2) Variance to allow free-standing sign in vision triangle – *August approved*
- 1021 Main Street – Jones Sings and Burkhart Signsystems (AT&T) – Special Sign approval for 2 wall signs each greater than 32 square feet – *November approved*

Below is Chart V, which depicts the specific sign requests made that required Planning Commission action. There were a total of 25 individual sign requests on 8 properties for a total of 16 signs. The largest number of applications submitted is for sign review which can include requests for LED boards, special approval and variances in size or height requirements.

Chart V

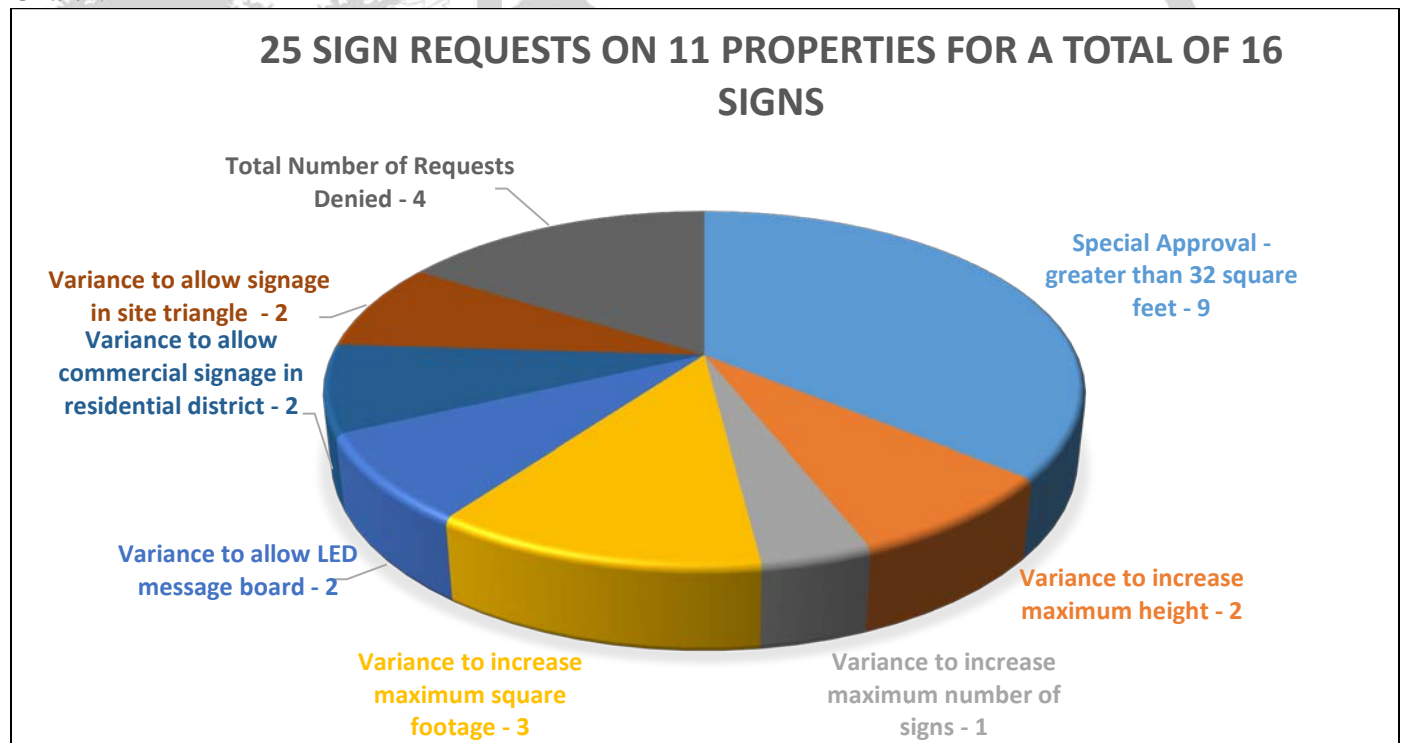
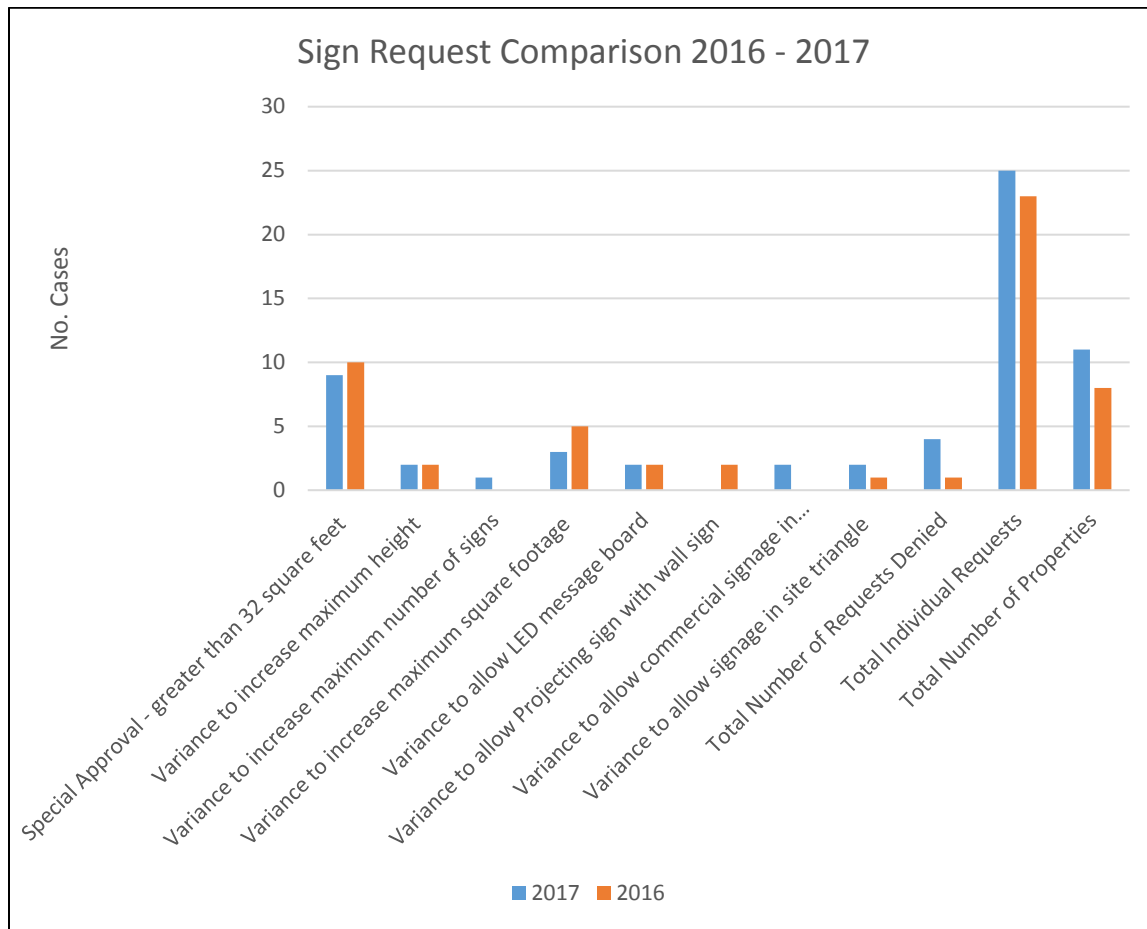


Chart VI is a comparison of requests from 2016 to 2017. The request for approval of signs greater than 32 square feet along with variance requests to increase the overall height, allowed square footage and to allow LED signs has remained consistent between the two years.



Chart VI



**Future Activities for 2018.**

In addition to the applications submitted for review and action by the public and development community, the Planning Commission will continue working on the tasks found in the 2016 Master Plan. Future activities include:

1. Complete review of Sign Ordinance (Code of Ordinance) to update the document and to address 2015 US Supreme Court ruling.
2. Review of the Zoning Ordinance in the area of parking, landscaping and screening.
3. Niles Avenue. Restart discussions on Niles Avenue, south of Napier Avenue.