

Helena Township Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

August 6, 2026, 7:00 PM | 8751 Helena Road, Alden, MI 49612

Helena Township Planning Commission minutes are posted at www.helenatownshipmichigan.gov

DRAFT

1. Call to Order: Chair D. Hunstad welcomed those attending in person and by Zoom, reviewed meeting decorum and the three-minute public-comment guideline, and called the meeting to order at approximately 7:03 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance: All present participated.

3. Roll Call:

Present: D. Hunstad, F. VanBerg, J. Gurr, J. Schilling, R. Wanstreet.

Absent: R. Byron, D. Whipple.

Also present: Zoning Administrator J. Petersen; former Zoning Administrator R. Logee; Township Supervisor C.C. "Butch" Peeples; members of the public.

4. Introduction of New Planning Commission Member: Chair Hunstad welcomed newly appointed member R. Wanstreet. Wanstreet briefly described her background in public policy/public administration, local and regional government, research, and prior service with Parks & Recreation.

5. Approval of Agenda: A motion was made and seconded to approve the agenda as presented. All in favor. Motion carried. [Maker/seconders were not clearly identifiable in the recording.]

6. Conflicts of Interest: No conflicts of interest were declared.

7. Oath of Office: Supervisor C.C. "Butch" Peeples administered the oath of office to Planning Commission members who elected to take it. Completed oath forms were signed for Township records.

8. Approval of Minutes from July 2, 2026: Four corrections were identified: the meeting date was corrected from June 2 to July 2, 2026; D. Whipple was corrected from present to absent; F. VanBerg was corrected from present to absent; and A. Stuart's surname spelling was corrected.

Motion made and seconded to approve the July 2, 2026 minutes as amended with the four corrections. All in favor. Motion carried. [Maker/seconders were not clearly identifiable in the recording.]

9. Communications: J. Gurr reported receiving recognition from the Michigan Association of Planning for twenty years of involvement. No additional communications were reported. The Antrim County Planning Commission did not meet during the month, so no county report was available.

10. Public Comment:

- A representative of the Alden Run organizing committee thanked J. Gurr for assistance with overflow parking during the recent event, which helped preserve convenient parking for election voters.
- A resident who had completed the Citizens Planner program encouraged the Commission to reflect on the training, consider opportunities for process improvement, and potentially use a subcommittee or additional public input to strengthen Planning Commission practices.
- Supervisor Peeples announced the passing of longtime community member Jack Finley and requested a moment of silence. He also announced Election Inspector training scheduled for September 29 and encouraged residents to serve as paid election inspectors.
- B. Wiedemeyer raised concerns regarding short-term rentals near his property, including noise, conduct, enforcement limitations, and the effect on neighboring residents. He asked the Township to consider a permit or licensing structure and meaningful enforcement mechanisms.
- K. Tomlinson raised concerns regarding blight in Alden, including deteriorated or poorly maintained properties near her home, and asked the Commission to address the issue through planning and enforcement tools.

11. Zoning Administrator Report:

a. Transition / Zoning Report: J. Petersen and R. Logee reported that the transition to Petersen as Zoning Administrator was proceeding well. A sample ordinance/material from Milton Township was provided for reference.

b. Food Trucks: The anticipated special-use request involving a food truck was no longer moving forward, so no action was required.

c. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs): Petersen asked the Commission to address Accessory Dwelling Units in the ongoing zoning-definition review. The existing ordinance repeatedly references living quarters but does not clearly define ADUs. The Commission agreed the term should be evaluated as part of the definitions project, and additional time will be allowed before the public-hearing stage.

12. Old Business:

a. Definitions: F. VanBerg reported that she and R. Byron had been reviewing and updating ordinance definitions. Work includes updating terminology, aligning references with current Michigan statutes, standardizing

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capitalization/formatting, and correcting grammar and spelling without intentionally changing the substance of existing definitions. J. Petersen and Commission members will continue reviewing the draft, including whether additional definitions such as ADUs are needed. The draft is intended to be posted for public review before a future public hearing, likely no sooner than approximately two meetings.

- b. Data Centers / Renewable Energy and Battery Storage Language:** The Commission conducted a detailed line-by-line review of the proposed amendments, correcting lettering/numbering, capitalization, cross-references, references to the Township Board, and formatting. Discussion clarified that the Planning Commission's work remains a recommendation until completion of the statutory review process and Township Board action. The next step is review by the Antrim County Planning Commission.

Motion by J. Gurr to approve the corrected renewable-energy, battery-storage, and data-center amendment language and forward it to the Antrim County Planning Commission for review as the next step toward Township Board consideration. Motion was seconded. All in favor. Motion carried. [Seconder was not clearly identifiable in the recording.]

- c. Fire / Emergency Access Ordinance:** Chair Hunstad reported that he had discussed the matter with Fire Chief Jesse Lane and had not yet received a completed response. Petersen advised that the proposed ordinance is expected to be handled as a police-power ordinance originating with the Township Board rather than as a zoning ordinance. By consensus, the Planning Commission will remove the item from its active old-business list unless the Fire Department, attorney, or Township Board returns it to the Commission.
- d. Blight Ordinance:** Petersen reported an upcoming meeting with Township counsel regarding the proposed blight ordinance. Because it is also expected to be a police-power ordinance, the matter will primarily proceed through the Township Board/attorney. Discussion referenced ongoing concern about deteriorated properties in the Alden area and the difficulty of addressing conditions on private property.
- e. Municipal Civil Infraction Ordinance:** The Municipal Civil Infraction Ordinance / police-power ordinance material was included in the packet for informational purposes only. No Planning Commission action was taken.

13. New Business:

- a. Minutes Production Procedure / Approval of Minutes:** Chair Hunstad reported on a meeting with J. Petersen, Supervisor Peeples, and Clerk O. Leffew regarding a revised minutes workflow. Meeting recordings will be used to generate a draft summary rather than a verbatim transcript. Before public posting, the draft will be reviewed by two Planning Commission members. The Chair will serve as one reviewer each month and a second Commission member will rotate. The full Planning Commission will retain final authority to approve the minutes at its next regular meeting.
- b. Meeting Packet Preparation:** The final agenda and meeting packet are to be posted on the Township website no later than 48 hours before the scheduled meeting. The preferred target is approximately five days in advance when practicable so Commission members and the public have adequate review time.
- c. Add-Ons to Meeting Agenda:** The Commission agreed that substantive items received after the packet deadline will generally be placed under New Business for the following month rather than added at the last minute. The intent is to provide Commission members and the public adequate notice and review time before Commission action.
- d. Zoning Ordinance Discrepancies:** Chair Hunstad reported finding numerous typographical errors, inconsistent references, and wording inconsistencies in the zoning ordinance. The Commission discussed treating ordinance cleanup as an ongoing project rather than waiting for a periodic comprehensive review.
- e. Cancellation of July Meetings:** Chair Hunstad proposed eliminating the regular July meeting because July attendance is routinely affected by the Independence Day period, summer visitors, and member availability. Public comment suggested retaining flexibility for a later July meeting if needed. The Commission noted that special meetings may still be scheduled when necessary.

Motion by J. Gurr, seconded by J. Schilling, to amend the Planning Commission bylaws to eliminate regular Planning Commission meetings during the month of July, while retaining the ability to call a special meeting when needed. All in favor. Motion carried.

14. Next Meeting: The next regular Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 3, 2026 at 7:00 PM. Members indicated that the 7:00 PM meeting time is an improvement over the former 5:00 PM start time and will continue.

15. Adjournment: Chair Hunstad adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:11 PM.

DRAFT REVIEW NOTE: Motion-maker/seconder names marked as unclear should be verified before the minutes are approved as the official record.

Prepared by Oryana Leffew from the August 6, 2026 meeting agenda, Zoom transcript, and meeting recording for Planning Commission review.