

Helena Township Planning Commission Meeting Agenda

Thursday October 1, 2026, 7:00pm

8751 Helena Road, Alden MI 49612

1. Call to order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call
4. Approval of Agenda
5. Conflict of Interest
6. Approval of Minutes from September 3, 2026
7. Communications
8. Public Comment
9. Zoning Administrators Report
 - A. Written report distributed at meeting
 - B. Act 58 update/introduction
 - C. Trailers – need plan of action (board directive)
10. Old Business:
 - A. Definitions
 - B. Data Centers
 - C. Zoning ordinance discrepancies - typos, wording, references
 - D. Bylaws

(all materials distributed in prior meetings)
11. New Business:
12. Public Comment
13. Announcement of next meeting November 5, 2026, 7pm
14. Adjourn – please remember sign in sheet

Helena Township Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

September 3, 2026, 7:00 PM | 8751 Helena Road, Alden, MI 49612

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

1. Call to Order: Chair D. Hunstad called the meeting to order at approximately 7:03 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance: All present participated.

3. Roll Call:

Present: D. Hunstad, F. Vandenberg, J. Gurr, R. Wanstreet, R. Byron, D. Whipple.

Absent: J. Schilling

Also present: Zoning Administrator J. Petersen; Township Supervisor C.C. Peeples; Township Clerk O. Leffew; members of the public.

4. Approval of Agenda: The Commission reviewed the agenda as presented.

Motion to approve the September 3, 2026 agenda as presented. Motion by J Gurr supported by All in favor. Motion carried.

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

6. Approval of Minutes from August 6, 2026: A correction was requested to accurately reflect R. Wanstreet's vote on the August minutes item concerning cancellation of regular July meetings.

Motion to approve the August 6, 2026 minutes with the correction to R. Wanstreet's vote. Motion by Gurr supported by Wanstreet. All in favor. Motion carried.

7. Communications:

- The Commission discussed an email communication received concerning the mooring ordinance (Chapter 5, Section 5.02) and the removal of parcel-specific references to legally nonconforming properties. It was explained that individual nonconforming parcels are not ordinarily listed in the zoning ordinance and that the affected resident had requested clarification.
- J. Petersen reported receiving a communication concerning the version of the mooring (Chapter 5) zoning ordinance posted on the Township website. The matter will be reviewed and the appropriate record will be corrected if necessary.
- Correspondence from the Antrim County Drain Commissioner was acknowledged.

8. Public Comment:

- B. Wiedemeyer raised concerns about a neighboring short-term rental, including late-night noise, renter conduct, lack of response from the property manager, and limited police enforcement. He asked the Township to address short-term rentals through zoning or another enforceable local process.
- J. Klein reported similar short-term-rental concerns near her Crystal Springs Road property and stated that earlier complaints had not received a response. Clerk Leffew asked that the correspondence be forwarded to her for recording and distribution.
- A resident requested restoration of a second public-comment period at the end of Planning Commission meetings. Discussion clarified that the request was for both an opening and a closing public-comment period.

- A resident asked about the status and security of the Township's online complaint/community-feedback process, noted differences between an ordinance posted online and the version reportedly adopted, and asked that approved minutes replace or be clearly distinguished from drafts on the website.

9. Zoning Administrator Report:

a. Data Centers - New Information: J. Petersen reported that recent training discouraged combining data-center regulations with renewable-energy provisions because state limitations on local renewable-energy regulation could create confusion. The new MTA sample data-center zoning ordinance and assessment tool were included in the packet. No data-center application is currently pending in Helena Township.

b. Planning Commission Training: J. Petersen reported a possible general Planning Commission training opportunity in Banks Township in early October. Several members expressed tentative interest, subject to the final date and schedule. Petersen will continue coordinating with Banks Township.

c. Multi-Commission Data-Center Collaboration: The Commission discussed possible collaboration with nearby planning commissions, township officials, county representatives, and residents. Members supported continued exploration and noted that Helena Township's prior work could be useful to surrounding communities.

d. Zoning-Amendment Procedure: Clerk Leffew summarized the developing written procedure for initiating, drafting, reviewing, noticing, conducting a public hearing on, and forwarding zoning amendments. Discussion clarified that the Planning Commission does not independently direct Township counsel; any legal review must be authorized through the Township Board or appropriate Township official. The procedure will continue to be refined.

e. Municipal Civil Infraction and Nuisance Ordinances: The Municipal Civil Infraction Ordinance was approved by the Township Board, published, and is scheduled to take effect September 26, 2026. Petersen reported that a second nuisance-ordinance draft had been submitted to the Board after attorney review. Discussion noted that the civil-infraction process may provide an enforcement mechanism for existing zoning requirements,

f. Petersen discussed the Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment Procedure that was created and drafted by Clerk Leffew – copies available in zoning – procedure outlined, defined and ready to implement for next submission to county.

10. Old Business:

a. Definitions: F. Vandenberg reported that she and R. Byron continue reviewing ordinance definitions and related inconsistencies. They expect to circulate an updated draft before the next meeting. The project arose from the Commission's review of typographical errors, obsolete references, and provisions that do not read consistently together.

b. Data Centers - Next Steps: The Commission reviewed the new MTA sample ordinance and discussed separating data-center regulations from the renewable-energy and battery-storage amendment previously approved for forwarding. Members discussed sound and vibration limits, dark-sky lighting, water use and the prohibition of evaporative cooling, independent energy supply, underground utility lines, decommissioning security, applicant-paid professional review, special-land-use and site-plan standards, and the need to adapt the model because Helena Township has no industrial zoning district or municipal water/sewer system. Possible overlay zoning and consistency with the Master Plan were also raised. A data-center moratorium was discussed; members noted that the Township Board could consider that issue separately.

Motion by F. Vandenberg to stop forward progress on the previously proposed amendment placing data-center provisions with renewable energy and to revisit data-center regulation using the newly available information. Motion was seconded by J Gurr. All in favor. Motion carried.

Next steps: Members will review the MTA model and submit comments to J. Petersen and planning commission chair for inclusion in a future packet. The Commission will consider Helena-specific revisions, including zoning-district structure, overlay-zone possibility, Master Plan consistency, and cross-references to the Township's special-land-use and site-plan-review chapters.

c. Zoning Ordinance Discrepancies: The Commission confirmed that typographical errors, outdated wording, and inconsistent cross-references remain an ongoing cleanup project. A resident encouraged concentrating available time on data-center work if a moratorium is adopted.

d. Minutes Production and Approval: J. Petersen and Clerk Leffew reported that the revised minutes-review process is being implemented and refined. The Commission discussed returning approved minutes to the Clerk so the website can distinguish final minutes from drafts. Clerk Leffew also explained that meeting packets and online records are being converted to accessible text formats rather than image-only scans to support website accessibility.

11. New Business:

a. Planning Commission Bylaws: Members reviewed the Milton Township bylaws handout as a reference while considering updates to Helena Township's bylaws. No bylaw amendment was adopted at this meeting.

b. Meeting Sign-In Sheet: A sign-in sheet was circulated for members and attendees. The Commission indicated that sign-in and roll-call sheets will be used going forward.

c. Second Public-Comment Period: Following the earlier public request, the Commission considered restoring a second public-comment period near the end of its regular agendas.

Motion to reinstate a second public-comment period on the Planning Commission's standard meeting agendas. The maker and seconder were not clearly identifiable in the recording. All in favor. Motion carried.

d. Township Website Demonstration: Clerk Leffew demonstrated current website work, including an online zoning-permit application, printable application options, zoning and ordinance pages, accessibility improvements, and the facility-rental page. The Commission discussed a future zoning map or address-based zoning lookup, a method for submitting site plans, prioritizing ordinances for online publication, possible inclusion of the privately operated Village Community Center in rental information, and clearly distinguishing public assets from privately owned facilities. Leffew explained that collaborative document tools and tracked-editing access will be introduced after security controls are completed.

12. Second Public Comment:

- A resident supported consideration of a data-center moratorium to protect the Township while ordinance work proceeds and noted that the work could be completed before the full proposed moratorium period expired.
- Residents thanked the Planning Commission, Zoning Administrator, Clerk, and Supervisor for recent process, website, transparency, and community improvements, and supported restoration of the second public-comment period with continued enforcement of the three-minute limit. This resident also asked to consider including zoning maps with zoning applications.

13. Next Meeting: The next regular Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 1, 2026, at 7:00 PM.

14. Adjournment: The meeting recording ended at approximately 8:28 PM before a formal adjournment was captured. The adjournment time should be confirmed by the Planning Commission before approval of these minutes.

Prepared by Oryana Leffew from the September 3, 2026 meeting agenda, recorded transcript, audio, and meeting recordings for Planning Commission review. Draft reviewed by ZA & PCC.

Statement for the Record

Review of the MTA Sample Data Center Zoning Ordinance

Received: 9.23.26 1pm

To:	Helena Township Planning Commission
From:	Rian Wanstreet
Re:	Review of the MTA Sample Data Center Zoning Ordinance

Ahead of our discussion of the MTA sample data center ordinance, I wanted to submit these thoughts in writing for the Commission's consideration.

I think this ordinance could serve as a very useful starting point, but there are elements that need to be resolved before we talk meaningfully about adopting (or adapting) it for our use.

Below are my biggest questions.

1. The MTA draft only permits data centers as a special land use in an "Industrial District." Helena doesn't have one. Where, physically, would a data center go under this draft as written?
2. Our Master Plan already contemplates accommodating high-tech and light industrial uses through an overlay zoning mechanism. Given that the core siting problem with the MTA draft is the lack of an Industrial District, should we be looking at building data center regulation through the overlay tool our own Master Plan already calls for, rather than trying to graft this onto districts that don't fit?
3. The draft assumes proof of capacity on public water and sewer systems. Helena doesn't have municipal water or sewer. Does this provision become inoperable, or does it need to be rewritten around private wells and septic?
4. Related: what does "water usage" mean for us specifically, given we're not on a municipal system? Should we be asking about well capacity, aquifer impact, or something else entirely?
5. The MTA draft defines what a data center is in broad terms, but nowhere defines how large or intensive a facility has to be before it's regulated. The small-scale exception turns entirely on "no adverse impacts" — a subjective standard, not a measurable one. Should we be building into our own draft an objective threshold (megawatts, square footage, generator capacity) the way our own ordinance already does in the renewable energy section for solar, wind, and battery storage?
6. "Sensitive Land Use" is defined to include schools, hospitals, campgrounds, and dwellings. In a rural township like ours, does that definition capture what we actually need it to protect — and does it inadvertently leave anything out?
7. The data center ordinance we just set aside required a host community agreement or community benefits agreement. The MTA data center draft contains no comparable provision. Was this omission by the MTA intentional? CBAs are fairly commonplace at this point. I would want ours to have one.
8. There are no ongoing public reporting requirements after approval - no required disclosure of actual water or energy use once the facility is operating. If this passes as is, we have no way to verify compliance with the representations made at application. Can we build in additional reporting requirements and ensure our government and the public is kept informed of the ongoing conditions of any center built?

These are my questions, but I would welcome the insight and questions of individuals with more knowledge than me in other areas. For example, I know next to nothing about noise standards. The MTA is so specific in its guidelines - which is great - but what does 55dB(A) day / 45dB(A) mean in practice?

I am grateful that we have the time and space to resolve the questions above, and also for the opportunities to learn from surrounding communities and experts in the upcoming months.

I do want to echo the observation our Zoning Administrator, Jackie Petersen, raised at our last meeting: a moratorium while we work through these questions would allow us to get this right rather than rushing to a result. I encourage the Helena Township Board of Commissioners to take that recommendation seriously to give the Planning Commission that time.

Respectfully submitted,
Rian Wanstreet