

Charter Township of Comstock

Planning Commission &
Community Development Department
2022 Annual Report



Summary

Development activity was steady in 2022. Requests before the Planning Commission far exceeded the number of applications from the previous year. The Planning Commission had a busy year with applications, rezoning requests and text amendments holding 19 regular meetings. A Joint Meeting was also held with the Township Board and Zoning Board of Appeals in March. Significant public input was received on various agenda items throughout the year.

In 2022, the Planning Commission considered nine applications for special exception use approval, twelve requests for site plan review and six rezoning proposals – three of which were conditional rezoning requests. Public hearings were held on two series of various text amendments along with working meetings utilized to craft the zoning language prior to the hearing. Work on the Master Plan update occurred as well.

Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC) was achieved in 2022; Comstock Township is the third Township in Michigan to achieve this important milestone. A celebration ceremony was held in August at Merrill Park.

Training and continuing education opportunities were offered both virtual and in person in 2022 including the Michigan Association of Planning's Annual Conference and the Spring Institute attended in person by the Community Development Director.

The following seven individuals made up the membership of the Comstock Charter Township Planning Commission in 2022.

Jennifer Jones-Newton, Chair

Ron Sportel, Vice Chair

Allan Faust, Secretary and Liaison to Zoning Board of Appeals

Jeff Ampey

Patrick Hanna

Larry Nichols

Bub Sherwood (ex officio member from Township Board)

With staff-support from

Community Development Director Jodi Stefforia

Site Plan Review

The Planning Commission reviewed a variety of site plans from a new Valvoline Instant Oil Change on Gull Road to the establishment of a ITC substation off East Main Street and North 28th Street. Twelve site plans were reviewed.

Weathervane Storage – site plan approval granted for a storage facility on G Avenue. *Phase one complete; phase 2 underway.*

Valvoline Instant Oil Change – site plan approval granted for a 3-bay instant oil change facility. *Complete.*

Mosquito Shield – site plan approval granted for a new office/warehouse building on K Avenue. *Project no longer being pursued.*

Road Commission of Kalamazoo County – site plan approved for phase two site improvements for a new campus for RCKC . *Underway.*

Redwood Apartment Neighborhoods – site plan approval granted for a 189-dwelling unit apartment development on Gull Road/G Avenue. *Site work underway.*

Vibetech – site plan approval granted for a building addition and pole building. *Underway.*

Midlink Business Park – site plan approval granted for an industrial building. *Not yet underway.*

Rooster's Call – site plan approval granted for a new restaurant on G Avenue. *Not yet underway.*

ITC - site plan approval granted for an electrical switching substation south of East Main Street. *Not yet underway.*

Canteen Vending – site plan approval granted for a new warehouse/office building on East K Avenue. *Not yet underway.*

Schupan - site plan approval granted for a new aluminum shredding facility in Midlink Business Park on Park Circle Court. *Not yet underway.*

Prestige Storage – site plan approval granted for an expansion of the storage facility on East Michigan Avenue. *Not yet underway.*

Special Exception Use

The Planning Commission reviewed nine applications for special exception use approval. Some of the applications were directly tied to a site plan review.

Valvoline Instant Oil Change – special exception use approval granted for a 3-bay instant oil change facility. *Complete.*

Woodhouse – special exception use review of a proposed 10-dwelling unit building on K Avenue tabled. *Withdrawn.*

Simpson – special exception use approval granted for an accessory building on N Avenue. *Not yet underway.*

Gilbert – special exception use approval extended for an accessory building on ML Avenue. *Not yet underway.*

Uminn – special exception use approval granted for a powder coating business on Comstock Avenue. *Complete.*

Arby's – special exception use approval granted for second drive up service lane on Gull Road. *Underway.*

MacAllister Rentals – special exception use approval granted for an expansion of the heavy equipment storage business on North 33rd Street. *Site work underway.*

Miles – special exception use approval to allow a family childcare home to become a group childcare home on Crestwood Avenue. *Complete.*

ITC – special exception use approval granted for an electrical switching substation south of East Main Street. *Not yet underway.*

Rezoning

Six new rezoning proposals were considered in 2022 by both the Planning Commission and the Township Board. Three were conditional rezoning requests. Additionally, one request began in 2021 with final action taken in 2022.

South 26th Street (5200 East Cork Street Investors) – request to conditionally rezone from AGR, Agriculture-Residential to M, Manufacturing. *Planning Commission recommended approval; Township Board approved the conditional rezoning request.*

East G Avenue/Gull Road (Redwood Apartment Neighborhoods) – request to conditionally rezone from B-3, General Business to RM, Multiple Family Residential for a multiple family development. *Planning Commission recommended approval; Township Board approved the rezoning request.*

East G Avenue (Watts) – request to conditionally rezone from R-1A, Single Family Residential to B-2, Community Business District. *Planning Commission recommended approval; Township Board approved the conditional rezoning request.*

Gull Road (Schafer Construction) – request to conditionally rezone from B-2, Community Business to B-3, General Business to allow outdoor storage. Item tabled by Planning Commission to give applicant time to revise site plan and meet with MDOT.

East K Avenue (Daniels) – request to rezone from R-1C, Cluster Housing District to LM, Light Manufacturing. Planning Commission recommended approval; Township Board approved the rezoning request.

King Highway and Grange Avenue (Meints) – request to rezone to LM, Light Manufacturing or M, Manufacturing from CC, Comstock Center and R-1B, Single family Residential three properties – one on King Highway and two on Grange Avenue. Subsequent to the public hearing, Applicant withdrew request.

East N Avenue (Franklin Partners) – request to rezone from AGR, Agriculture-Residential to LM, Light Manufacturing. Planning Commission recommended approval; Township Board approved the rezoning request.

Implementing the Master Plan

In 2022, progress was made on the five-year review of the Vision 2025 Master Plan. A full update is being prepared. The Planning Commission studied properties in 15 areas of the Township to determine if any should be rezoned to match the Future Land Use Map or if the Future Land Use Map should be amended to match existing zoning or if no changes are warranted. Continued work on the update is expected in early 2023 with a goal to hold a public hearing in the first half of the year.

A Capital Improvement Program (CIP) – an annual requirement identified in both the Planning Enabling Act and the Vision 2025 Master Plan – was prepared by a subcommittee of the Township Board, Planning Commission and Township staff and adopted by the Township Board.

Text Amendments

The Zoning Ordinance provisions addressed by the Planning Commission in 2022 include the following:

- Created provisions addressing primary caregivers.
- Updated language regarding parking and storage of trailers.
- Modify nonconforming lots provision to allow them to be buildable.
- Updated language addressing mining and quarrying.
- Clarify language to allow an accessory building on a lot without required minimum frontage.
- Various other amendments addressing areas where clarification was needed to existing text.

Administrative Review

Consumers Energy Galesburg City Gate – site plan approval granted for minor changes to the site and a new accessory building located near the Morrow Substation facility.

Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet – site plan approval granted for an addition to the west side of the building and an accessory building in the southwest corner of the property. *Underway.*

Miscellaneous

Discussions were held regarding creating provisions to allow for agricultural tourism. Work will occur on this as agenda space allows.

Redevelopment Ready Communities

The Community Development Director began pursuing Redevelopment Ready Community Certification from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) in late 2018. This is an arduous program where the community works to streamline the development approval process by integrating transparency, predictability and efficiency into the daily development practices. The Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) process is a statewide program that certifies communities that actively engage stakeholders and plan for the future. The RRC certification signals that the community has clear development policies and procedures, a community-supported vision and a predictable review process.

Through the RRC certification process, numerous new policies and guides have been created that reflect existing best practices – Comstock’s customer-oriented practices were formalized through this process. The guides bring together relevant development information in a single location on the webpage and reflect the Township’s redevelopment readiness. The most often viewed include the Development Process Overview and the Conceptual Review Checklist.

In 2022, Comstock Township achieved *Certification* with completion of 5 of 6 best practice areas of the program. The Township is now eligible for additional grant funding and technical assistance from the MEDC for activities that complement the Redevelopment Ready Certification status – such as hiring a consultant to prepare a modern, digital and interactive zoning ordinance.

As the Township is now Certified, the MEDC will work with staff in the identification of and national-level marketing of three soon-to-be-selected priority redevelopment sites in the Township. This is Best Practice 6. The Community Development Director is working on the first of the priority sites which involves up to 10 parcels in Comstock Center.

Public Engagement

The Township adopted a Public Participation Plan in 2019 as part of Best Practice 1 of the Redevelopment Ready Community certification process. An annual summary to the Township Board on public engagement undertaken in the previous year is a RRC 2.0 requirement. Inclusion of this summary is included in the Planning Commission & Community Development Department Annual Report.

All meetings were held in person in 2022 after a year and half of virtual meetings due to COVID-19.

- Meetings of the Township Board and Planning Commission remained accessible to view on cable television, the Public Media Network (PMN) webpage and on the PMN App. Township Board and Planning Commission meetings were broadcast live on Public Media Network.
- On the Township's webpage, members of the public are able to sign up to receive email notification of and a direct link to agendas and meeting packets as they are published.
- Social media was heavily used to announce meetings and other items of interest.
- NIXLE was utilized for important time-sensitive alerts.
- The Township's newsletter is now issued monthly.
- Inserts with the assessment notice and tax bills were used to share relevant information.

Some residents chose email to send their comments on various items. These emails were shared with the board members and became part of the public record.

Applicant Feedback

As part of the Redevelopment Read Communities program, the Township solicits feedback via a survey emailed to applicants. The survey is sent to former applicants and asks about their experience with the development process, Township Staff and Boards and the nature of their request before the Township.

Feedback from applicants has been positive about the Community Development Director's assistance with the process and scheduling of reviews as well as the Planning Commission's review and approval process.

Downtown Development Authority

Serving as the Director of the Comstock Center Downtown Development Authority (DDA) the Community Development Director's responsibilities work toward implementation of the Downtown Development Plan adopted by the Township Board in 2019 and the Comstock Center Place Plan for Prosperity and Redevelopment and the Economic Development, Marketing & Branding Strategy. The DDA is a large board with 8 to 10 members in 2022, to be more efficient, the DDA formed committees to work on specific areas such as *Beautification, Economic Development, Marketing & Outreach, Events* and an *Executive Committee*. The Executive Committee, among other tasks, serves as the sounding board for initiatives the Director may undertake or encourage the DDA to pursue toward making Comstock Center a more vital area for investors, businesses and the residents. In 2022, the DDA formally selected the Community Development Director to serve as the DDA Director with a stipend; this was approved by the Township Board.



Training and Continuing Education

The Community Development Director attended the Michigan Association of Planning annual conference in October. She also attended the Michigan Downtown Association annual conference in November and various other single-day workshops.

In 2020, Comstock Township upgraded its membership with the Michigan Townships Association (MTA) allowing all staff, board and commission members to obtain online training through live and/or pre-recorded webinars on a variety of topics at no cost per attendee. The Community Development Director reminds the Planning Commission of training opportunities as a regular agenda item. The training opportunity will remain available in 2023 and it is anticipated that MTA will add new content. As the Community Development Director becomes aware of relevant topics being presented, the information is shared.

Per Township policy, appointed board and commission members seeking re-appointment must have attended at least one hour of training per year of term length. For example, Planning Commission terms are three years long; it is expected that within her/his term, the individual member attend at least three hours of training on land use and/or zoning topics.

Day to Day

The Community Development Director fields numerous inquiries each day from developers, engineers, residents, and more. To reduce the disruptions that these inquiries of often- common themes create, many documents have been placed in logical locations on the web page so that individuals can readily find information and then reach out to the Township if they have further questions. A new interactive Zoning Ordinance will be prepared in 2023 with the help of a consultant – this should further facilitate the public finding answers to planning and zoning questions.

The Community Development Director serves as staff support to the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals and as the Director to the Downtown Development Authority. She schedules the agendas, prepares the notices and staff reports and attends the meetings to share reports and then follows up each meeting. She also presents to the Township Board on land use and zoning matters and activities of the Downtown Development Authority.

Coordination occurs daily within the Township departments as well as with the Kalamazoo Area Building Authority to allow for streamlined and prompt reviews and approvals or simply an answer to an inquiry.

The Community Development Director serves on the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study Technical Committee as Vice Chair and two of the organization's subcommittees and various other committees in the Kalamazoo area as the topic warrants.