



City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission FY19 ANNUAL REPORT



CITY OF
GRAND
RAPIDS

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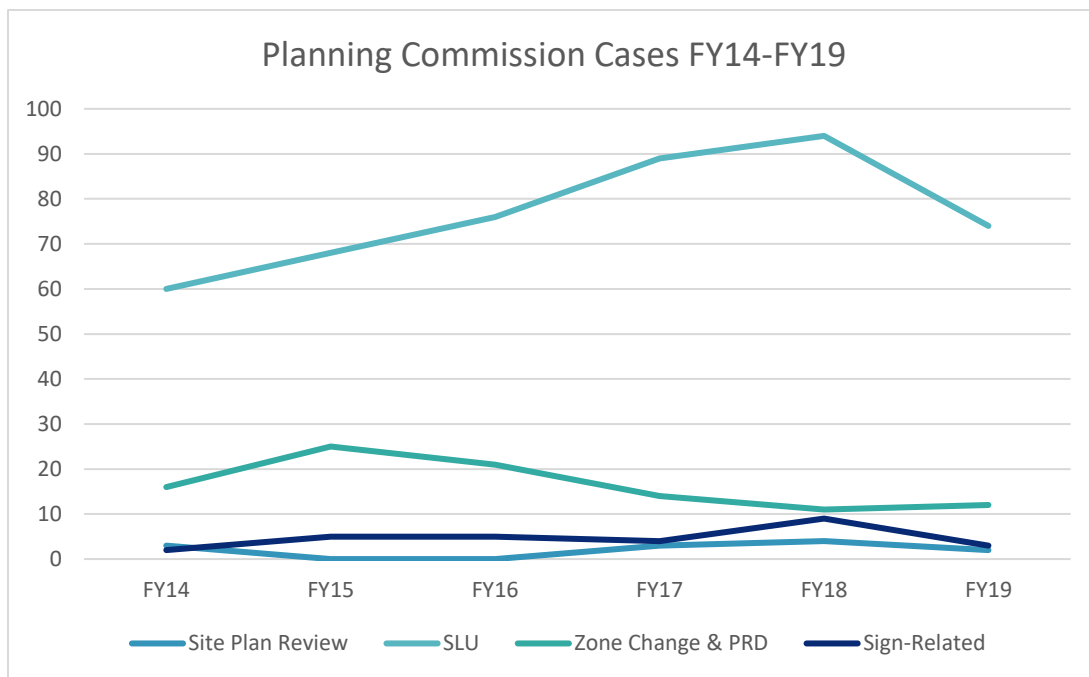
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OVERVIEW

This report provides an overview of the activity of the City of Grand Rapids Planning Department in FY19 (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019). Under the direction of the City Commission, three appointed boards (Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Historic Preservation Commission), and the City Master Plan, the Planning Department guides public and private development efforts in the City of Grand Rapids.

PLANNING COMMISSION CASES

The volume of cases heard by the Planning Commission has grown steadily over the last six years until declining slightly in FY19.



Special Land Uses

There were approximately 74 Special Land Use (SLU) applications considered by the Planning Commission in FY19. Of these, 68 were approved, or approximately 92 percent. Some of the Special Land Use requests included the following:

- **Alcohol Uses:** Twenty-one (21) SLU applications regarding new or expanded alcohol uses were considered by the Planning Commission.
 - **Gas Station SDM:** Six (6) of these SLU requests were for the sale of wine and beer at gas stations.
- **Ground Floor Office:** In many commercial zone districts, active ground-floor uses are encouraged. As such, office on the ground floor requires Special Land Use approval. Four (4) SLU applications for ground floor office were considered.

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- Parking-Related: Five (5) cases for parking as a principal use were considered.
 - Density-Related: Five (5) SLU applications related to increasing density were considered, from two-family to multifamily uses.

Medical Marijuana

On December 28, 2018, City Commission adopted Zoning Ordinance amendments, which established regulations for medical marijuana facilities, including applicability, approval procedures, authorized facilities, application requirements, annual fees, violations, rights, state laws, federal laws, and receipts of applications. An industry information meeting and several community information meetings took place in early January 2019, along with applications for Safety Compliance Facilities & Secure Transporters beginning soon after. In March 2019, a draw of applications for Growers, Processors, and Provisioning Center began, with Draw Day for first round of applications being on April 12, 2019 in City Commission Chambers. The first Medical Marijuana case was heard at the Planning Commission on May 9, 2019. Senior Planner Landon Bartley, AICP and Planning Aide, Angélica De Jesús, MPP manage Medical Marijuana cases internally in the City of Grand Rapids.

A total of five (5) Marijuana Special Land Use (MSLU) applications were considered related to establishing medical marijuana provisioning centers. Of the five cases heard, four (4) cases, or 80% of medical marijuana cases in FY19, were approved.

Sign-Related Requests

Three (3) applications were considered for Planned Sign Programs (Optional Plan Review), digital message centers (Special Land Use), or amendments to previously approved sign packages (Site Plan Review).

Zone Changes

Twelve (12) of the cases brought before the Planning Commission were either for rezonings to another zone district or for Planned Redevelopment District rezonings and amendments.

Text Amendments

The Zoning Ordinance is a set of laws that regulates land use within the City of Grand Rapids and endeavors to promote great neighborhoods, vital business districts and a strong economy, and balance with the natural environment. In FY19, several amendments to the Zoning Ordinance were considered by the Planning Commission.

Adult Day Care/Foster Care

- On May 24, 2018 there were two text amendments under consideration by the Planning Commission regarding Adult Day Care and Adult Foster approval in Low-Density Residential Zone Districts.
- The first amendment proposed that Adult Day Care Centers be permitted with Special Land Use approval in the Low Density Residential (LDR) Zone Districts.
- The second amendment proposed that Large Group Adult Foster Care Homes of 13-20 residents be permitted with Special Land Use approval in the Low Density Residential (LDR) Zone Districts.
- The Planning Commission unanimously recommended the text amendments to the City Commission, and the City Commission adopted the text amendments on July 10, 2018.

Group Child Care Homes

- On July 24, 2018, the City Commission amended the Zoning Ordinance to permit group child care homes as a permitted use in Residential Zone Districts.

Housing NOW!

- Housing NOW! is a collection of 11 policy proposals that came out of the Great Housing Strategies community planning initiative in 2015. In FY18, the Planning Commission considered Zoning Ordinance amendments addressing four of these eleven (11) policy proposals. These amendments included use modifications pertaining to accessory dwelling units, attached-single family, two-family and multi-family residential uses; dimensional adjustments including lot width, lot area and building width requirements; and the addition of a density bonus for low income housing developments. The City Commission facilitated a series of Community Feedback Sessions in August 2018 to capture community feedback on the proposed ordinance recommendations.
- Three Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments to implement Housing NOW! Recommendations #3, #8, and #9 were adopted on December 18, 2018.
 - HAC Recommendation #3 incentivizes small scale development. Small scale development is also referred to as “missing middle” housing consisting of multi-unit housing types such as duplexes, fourplexes, bungalow courts and mansion apartments that are not bigger than a large house. The text amendment:
 - Eliminates the lot area requirement of 20,000 sq ft.
 - Reduces the minimum dwelling unit width from 18’ to 14’.
 - HAC Recommendation #8 allows for the development of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU’s) with administrative approval within residential zone districts. The text amendment:
 - Eliminates lot area requirement of 5,000 sq ft.
 - Increases building height for accessory structures with an ADU and allows 2-story garages.

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- Increases floor area ratio from 25% to 40% between primary structure and ADU.
 - HAC Recommendation #9 would modify attached single-family residential dwelling unit requirements to encourage this type of development pattern within the City's residential zone districts. The text amendment:
 - Reduces minimum dwelling unit width from 18' to 14'.
 - Eliminates lot width and lot area requirements.
 - Permits up to 4 attached dwellings with administrative approval within 500' of mixed-use commercial zone district.
 - Three Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments to implement Housing NOW! Recommendations #3, #6, and #8 were adopted on March 26, 2019.
 - HAC Recommendation #3 incentivizes small scale development. The text amendment:
 - Allows single-family dwellings on corner lots to be converted to two-family dwellings as a permitted use, subject to applicable site and building placement standards and building element requirements.
 - Permits a two-family residential dwelling within the LDR zone district when located on a corner lot.
 - HAC Recommendation #6 considers affordable housing density bonuses. The text amendment:
 - Allows for affordable housing density bonuses for multi-family developments in accordance with available residential bonuses.
 - Minimum lot area per dwelling unit may be reduced by up to 500 sq ft per dwelling where at least 20% of the total number of dwelling units are priced between 60% and 79% of Area Median Income, as adjusted for family size, with rates remaining affordable for at least 30 years.
 - Minimum lot area per dwelling unit may be reduced by up to 1,000 sq ft per dwelling where at least 20% of the total number of dwelling units are priced at or below 30% of Area Median Income, as adjusted for family size, with rates remaining affordable for at least 30 years.
 - HAC Recommendation #8 would allow for the development of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) with administrative approval within residential zone districts.
 - ADUs will be designated as a "Qualified Review," a process by which neighbors may request a public hearing on a proposed ADU. If no objection to the ADU is received, however, the ADU would be approved administratively.

Medical Marijuana

- Following the amendments to the zoning ordinance in FY18 to allow medical marijuana facilities in the city of Grand Rapids, a number of text amendments regarding medical marijuana were considered. Amendments included removing the pre-qualification requirement; allow for secure transporters and safety compliance facilities related to marijuana as a permitted use in

certain zone districts; modify the administration, timing, and mapping of required separation distances; modify separation distance requirements for provisioning centers located in Industrial zone districts; and other amendments meant to clarify and correct previously adopted language.

- Recommended to the City Commission for adoption on November 8, 2018.
- Adopted by the City Commission with revisions on December 18, 2018.

Gas Station – Canopy Enclosures

- Applicants seeking to redevelop gas stations have found that reconstructing the station in a typical modern format with the station building to the rear of the site and the pumps and canopy to the front requires a dimensional variance due to the incongruence of such a layout with the traditional site layout requirements of most Grand Rapids zone districts. Several such variances have been granted in recent years, which led staff to consider that a text amendment to change layout requirements may be warranted for this specific land use.
 - Recommended to the City Commission for adoption on May 9, 2019.
 - Adopted by the City Commission with revisions on July 9, 2019, with an effective date of July 23, 2019.

Food Trucks

- On February 28, 2019, the City of Grand Rapids proposed to the Planning Commission an amendment to Articles 6, 7, 9, 12, and 16 of the Zoning Ordinance, which was recommended to the City Commission for approval. The ordinance language allows food trucks to operate in the NOS (Neighborhood Office Service) and IT (Industrial Transportation) Zone Districts with administrative/staff review and approval. In all of the other Mixed-Use Commercial Zone Districts, food trucks would be able to operate for up to 90 days via staff review/approval.
 - On April 9, 2019, the text amendment regarding food trucks was heard by the City Commission, and it was established on April 23, 2019.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS CASES

The Grand Rapids Board of Zoning Appeals considered 16 cases in FY19, down 1 case from FY18. Of these, 10 cases were approved. The approved cases included:

- Dimensional Variances: Three (3)
- Use Variances: Three (3)
- Appeals: Two (2)
- Sign: One (1)
- Use & Dimensional: One (1)

Appeals

The Board of Zoning Appeals considered two Appeals cases in FY19. The first case was an appeal on January 17, 2019 of a Planning Director's decision that the applicants proposed building plans show a conversion from a single-family dwelling with an ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) into a two-family dwelling at 2461 Westboro Drive NE. The Planning Director's decision was unanimously affirmed by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

The second case was an appeal on May 16, 2019 of a Planning Commission Special Land Use approval of a transitional housing and social service organization in a single-family home in a residential zone district at 1353 Bridge Street NW. The determination made by the Planning Commission was affirmed unanimously by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT CASELOAD

Below is a table showing both the administrative and legislative permit caseload of Planning Department staff. Additionally, staff reviews building and Land Use Development Services (LUDS) permits, demolition permit applications, lot split/combination applications, and applications for business and alcohol licenses.

Approval Process	Application Type		#
Administrative	Zoning Permits	Accessory Structures	37
		Driveway/Paving	105
		Fence	329
	Administrative Departure		85
	Backyard Chickens		61
	Event/Temporary Use Permit		101
	Sign		266
	Property Use Verification		114
	Director Site Plan Review (mostly alcohol at restaurants)		25
	Historic Preservation Certificate of Appropriateness **5-10% are referred to the Historic Preservation Commission		387
Board or Commission	Board of Zoning Appeals		16
	Planning Commission	Special Land Use	97
		Marijuana Special Land Use	5
		Planned Sign Program & Amendments	9
		Rezoning & PRD	11

PLANNING PROJECTS

In FY19, the Planning Department worked on a number of long-range planning projects. These include:

South Division

The progress of the South Division Corridor Plan continued in FY19. This Area Specific Plan covers a 3-mile segment of South Division, stretching from Wealthy Street to 28th Street. A strong concern has emerged about maintaining the culture, people and places that make the neighborhood unique, and leveraging these resources within an equitable development plan. This process will focus on six important themes, including: Meaningful Engagement; Development without Displacement; Economic Opportunity; Transportation; Health, Environment and Quality of Life; and Build and Preserve Community Identity.



For the first half of FY19, a number of community meetings revealed the plan's process to residents of South Division. During this time, a Working Groups Program was established to capitalize on input from the community meetings to further develop and design the contents of the plan. Similar community meetings continued into the second half of FY19 with the inclusion of plan priority projects in the spring. The Area Specific Plan completed a final plan for public review in August 2019, which was considered at the August 8, 2019 Planning Commission meeting and moved to be considered by the City Commission.

Heartside

Precipitated by resident concerns, the Heartside Quality of Life study began in September 2017. Engagement began with a Quality of Life Listening Tour, where more than 200 people attended to voice their hopes for the neighborhood. Next was a Neighbor Knowledge Exchange where staff presented preliminary results from the listening tour, engaged in dot voting activities, and received additional feedback from the community. Key focus areas for work groups were derived from this knowledge exchange. Phase three was the creation of seven work groups broken down by topic areas voted on by neighbors: At Home in Heartside; Public Restrooms; Neighborhood Building and Activation; Engaged and Employed; Substance Abuse Support, Recovery, and Mental Health Advocacy; Fresh Food Access; and Areas of Improvement (Pekich Park and Lucky's Liquor).

Six bi-weekly meetings occurred between May and July of 2018, which was followed by a Heartside Work Group Progress Report Luncheon with about 60 attendees. Each group established five final recommendations for the Planning Department and other collaborative partners to consider and execute that will improve the quality of life in Heartside. Work groups celebrated their accomplishments on August 8, 2018, and a final report and report back to the community was approved by the City Commission in February 2019.

Age-Friendly Communities

An initiative to make Grand Rapids more accessible for residents and visitors of all ages, in February 2018, Mayor Bliss chose the AARP book, “Where We Live, Communities For All Ages” as her book of the year, which continued into the beginning of FY19. In May 2018, the City Commission unanimously adopted a resolution authorizing the Mayor to take steps necessary to seek formal designation as an Age-Friendly Community with the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the beginning of FY19, the Mayor’s Age-Friendly Advisory Council began meeting to identify action steps and oversee the efforts of four work groups: Housing, Transportation, Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, and Communication. The work groups convened August through January, and the goals were delivered to the City Commission in February 2019. Three phases are expected to ensure the project remains efficient. Phase one is to be planned by August 2020 and includes establishing mechanisms to involve older people in all stages of the age-friendly communities to process while developing a three-year community-wide Action Plan based on baseline assessment and community outreach. Phase two commits to implementing the Action Plan by August 2023 and submitting a summary report to AARP/WHO outlining process. Phase three continues improvements in 2023 and beyond, focusing on continually developing an age-friendly community.

MLK Neighborhood

In FY19, a Quality of Life Study for the MLK Neighborhood began in February 2019. The goal of the study is to listen, build resident voice, and increase leadership capacity through authentic, inclusionary involvement in the planning process in creation of a shared vision for the future of the neighborhood surrounding MLK Park. Listening sessions occurred in winter 2019 to establish a vision and priorities for the study. Studies and engagement were completed in spring 2019 with theme-based work groups covering specific areas of change. By summer 2019, a community report was compiled.

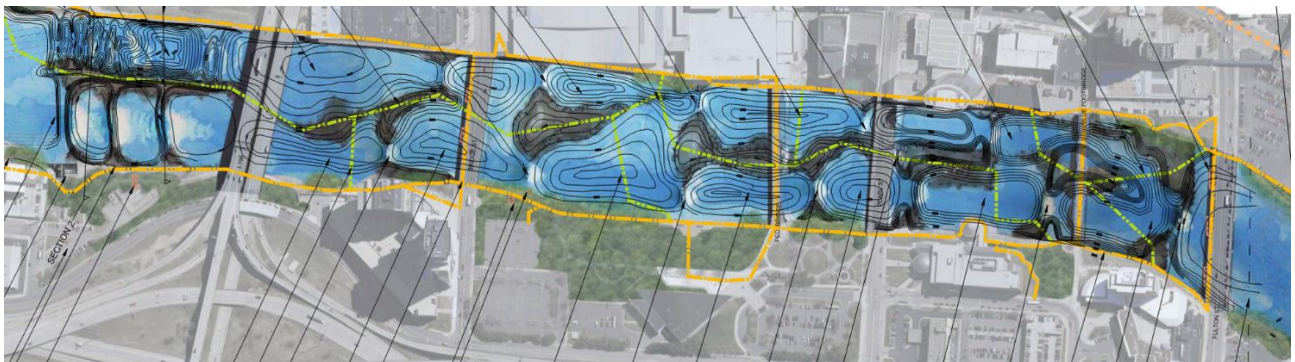
Southtown

The Southtown Business Area Specific Plan kicked off in the fall of 2017 and focuses on the business districts of Alger Heights, Boston Square, Franklin and Eastern, Madison Square and Seymour Square. The first round of public engagement was held in April 2018, which included a three-day workshop and a community survey. The second round of engagement was held in August of 2018 and featured pop-up workshops in the business districts and meetings geared towards community partners, residents, and business and commercial property owners. As the timeline progresses, the plan is in its final stages and gearing towards plan adoption and action. The Southtown Corridor Improvement Authority approved the Southtown Business Area Specific Plan in April 2019. The Southtown Business Area Specific Plan was tabled at the July 11, 2019 Planning Commission meeting until a future date.

Grand River Restoration

Supported by the GR Forward Downtown & River Action Plan of 2015, the Grand Rapids restoration project continued in FY18. The \$43M river restoration initiative will create 9,400 feet of whitewater rapids in the downtown, entailing the removal of five dams between Sixth and Pearl streets to restore an 18-foot elevation change across a 2.2 mile span of the Grand River. A new adjustable hydraulic structure is proposed one mile upstream from the existing 6th Street dam. New riverside parks are also proposed. The restoration will occur in three phases, the first of which, focused between I-196 and Fulton Street, is in the pre-permitting stage with an anticipated completion date of December 2022. The second phase will focus on the construction of an Adjustable Hydraulic Structure (AHS), which is to be completed by December 2023. The final phase, from the AHS to I-196 could be completed as early as 2025.

Milestones this year included the Grand Rapids Whitewater organization hiring a President and CEO to assist with the multi-agency permitting and restoration process, and launching a fundraising campaign to raise the necessary private dollars to complete the project. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion was rendered by April 2019. A River for All advisory committee was created by the City of Grand Rapids to assist in the development of guidelines for river trails and future recreational sites along the river.



AWARDS & DISTINCTIONS

Transit-Oriented Development Pilot Program

In FY19, a grant was established by The Rapid called The Silver Line Transit-Oriented Development and Multimodal Planning Grant in order to encourage transit-oriented development on the Silver Line corridor, building upon the success of the route. The project extends from Wealthy Street to the southern City Limits, as well as the remainder of the route through Kentwood and Wyoming to approximately 60th Street. The primary goals of the grant are to analyze the reasons development has not occurred on the corridor and put in place steps to encourage transit-oriented development, study the current housing and employment market conditions on the corridor, and identify barriers/opportunities for spurring economic development along the corridor to prioritize equitable development. The project is a joint collaboration between The Rapid, the City of Grand Rapids, Kentwood, and Wyoming. This project did not have a cost in FY19, but is expected to begin impacting the budget in FY20. The estimated timeline for the project is 15 months, likely carrying the work forward into FY21.

ZONING VIOLATIONS

Enforced by Code Compliance with the assistance of the Planning Department, the following zoning violations were filed in FY19:

Type	#
Driveway	9
Fence	45
Illegal Business	9
Overcrowding	0
Vehicle Parking	41
Yard Sale	0
Other*	451
Total	555
*Does not include violations of the sign ordinance, which were enforced by the Planning Department Sign Inspector	

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Several improvements for the Planning Department occurred in FY19, including:

- The Planning Department had a new hire in early 2019. Brent Geurink was hired as a Planner, and he currently focuses primarily on sign review, development plan review, and counter work.
- Due to the increasing workload of Medical Marijuana Special Land Use cases, Planner Landon Bartley began focusing entirely on these cases. Planning Aide Angélica De Jesús has also assisted in these cases.
- Board and Commissioner resource pages were maintained to consolidate relevant documents and resources in one place to aid board members in their duties.

STAFF & COMMISSIONER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Planning staff began offering a list of opportunities for training and ongoing development in July 2017. This was done in part to satisfy a strategy that the City proposed as part of its certification as a Redevelopment Ready Community, and in part in response to requests by members of the Planning Commission and City Commission for more such opportunities. This list is updated quarterly, and typically includes webinars, educational meetings, training programs, and conferences. In FY19, staff arranged for a total of 6 free and 2 paid webinars, 2 free in-person events, 1 paid event, and 1 paid conference, for a total of 12 training opportunities.

Finally, beginning in late FY18 staff began including an educational article from the Michigan Association of Planning in each Planning Commission agenda packet. These articles are based on MAP's "Planning and Zoning Officials Academy" and include topics such as the role of the Planning Commission, conducting effective public meetings, decision making best practices, conflict of interest, and more. Additionally, staff subscribed to a quarterly publication, "The Commissioner", published by the American Planning Association and directed specifically for Planning Commissioners. Staff includes issues with each quarterly training update.



PLANNING COMMISSION ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION

About the Board

The City of Grand Rapids Planning Commission works with the Planning Department, the City Commission, and other appointed boards to guide public and private development efforts and carry out the City's Master Plan. Members seek to administer the Zoning Ordinance fairly and equitably, and to understand citizens' interests and concerns with respect to development. The City Planning Commission is comprised of nine members who can serve up to three 3-year terms. As of June 30, 2019, the Planning Commission roster was as follows:

Kyle Van Strien, Chairperson	Paula Collier
Paul Rozeboom, Vice Chairperson	Paul Greenwald
James Davis, Secretary	Laurel Joseph
Stacie Behler	Eric Treur
Walter Brame	

Planning Commission Attendance Record – FY19	
Number of Planning Commission Meetings Held	20
Number of Meetings Where Quorum was Affected	1
Average Commissioner Present Rate	88.2%
Average Commissioner Absent Rate	11.8%

Enabling Legislation

Chapter 62 of the City Code addresses the Planning Commission. Key components of the ordinance include provisions that:

- Planning Commission members be representative of important segments of the community.
- Bylaws be adopted by the Planning Commission, including conflict of interest provisions.
- Planning Commissioners must vote unless a conflict of interest exists.
- A Planning Commissioner may be removed from office for malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance, following written charges and after a public hearing before the City Commission.
- An annual report be submitted to the City Commission.
- Describe the contents of the Master Plan, detailed procedures for adoption of the Master Plan, and requirement for an update every five years.

Planning Commission Bylaws

Planning Commission bylaws include rules regarding membership, duties, term of office, operating procedures for meetings and public hearings, voting, conflict of interest standards, and removal from the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission bylaws govern the body's operating procedures.

The bylaws had last been updated on March 26, 2009 to conform to the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008. Two amendments to the bylaws were adopted in FY18, including an amendment to institute a more relevant measure of commissioner attendance and an amendment to eliminate the two-year maximum term limit for Planning Commission officers (Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary). No additional amendments to the bylaws were adopted in FY19.