



**City of St. Joseph Michigan  
Planning Commission  
Annual Report  
Calendar Year 2023**

**Approved February 1, 2024 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 2023

- 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, 2024, 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.**

In 2024, all meetings were held in person. The Commission held monthly meetings with the exception of June when there was no business to discuss.

There were several vacancies during 2023. In November 2023, the Commission was back to having nine appointed individuals. Dustin Tefs was appointed on September 6<sup>th</sup> to fill the vacant seat created when Ceile Wipper requested not be re-appointed. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, the City Commission appointed Pam Porter to fill the vacancy created when Thaddeus Hackworth resigned his term ending April 2026 and Michael Plichta was appointed to fill a 2022 vacancy created when Bridget Cook resigned her term expiring April 2025.

During the annual organizational meeting in July, Ms. Hartzell was re-appointed to serve as Chair for the 2023-2024 term and Mr. Ebbert was appointed to be the Vice Chair.

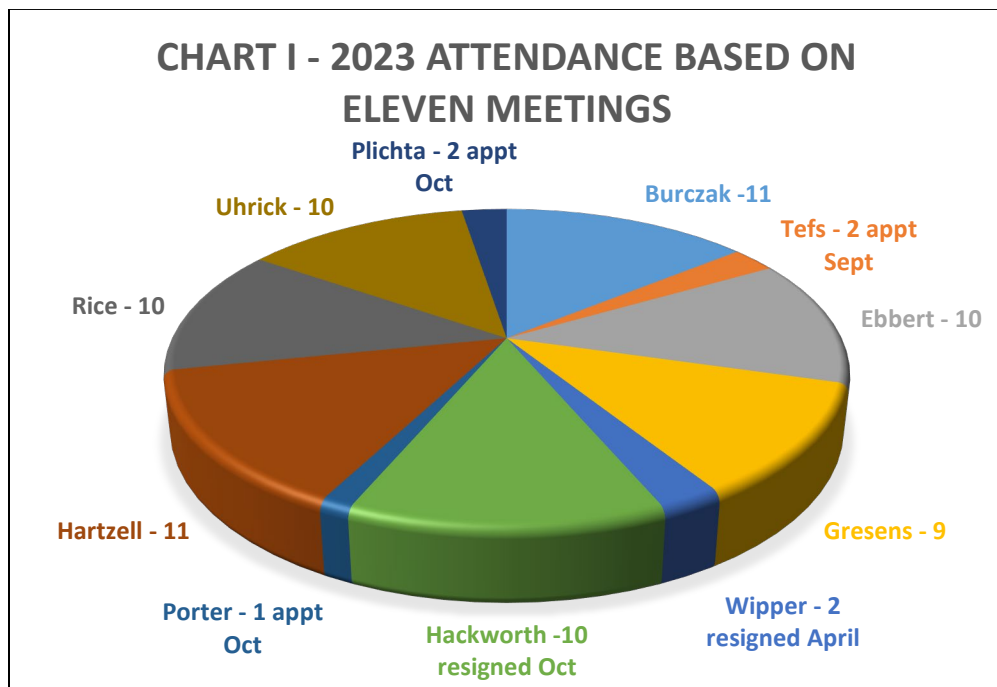
The nine meetings ranged from 0.75 to 4.0 hours for a total of 19.25 hours over the calendar year. Planning Commissioners spend additional time reviewing the agenda packets prior to the meeting and visiting the site. The overall member meeting attendance rate for the year was approximately 91%. Staff 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 2023</u>	<u>Appointed</u>	<u>Years' Service as of Dec 2023</u>	<u>Term Expires</u>
Kathy Burczak	100%	5/2021	10 (includes previous)	2024
Sean Ebbert	91%	3/2007	16	2025
Richard Gresens	82%	1/2022	5 (includes previous)	2024
Patsy Hartzell ( <i>Chair</i> )	100%	7/1985	38	2026
Becky Rice	91%	2/2006	17	2025
Anthony Uhrick	91%	5/2021	3	2024
Michael Plichta	100%	9/2023	1	2025
Pam Porter	50%	9/2023	1	2026
Dustin Tefs	100%	6/2023	1	2026

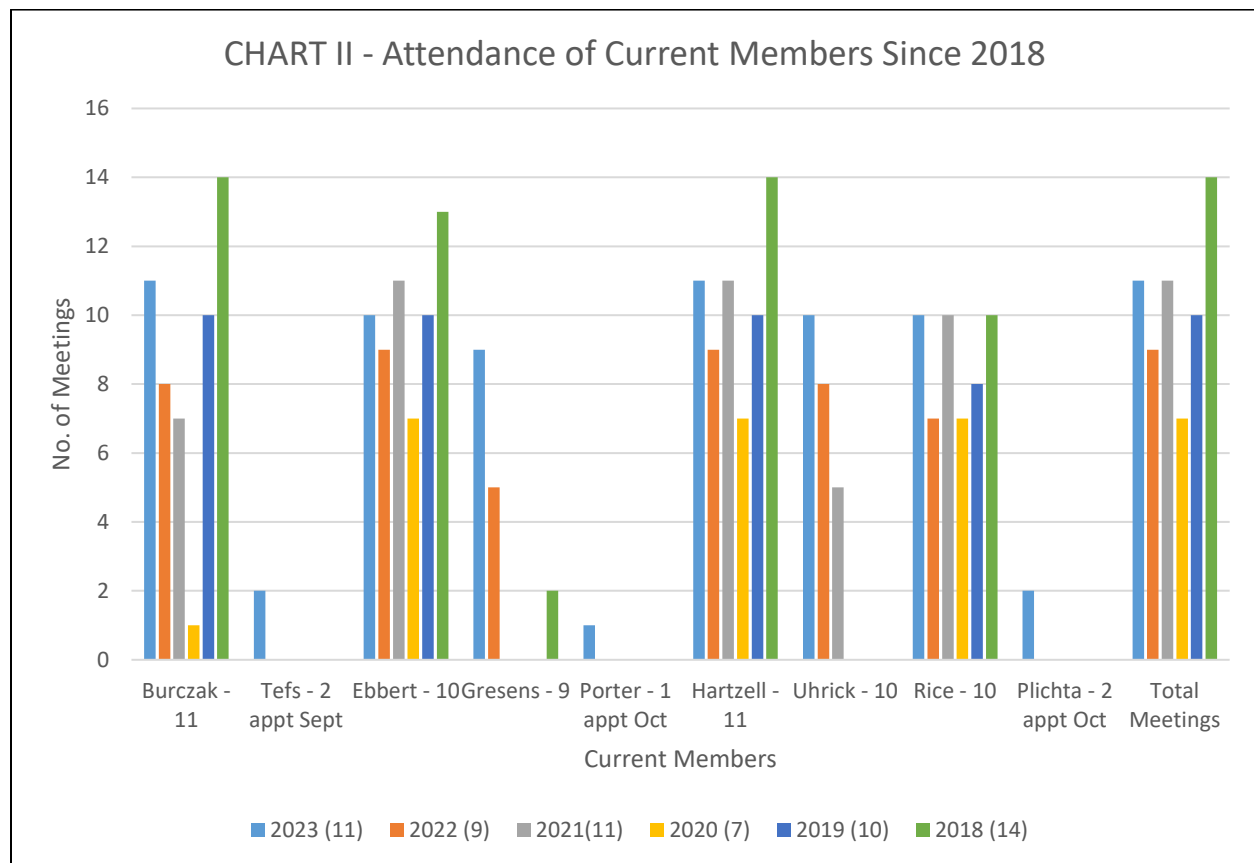
Resignations during 2023

Thaddeus Hackworth	100%	1/2021	2.5	2026
Ceile Wipper	50%	3/2017	6.5	2023



Below is Chart II which depicts attendance for the current members since 2017. It shows that members are consistently attending meetings and understand the commitment when accepting appointments. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Commission did not meet in February, March or April due to no business, the remainder of the calendar year and into 2021 meetings were conducted virtually using Zoom as allowed by the State of Michigan.

Ms. Burczak requested not to be reappointed to the Planning Commission when her term expired in April 2020, there was a vacancy existing when she was reappointed in May 2021. Mr. Gresens served on the Commission prior to resigning in 2018, there was a vacancy in 2022 and he applied to be reappointed.



All members of the Planning Commission are encouraged to participate in additional learning opportunities. City staff arranged for a two-and-one-half hour Housing Supply, Choice, and Affordability Workshop in June 2023 through the Michigan Association of Planning. Ms. Burczak, Mr. Ebbert and Chair Hartzell attended the workshop in addition to City Commissioners, other appointed board or commission members and city staff. Mr. Ebbert also attend the Advanced ZBA: Beyond the Fundamentals webinar by the Michigan Association of Planning. Mr. Uhrick and past member Mr. Hackworth attended the eight-hour Housing in Four Parts web series by the Michigan Association of Planning.

The three members appointed in 2023 are scheduled to take the MSUE Citizen Planner course in 2024 and all remaining members have previously taken the class. In addition, some members of the City Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals have completed the class in the past. Money is budgeted annually for members to complete additional training. There are several organizations that provide on-line training free of charge or at reduced rates. In addition, many previously recorded training opportunities can also be found on YouTube for viewing.

Ms. Burczak has maintained her designation as a Master Citizen Planner through Michigan State University Extension and is a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. Educational opportunities in 2023 included: attending 17 sessions at the ASLA 2023 Conference on Landscape Architecture in Minneapolis, the Southwest Michigan Coastal Leadership Academy (January and February 2022 – 9 hours) and completing the Heartsaver First Aid CPR AED program.

On August 31, 2023, Rep. Andrews hosted a “listening tour” on short-term rentals. Chair Hartzell along with the Community Development Director, City Attorney and Building Official also attended the event.

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

In 2023 the Planning Commission was staffed by Kristen Gundersen, Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator; Laurie Schmidt, City Attorney; Trudy Wilder, Building Official, and Building Inspector Caleb O’Toole.

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 completed her third term on the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission as a Berrien County appointed member. Training attended includes the following training and workshops:

1. Michigan Association of Planning Spring Conference in May 2023.
2. Michigan Association of Planning – State Conference in October 2023. Obtained continuing education credits necessary for AICP membership.
3. Michigan Association of Planning web series – Housing in Four Parts; Advanced ZBA: Beyond the Fundamentals; and Zoning Administration 2.0.
4. In addition, numerous other virtual webinars to maintain membership in the American Institute of Certified Planners, Certified Floodplain Managers and to gain additional knowledge regarding downtown development.

The City Attorney has been a Board member of the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys since 2019. Training options that were attended included the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys Winter Board Retreat along with the Institute of Continuing Legal Education – Labor Law and Employment Law Institute and the Microsoft Word Academy for Lawyers. A webinar on Cannabis Regulatory Agency Municipal Summit, FOIA Training through Hinkley Training and Consulting. The Spring and Fall Michigan Association of Public Employees Retirement Systems Conferences. The on-site Michigan Association of Planners – Housing Supply, Choice and Affordability Workshop.

The Building Official attended the Spring Code Officials Conference and has attend webinars when determined helpful. The Building Inspector completed the Zoning Administrator Certificate program through Michigan State University Extension. In addition, the Inspector obtained Plan Review ICC Certificate and completed Fire I and Fire II classes through the NFPA while attending the Fall Code Officials Conference. Both individuals are involved with the Metro Building Inspectors Association of Greater Grand Rapids. In person annual training held by the State of Michigan to help obtain continuing education credits was attended as necessary.

**2023 Planning Commission Meeting Information and Agenda Items.**

During 2023, the Planning Commission reviewed 10 requests associated with private property. The Planning Commission also received two requests from the City Commission to study Short-term Rental in the D Downtown District and the parking and storage of recreational vehicles. At the beginning of the year the Planning Commission continued its review of changes associated with access and parking in the Zoning Ordinance along with solar energy and green/vegetative roofs, however, due to the work load of public business and requests from the City Commission, there was little time to work on these items.

Following is Chart III which lists the different types of action items the Planning Commission reviewed in 2023. Please note that the one text amendment request listed below was on the Planning Commission for five meetings.

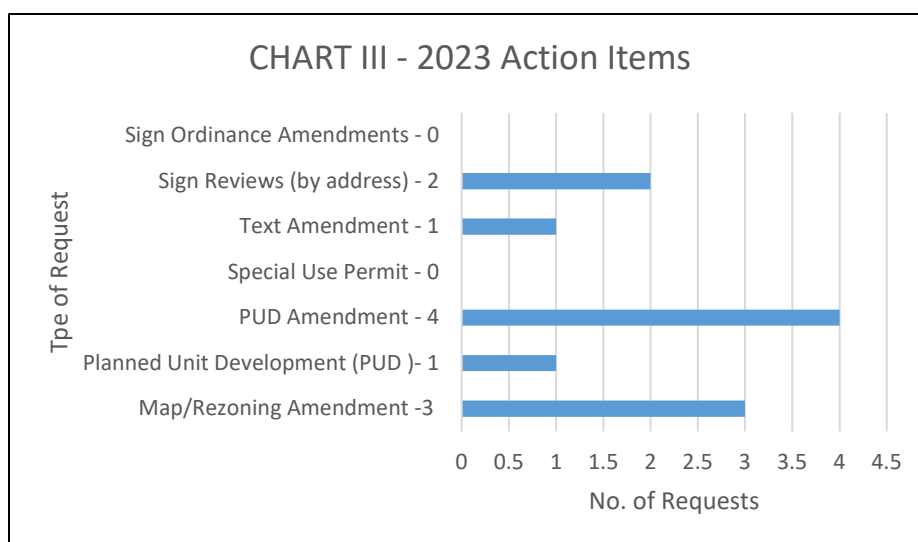
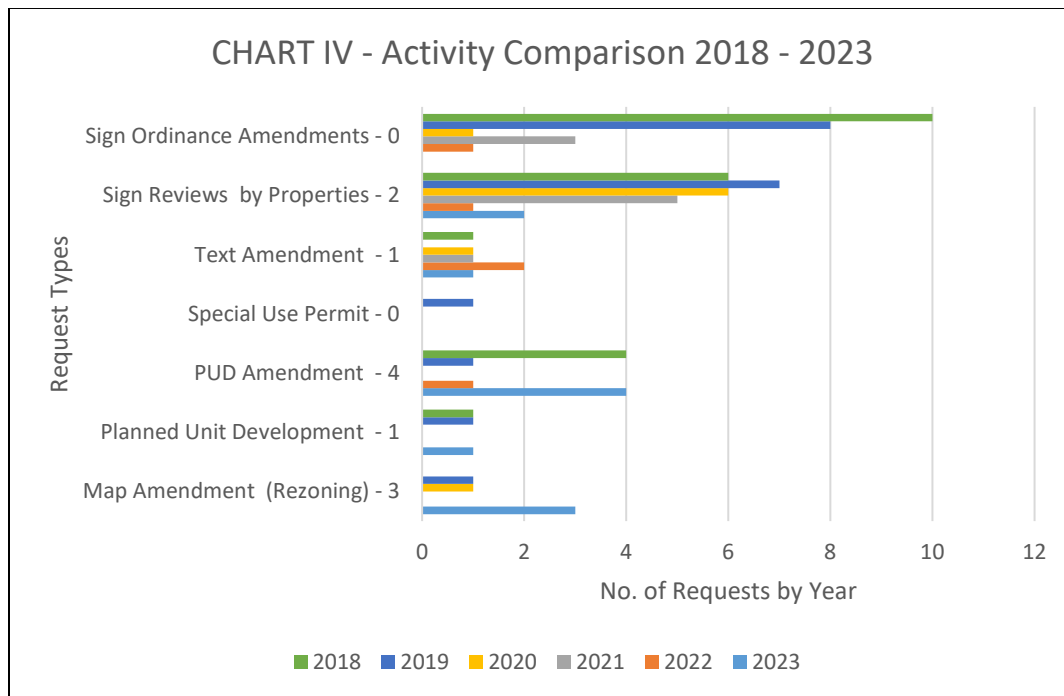


Chart IV provides a comparison of activity from 2018 – 2023. Based on Chart IV below the number of Planned Unit Development Amendments and Map Amendments (rezonings) increased quite a bit in 2023 compared to past years. The number of sign requests has remained low since highs in 2018 and 2019 prior to the new Sign Ordinance being adopted in early 2020.



Following is a complete list of the applications acted upon in 2023. This list provides the address, brief description of request, month of review and action taken by the Planning Commission. The Planned Unit Development request along with the Major Amendment to the Planned Unit at Harbor Shores required extensive Commission time and staff time to review.

Map Amendment (rezoning).

- Map amendment from C Commercial Business District to R1-A Single-Family Residence District for a portion of the property known as 2717 Cleveland Avenue. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the request on May 4, 2023. *The City Commission approved first reading of Ordinance on May 15, 2023 and the second reading on June 12, 2023. The Ordinance became effective on June 23, 2023.*
- Map amendment from C Commercial Business District to R1-A Single-Family Residence District for the properties known as 2621 and 2625 Niles Avenue. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the request on July 6, 2023. *The City Commission approved first reading of Ordinance on July 24, 2023 and the second reading on August 14, 2023. The Ordinance became effective on August 25, 2023.*
- Map amendment from CO-A Commercial Office District to D Downtown District for the property known as 206 Court Street. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the request on November 2, 2023. *The City Commission approved first reading of Ordinance on November 13, 2023 and the second reading on December 11, 2023. The Ordinance became effective on December 22, 2023.*

### Planned Unit Developments.

- 143 Anchors Way – Harbor Isles Marine, LLC – Request for a planned unit development in the W Water Recreation District to allow existing and new uses. Planning Commission conducted public hearing on March 2, 2023 and recommended approval of the requests on April 6, 2023. *The City Commission conducted a public hearing and approved the Planned Unit Development which included the existing uses and allowing existing and new uses: 1) the sales/rental, servicing, and indoor storage of golf carts, low-speed vehicles, other power sports equipment such as E-bikes, scooters, bicycles, and accessory items; 2) indoor and outdoor storage of boats, trailers, and associated accessory equipment; and 3) the repair and servicing of boats as described in the staff memorandum from the April 6, 2023 with conditions. The remaining request associated with boat assembly was continued to June 26<sup>th</sup> and then July 24<sup>th</sup> before being approved on August 28, 2023 with conditions.*

### Planned Unit Development – Amendments.

- Third Major Amendment to the 2016 Harbor Village PUD to develop Buildable Areas B and C while modify previously approved design in the W Water Recreation District with waivers. The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on March 2, 2023 and denied the request. The applicant withdrew the request on March 13, 2023. No further action was required.
- Third Major Amendment to the 2016 Harbor Village PUD to develop Buildable Areas B and C while modify previously approved design in the W Water Recreation District with waivers. The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on April 6, 2023 approved the request with conditions. *On May 8, 2023, the City Commission conducted a public hearing and approved the request as recommended by the Planning Commission.*
- Major Amendment to Edgewater Dunes residential development specifically for 501 Dunewood Drive (Unit 79) to decrease front building setback along Summer Ridge Parkway; decrease front building setback along Dunewood Drive and decrease side building setback along south lot line. Planning Commission continued public hearing on April 6<sup>th</sup> and recommended approval of the request on May 4, 2023. *City Commission conducted a public hearing and approved the request on June 12, 2023.*
- Major Amendment to Edgewater Dunes residential development specifically for 539 Dune Ridge North (Unit 66) to decrease rear building setback and to increase maximum lot coverage. Planning Commission conducted public hearing on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and recommended approval of the request with conditions. *City Commission conducted a public hearing and approved the request on August 28, 2023.*

### Special Use Permits.

No requests.

### Text Amendment – Zoning Ordinance.

- Sections 4.6.3 – Table 4-1; 4.6.4 – Table 4-2; 11.12.11.E; 18.2.7.C – Table 18-1 and 18.2.12.A as they relate to Short-term Rental in the D Downtown District. City of St. Joseph was the applicant. Planning Commission discussed the request and draft language on July 6<sup>th</sup>, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, September 7<sup>th</sup> and conducted a public hearing on November 2<sup>nd</sup> when they recommended approval of draft language as amended. *City Commission approved first reading of the amended ordinance on December 11, 2023. The second reading of the ordinance is scheduled for January 8, 2024.*



- The Planning Commission began discussions regarding the parking and storage of recreational vehicles after receiving a request from the City Commission. Discussions happened on October 5<sup>th</sup>, November 2<sup>nd</sup> and are scheduled to continue in 2024. Once a draft ordinance is completed, a public hearing will be scheduled with a recommendation going to the City Commission.

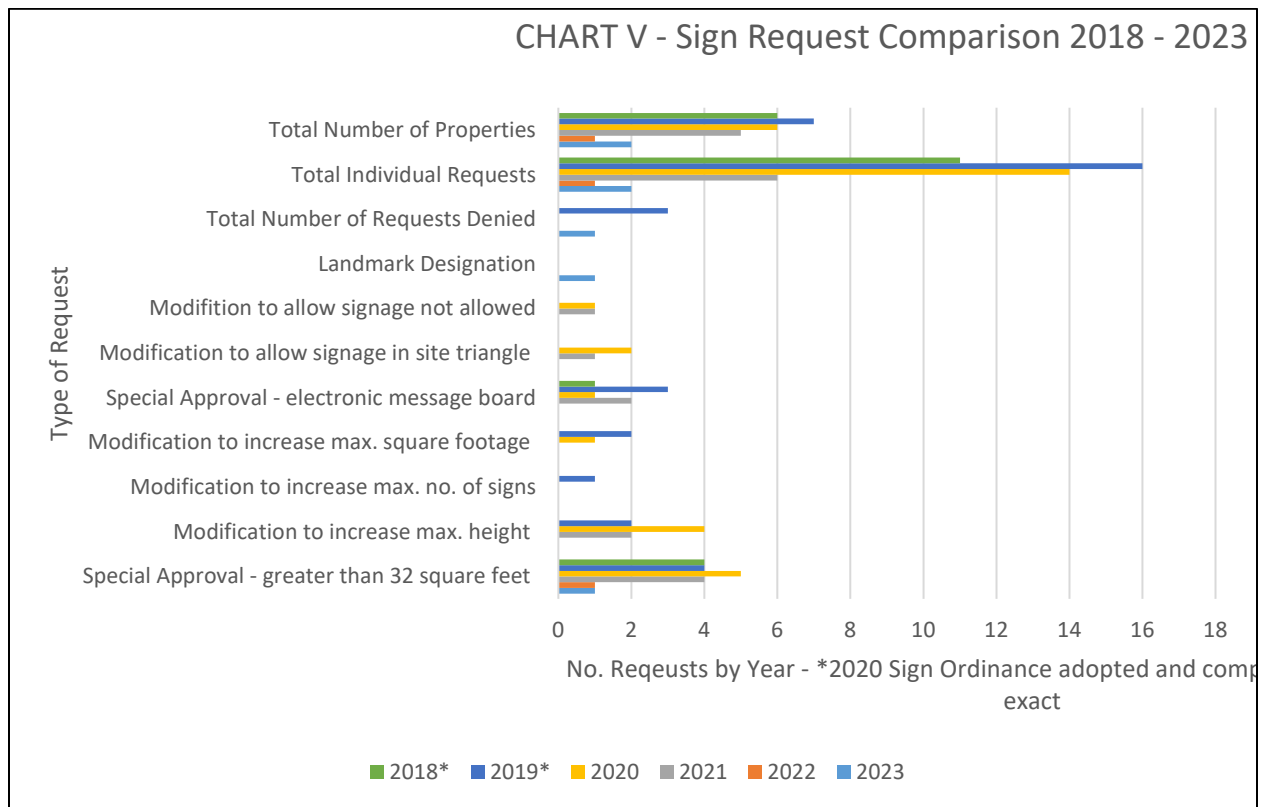
Text Amendment – Sign Ordinance.

None.

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

- 221 Main Street – FastSigns and 221 Main – Restaurant and Cocktail House – Special Approval of a Sign Greater than 32 sf (51.46 sf) and approval of – *Approved October 5, 2023 with conditions.*
- 609 Court Street – Trinity Lutheran Church – Request for Landmark Sign Designation; Approval of Landmark Sign Repair or Restoration; Sign Modification to allow Electronic Message Board where the sign type is not allowed; and Special Sign Approval for an Electronic Message Board – *Planning Commission denied the request for the Landmark Sign Designation and did not take action on the remaining requests on December 7, 2023.*

Following is Chart V, a comparison of sign requests from 2018 to 2023. The comparison does not reflect all types of requests prior to the adoption of the Sign Ordinance in January 2020. The comparison does show that the total number of requests has decreased. Please note that city staff approves all signs that comply with the Sign Ordinance or do not require Special Approval for being greater than 32 square feet or involve an electronic message board.



## **Future Activities for 2024.**

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 planned activities include:

1. Review of the Zoning Ordinance in the area of access management and parking; landscaping, buffering and fencing; and green infrastructure; and other areas as determined necessary. FEMA has issued new Floodplain Maps along the Lake Michigan Coast that will require amendments to the Zoning Ordinance for adoption for the City to be compliant with the Flood Insurance Program.
2. Based on preliminary conversations, City staff believes there might be less private property or business owner requests in 2024 when compared to 2023. Requests from private property owners or business takes priority with the Planning Commission. Two public hearing requests were already received for the January 2024 meeting.
3. In past years the Planning Commission has stated work needs to be done to Article 18 Planned Unit Development Regulations and Article 19 Landscaping, Buffering and Fencing. Staff has additional areas of the Zoning Ordinance which should be reviewed for changes.