

**City of St. Joseph Michigan  
Planning Commission  
Annual Report  
Calendar Year 2020**

**Approved February 4, 2021 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 2020:

- 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 February 4, 2021, 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.**

2020 was a unique year with the COVID-19 pandemic which required changes to public meetings. The City of St. Joseph was able to quickly move to virtual meetings using Zoom software beginning in March 2020 in addition to following State of Michigan rules for hosting such meetings which changed several times during the year.

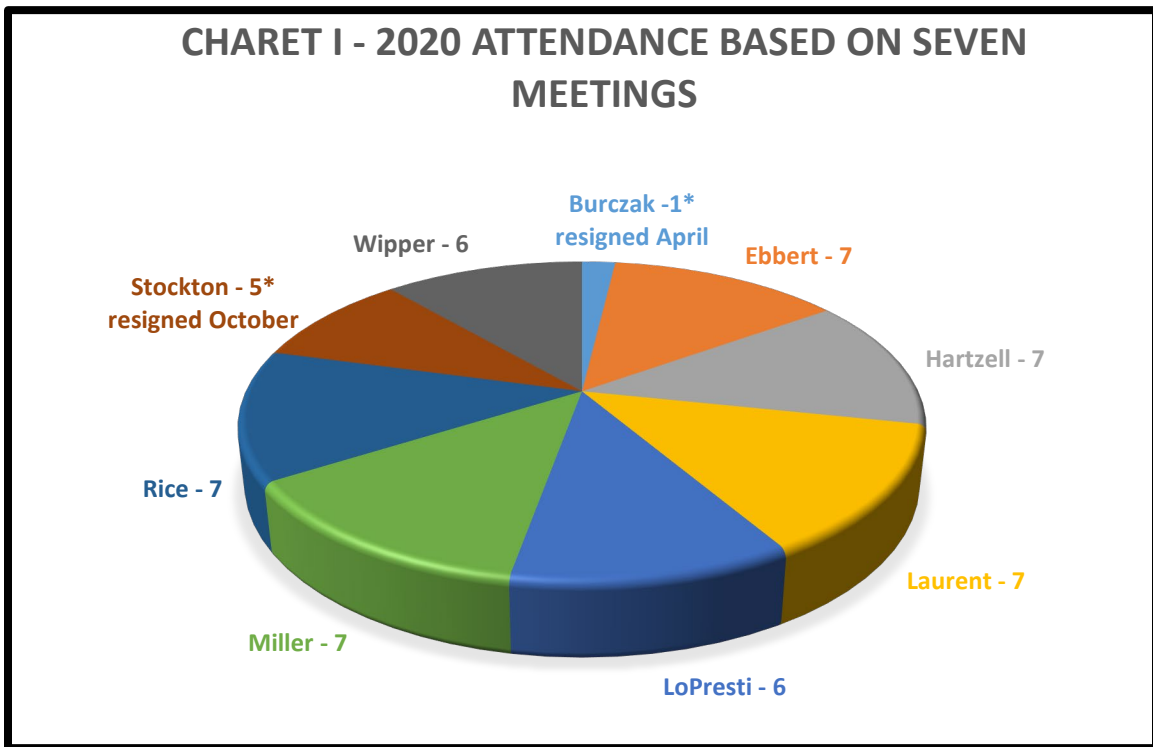
The Planning Commission conducted one (1) in-person meeting before the pandemic altered how meetings would take place. Due to no public business five (5) regularly scheduled meetings were cancelled. Ms. Kathy Burczak resigned from the Commission at time of re-appointment in April after serving for seven years. In April, Ms. Patsy Hartzell and Ms. Ceile Wipper were both reappointed to the Commission and their terms will expire in 2023. In October Ms. Donna Stockton resigned from the Commission after moving out of the community. At the end of 2020 there were two vacant positions on the Planning Commission.

During the annual organizational meeting in June, Ms. Hartzell was re-appointed to serve as Chair for the 2020-2021 term and Ms. Wipper was appointed to be the Vice Chair.

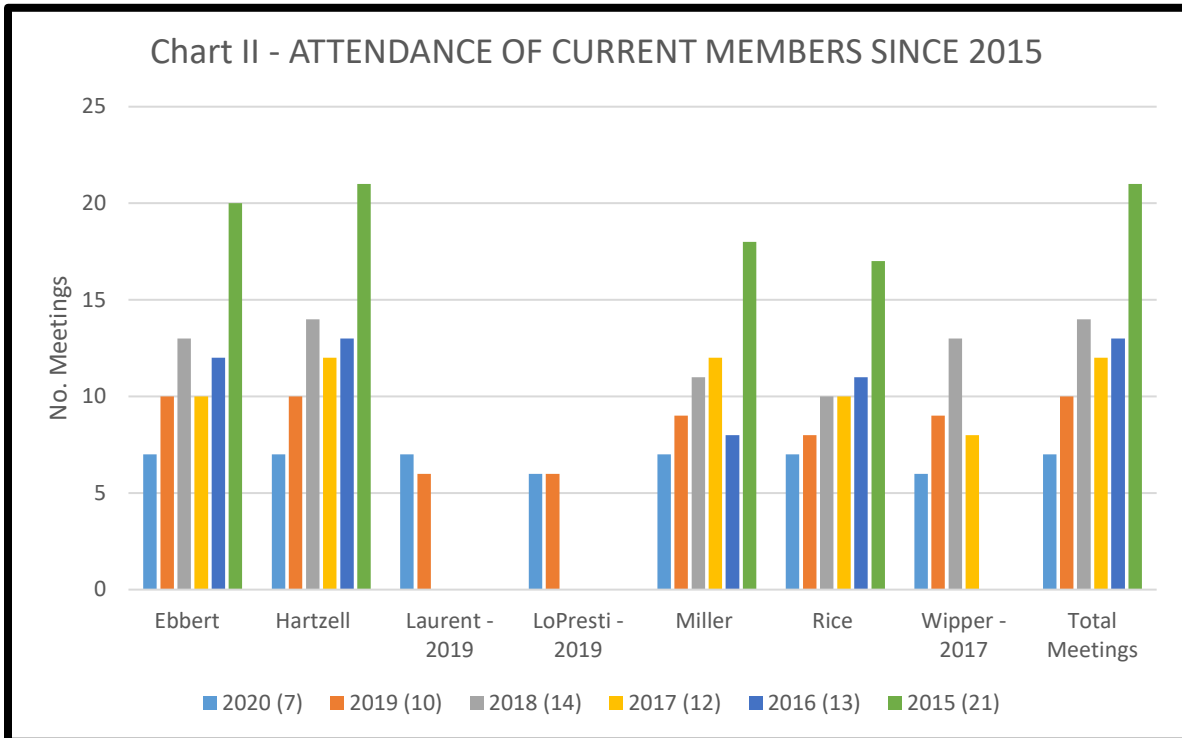
The ten meetings ranged from 0.75 to 2.0 hours for a total of 9.75 hours. Planning Commissioners spend additional time reviewing the agenda packets prior to the meeting and visiting the site. The overall member meeting attendance rate for the year was approximately 96%. Staff was informed of absences prior to the meeting.

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>		<u>Years' Service</u> <u>as of Dec 2020</u>	<u>Term</u> <u>Expires</u>
	<u>2020</u>	<u>Appointed</u>		
Sean Ebbert	100%	3/2007	13	2022
Patsy Hartzell ( <i>Chair</i> )	100%	7/1985	35	2023
Aaron Miller	100%	7/2005	15	2021
Becky Rice	100%	2/2006	14	2021
Ceile Wipper	86%	3/2017	4	2023
Julee Laurent	100%	3/2019	2	2021
Joe LoPresti	86%	3/2019	2	2021
Vacancy				2022
Vacancy				2023
Donna Stockton	100%	8/2019	1	2022
Kathy Burczak	100%	5/2012	7	2020



Below is Chart II which depicts attendance for the current members since 2015. It shows that members are consistently attending meetings and understand the commitment when accepting appointments.



All members of the Planning Commission are encouraged to participate in additional learning opportunities. In past years, on-site training has been provided through the Michigan Association of Planning, unfortunately no on-site training was provided in 2020. Ms. Stockton completed the on-line Citizen Planner Course through Michigan State University Extension. The City has budgeted money for all members of the Commission to take the Citizen Planner Course. With the exception of Mr. LoPresti and Ms. Laurent all current members have completed the training. Those wishing to take the class again as a refresher have the opportunity.

**Staff Support and Packet Creation.**

In 2020 the Planning Commission was staffed by Kristen Gundersen, Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator; Laurie Schmidt, City Attorney; Trudy Wilder, Building Official.

All packets were created using the Granicus 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 and other appointed Boards and Commissions.

The Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator attended the following training and workshops:

1. Michigan State Floodplain Annual Conference, Ann Arbor, Michigan, three-day conference in March 2020. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for designation as a Certified Floodplain Manager.
2. Michigan Downtown Association Spring Workshop, Lansing, Michigan, one-day event in March 2020
3. Michigan Municipal League State Conference – virtual conference in October 2020.
4. Michigan Association of Planning – State Conference, virtual conference in November 2020. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for AICP membership.
5. Michigan Downtown Association State Conference, virtual conference in November 2020.
6. In addition, numerous other virtual webinars to maintain membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners, Certified Floodplain Managers and to learn more about handling the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice community items.

The City Attorney attended several municipal law conferences and seminars virtually.

The Building Official attended several on-line training opportunities and two annual building conferences held by the State of Michigan to help obtain continuing education credits needed for different certifications. The Building Inspector also attended and completed coursework to become a Certified Zoning Administrator and passed the required test for designation.

The City hired a new building inspector, Tony Riegel in October 2020 who will be attending the Citizen Planner Class and a future Zoning Administrator workshop.

### **2020 Planning Commission Meeting Information and Agenda Items.**

During 2020, the Planning Commission reviewed 10 requests. In addition, the Planning Commission began discussions regarding preliminary draft language associated with access and parking in the Zoning Ordinance.

Following is Chart III which lists the different types of action items along with special projects the Planning Commission reviewed in 2020. 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.

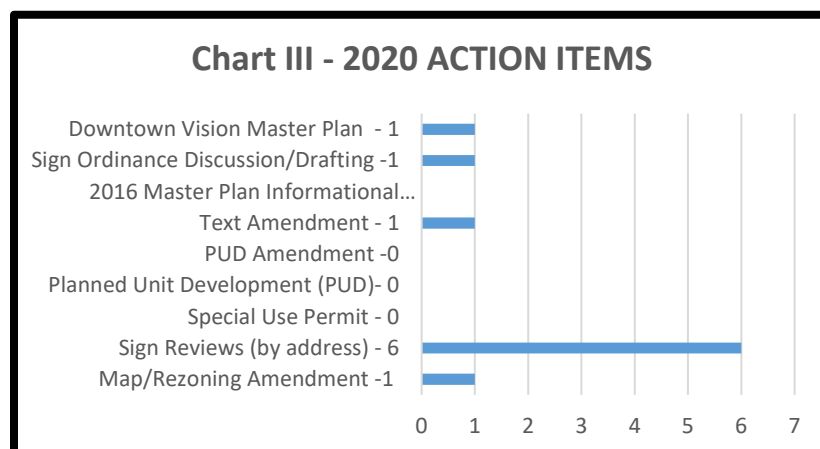
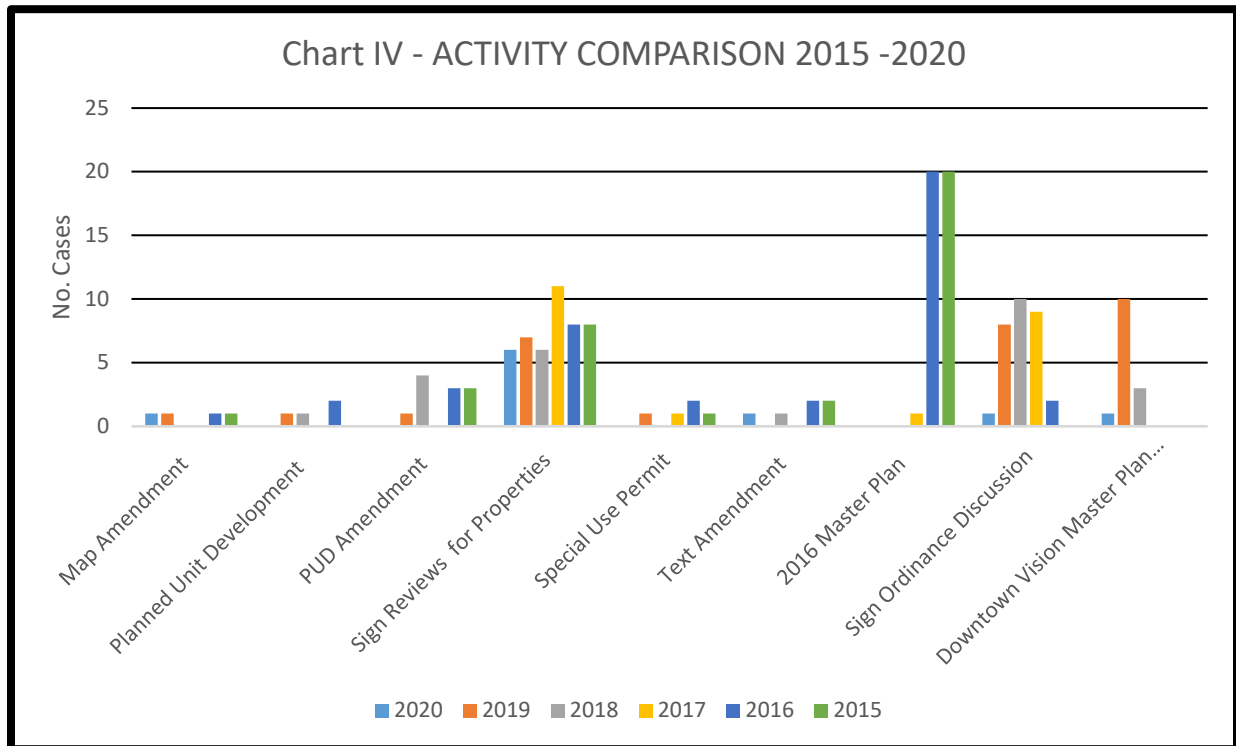


Chart IV provides a comparison of activity from 2014 – 2019. It appears that the number of requests being processed has remained relatively consistent over the last six years.



Following is a complete list of the applications acted upon in 2020. 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.

- 216 Court Street – Michael and Jamie Gross – Map Amendment from CO-A Commercial Office District to D Downtown District. *Recommended approval on May 7, 2020. City Commission approved second reading of the ordinance of June 8, 2020.*

Planned Unit Developments.

No requests.

Planned Unit Development – Amendments.

No request.

Special Use Permits.

No requests.

Text Amendment.

- Section 3.29 of Zoning Ordinance as it pertained to requiring sprinkler systems for residential homes located more than 100 feet from the street. City of St. Joseph was the applicant. *Recommended approval on December 14, 2020. City Commission approved second reading of the ordinance of January 11, 2021.*

- Chapter 25 Signs of Code of Ordinances several minor changes along with grammar issues. *City Commission approved second reading of the ordinance of January 11, 2021. Not included in Action Count because regulations found in Code of Ordinances.*

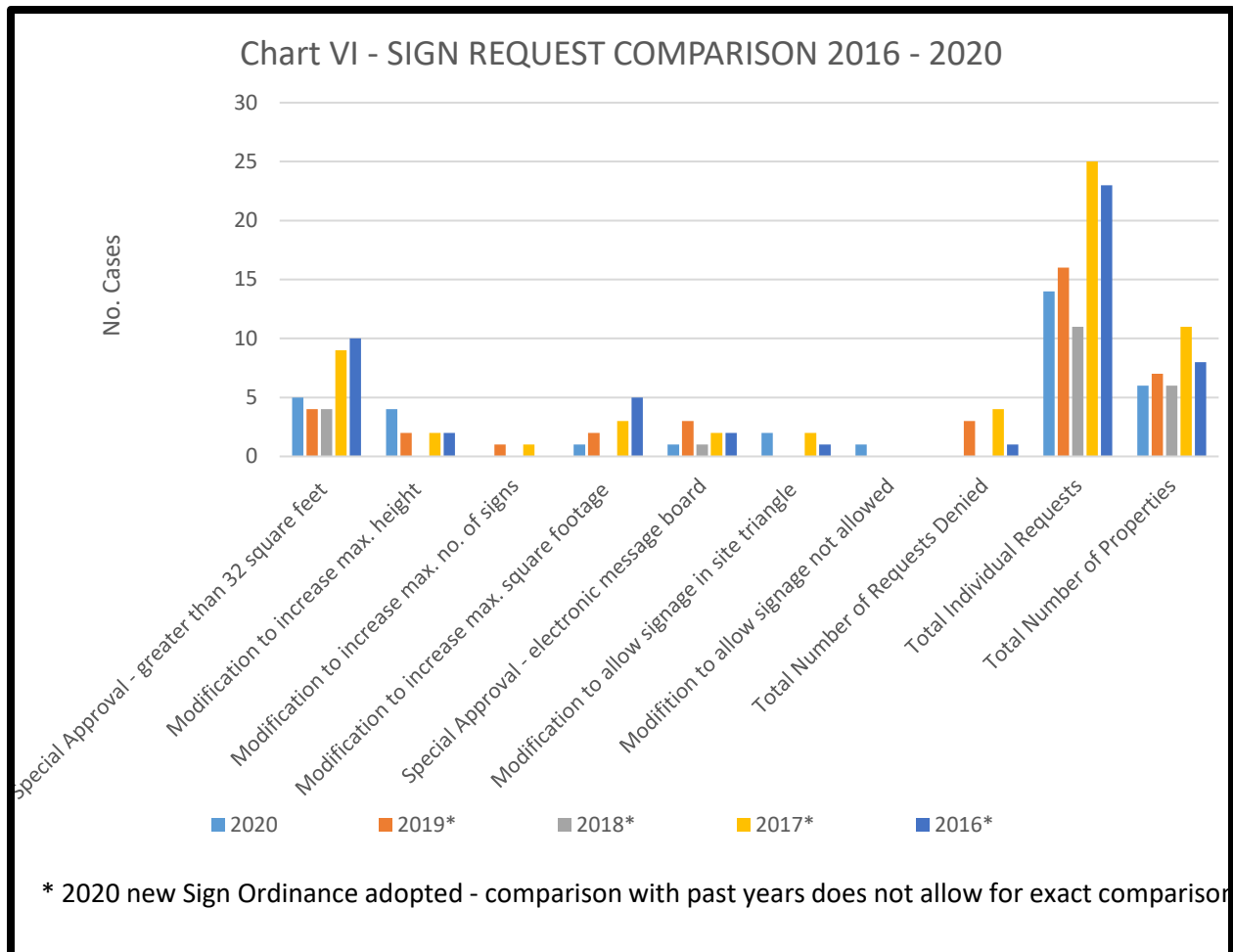
Sign Variances and Special Sign Approvals (regulations found in Code of Ordinance).

- 320 Main Street – Sign Art Inc and Sturgis Bank – 1) Modification to allow free-standing sign in clear vision area; 2) Modification to increase overall height of sign from 15 to 16’7 ½”; and 3) Special Approval of a Sign Greater than 32 sf (44.53 sf) – *Approved with July 9, 2020*
- 2460 Lakeshore Drive – Burkhart Sign Systems LLC and Haddad Estates LLC (dental office) – Modification from Section 25-13 Table 25-1 to increase overall height of ground sign from 20 to 22 feet – *Approved September 3, 2020.*
- 215 State Street – Urban Found – Timothy VanDenBrink – Special Sign Approval greater than 32 sf (36 sf). *Approved September 3, 2020.*
- 250 Anchors Way – Midwest Sign Company, LECO and Pier 33 - 1) Sign Modification from Section 25-13 Table 25-1 to allow one wall mounted sign were not allowed; 2) Sign Modification from Section 25-13 Table 25-1 to increase the overall height from 20 to 24 feet for one wall mounted sign; and 3) Special Sign Approval for a sign greater than 32 square feet in size (150 sf actual). *Approved with conditions November 5, 2020.*
- 300 Main Street – Universal Sign Inc and TCF Bank - 1) Modification from Section 25-15.1 to allow freestanding sign in the 20-foot clear vision area; 2) Modification from Section 25-13 Table 25-1 to increase the overall height of a free-standing sign from 15 to 17.75 feet for free-standing sign; 3) Special Sign Approval for a sign greater than 32 square feet in size (48.2 sf actual) for free-standing sign; and 4) Modification from Section 25-13 Table 25-1 to allow a wall sign to extend above the bottom of the second-floor window. *Approved November 5, 2020.*
- 3125 Cleveland Avenue – SignArt Inc and Sturgis Bank – Special Sign Approval for Greater than 32 sf (49.69 sf) and 2) Special Approval of Electronic Message Board. *Approved December 3, 2020.*

Chart V depicts the individual sign requests made that required Planning Commission action. There was a total of 14 individual sign requests on 6 properties for a total of 7 signs. The largest number of applications submitted was for special sign approval for signs greater than 32 square feet.



Below is Chart VI, a comparison of requests from 2016 to 2019. 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 over the years.



### **Future Activities for 2021.**

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. Study Main Street corridor mixed use properties to determine if residential uses on the ground floor should be allowed.
2. Review of the Zoning Ordinance in the area of lighting, parking, landscaping, screening and other areas as determined necessary.
3. Conduct required hearing process for adoption of updated FEMA Floodplain Maps
4. Complete required five-year review of the adopted 2016 Master Plan.