HELENA TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 1, 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 regular meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance: Those present participated in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Roll Call:

Present: D. Hunstad, F. Vandenberg, J. Gurr, J. Schilling, R. Wanstreet, R. Byron, and D. Whipple.
Also present: Zoning Administrator Jackie Petersen; Deputy Clerk Shayla Savage; Township Supervisor C.C. Peeples, Robert Logee, Assessor; and members of the public.

4. Approval of Agenda: The October 1, 2026 agenda was approved
Motion: VandenBerg, Second: Gurr Vote 7/0 Motion carried without opposition.

5. Conflict of Interest: No conflicts were declared.

6. Approval of September 3, 2026, Minutes:
Motion: Byron, Second: Wanstreet Vote 7/0 Motion carried without opposition.

7. Communications: None

8. Public Comment:

Resident Wilcox commented on administrative consistency and public access to Planning Commission records, including clear identification of draft versus approved minutes, incorporation of approved minute corrections, posting of current ordinances, and correction of the meeting schedule shown on the Township website.

9. Zoning Administrator Report:

Zoning Administrator Jackie Petersen reported that zoning activity had reached permit number 39 and reviewed materials distributed to the Commission. She also reported that online credit card payment for permits had begun.

A. Act 58 Update/Introduction: Petersen advised that the land-division changes discussed under Act 58 are expected to take effect March 24, 2027, and may require review of Township parcel-split, access, and private-road standards. She will continue researching affected parcels and implementation considerations and report back to the Commission.

B. Planning/Zoning Training: Members were advised of a Banks Township planning-commission training opportunity in October and a November 11 training in Gaylord addressing data-center issues and moratoriums. Interested members may register; mileage will be reimbursed under Township policy.

C. Trailers/RVs: The Commission reviewed existing Township language concerning recreational vehicles and temporary dwellings and compared it with practices in nearby townships. Discussion focused on defining "temporary," use on vacant versus improved parcels, permit/tracking options, enforcement, and distinctions among RVs, trailers, motor homes, and temporary dwellings. The Commission did not form a subcommittee. D. Whipple will provide prior research/materials to the ZA. Petersen will use the existing ordinance language, surrounding-township examples, and submitted materials to draft clarifying language for later Commission review.

10. Old Business

A. Definitions: The Commission reviewed the ongoing zoning definitions. The working set was reported to be substantially complete, with additional clarification needed for several terms, including mobile-home-related terms, short-term vacation rentals, motor homes/RVs, private roads, fences, and data centers. The Commission also discussed the relationship between private-road standards, emergency-vehicle access, and possible future ordinance work. Relevant County/private-road information will be provided for continued review.

B. Data Centers: The Commission reviewed the MTA sample material, Helena Township's prior work, and written questions submitted by Rian Wanstreet. Wanstreet's written comments raised issues including siting without an Industrial District, use of the Master Plan overlay concept, private well/septic and water impacts, objective size/intensity thresholds, sensitive land uses, community-benefit agreements, and ongoing public reporting. The Commission discussed whether data-center provisions should remain integrated with renewable energy provisions or be developed as a stand-alone ordinance. The discussion generally moved toward further evaluation of a stand-alone approach, but no final ordinance direction was adopted.

The ZA reported that a multi-township ad hoc effort is being organized, and that additional data center training is scheduled. Members were encouraged to submit research and concerns to the ZA as a central collection point. No formal Planning Commission subcommittee was created. When the ZA asked whether the Commission wished to recommend a data-center moratorium to the Township Board, the Chair polled the members. The record reflected some support for a moratorium with a 3 of 7 polled member count, but no formal recommendation or motion was adopted.

C. Zoning Ordinance Discrepancies: The Commission acknowledged that ordinance discrepancies, wording, references, and missing/uncertain provisions remain part of the broader ordinance and definitions review. No formal action was taken.

D. Bylaws: The ZA clarified that a public hearing is not required to amend its bylaws; proposed bylaw amendments must be forwarded to the Township Board for approval. No further action was taken at this meeting.

11. New Business: No new business was presented.

12. Public Comment:

A member of the public commented on distinctions among RVs, trailers, mobile homes, and related definitions. After the Chair initially moved toward adjournment, the meeting was reopened to allow a Zoom participant to comment.

G. Mayes commented that the MTA data-center material should be treated as a guideline/template rather than adopted without additional Township-specific analysis. He encouraged review of multiple ordinances and best practices before Helena Township finalizes its approach.

13. Next Meeting:

The next regular Planning Commission meeting was announced for Thursday, November 5, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.

14. Adjournment:

Following completion of the additional remote public comment, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:12 p.m.

Prepared by Township Clerk/ Recording Secretary Oryana Leffew from the October 1, 2026 meeting agenda, recorded transcript, audio, and meeting recordings for Zoning Administrator Jackie Petersen & Planning Commission review.

Approved at the 2026-11-05 HTPC regular meeting. Made available to the public on 2026-11-05.