



**HELENA TOWNSHIP
ADVOCACY GROUP, NFP**
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Helena Township Planning Commission
REGULAR MEETING
November 6, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

RECAP

(The content contained herein was extracted directly from recordings of the above-referenced event and prepared as accurately as possible based on the room's conditions including number of people simultaneously conversing. At such times, comments are unrecognizable, it is so noted as such as being "(inaudible)."

Present

Jim Gurr - Chair
Fay VandenBerg - Secretary
Jim Schilling – Board Liaison
Mike Robinson – Vice-Chair
David Hunstad
Gordy Schafer
Darren Whipple
Bob Logee -Zoning

Absent

Butch Peeples - Supervisor

Pre-Meeting Discussion(s):

Jim Gurr talked with a resident about the importance of the Master Plan (which is amended every 5 years) regarding the fact "no commercial activities that aren't natural resource related are permitted in Ag Zone and wine processing qualifies as that, but when he had it listed for sale, he, the realtor, was suggesting it could be used for an event venue, which technically, if it isn't directly related to the wine, he couldn't do. We recognize that there may be some changes coming down the pipe with respect to that, and the flower lady on Cemetery Road feels the same way. We have a cut flower business that is technically agriculture related, but she would like to add weddings. I told her that she couldn't."

Pledge of Allegiance:

Roll Call

Agenda:

Gurr mentioned the Agenda but knew it needed to be amended as the addition of "Amending the Bylaws" needed to be added under New Business.

Schafer made a motion to add Amending the Bylaws under New Business; Whipple seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

Conflict of Interest:

No response from any PC Members.

Approval of Minutes of October 2, 2025 Public Hearing:

Schilling made a motion to approve the Minutes of the October 2, 2025 Public Hearing; Gurr seconded.
Motion carried.

Communications:

A resident submitted a request to the Planning Commission about having a “Private Cemetery” on her property to bury a family member. A Public Hearing has been scheduled for Tues., November 18th at 11:00 a.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:**Amending the Bylaws:**

Resident (G. Mayes) asked about the process to amend the Bylaws.

VandenBerg stated she had not brought in her MTA “Little Red Book” but would look into it online later.

G. Mayes presented a copy of the Bylaws, dated May 9, 2024 and read the following:

Zoning Report:

Bob Logee provided an overview of his office’s activity the past month:

- 8 Permits
- 2 Sheds
- 1 Residence
- 1 Addition
- 1 Remodel
- 1 Roof Replacement
- 1 Garage
- 1 Demo Permit issued to demolish the “Armstrong House” to build a new bank.

Schafer offered additional details regarding the new bank. He indicated it’s a 3-year plan. They will tear down the old house and build a nice bank with the proper setbacks. Then, where the old (existing) bank is, after the new bank is built, a new drain field gets moved to where the old bank was which will be wide open. It’s going to be beautiful between the practice building and the new building they have planned – “they do not have a design yet, but they have the money. They have lots of it.”

Logee added “They will need to come before this board with a special permit, exception, not exception, special handling to get it approved.”

Old Mill House:

Gurr mentioned his surprise as to how quickly Mike McCracken was able to tear down and build the new building in downtown Alden. Schilling stated, “he did everything he could to save as much of the old as he could.”

Elimination of Planning Commission's Monthly Regular Meetings:

Gurr addressed the Planning Commission about reducing the number of times the Planning Commission meets each year (which is currently MONTHLY). He indicated the PC is required to have (4) Planning Commission meetings a year and not every month. He indicated meeting monthly has become burdensome on virtually everybody involved and encouraged the PC to seriously consider changing the schedule.

Schafer indicated meeting in July is difficult as it's a busy time of year. Meeting every other month will help the PC "get homework done" and gives the PC 2 months to ensure proper notification of meetings is given and they are not so rushed to meet specific deadlines. He mentioned there would still be two meetings during the summer (June and August). He also indicated he calculated it saves the Township about \$3,600 per year and, therefore, was in favor of eliminating 50% of the Monthly Regular Meetings.

Whipple then mentioned the PC could always hold a meeting in between if needed.

Gurr outlined the process to add a Special Meeting onto the yearly calendar if the PC needed one. It would require 2 PC Members to initiate the need for a meeting but couldn't provide, with certainty, whether or not the Board would need to approve the addition of another meeting.

Resident (L. Mayes) then asked how the public would be notified that the PC scheduled an additional meeting and how far in advance?

Gurr indicated the PC would "have to develop a process for doing that."

L. Mayes: "And how would we find out about that process?"

VandenBerg: "Definitely it will be on the website."

L. Mayes: "Okay."

Gurr: "It's not intended to be a surprise."

Whipple: "...we'll discuss it and find a process and post it and then verbally let you know...So we'll have to come up with a process...and let you know."

L. Mayes then reiterated the need for the PC to discuss / work on the process in an Open Public Meeting so as to not violate the Open Meetings Act ("OMA") so the public can be aware of the PC's discussions.

Gurr referenced Banks Township and the scrutiny it is experiencing regarding the development of their Zoning ordinances. Gurr stated "Yeah, we'll develop an absolutely as open and completely visible process as we possibly can."

Whipple confirmed amending the PC's meeting schedule would be put on the PC's December 4, 2025, Agenda.

April Meeting Concern:

Resident G. Mayes voiced a concern over the reduction in the number of Monthly meetings – especially with one of the first being scheduled in April – a month in which many residents have not yet returned from being out of town over the winter. He mentioned how the Planning Commission was convinced by Residents (including a couple Planning Commission Members) to RE-DO the Boats & Docks Public Hearing, conducted on April 3, 2025, because people they were out of town and, apparently, “blindsided” about the Public Hearing.

He went on to encourage the Planning Commission to consider holding a Meeting in May and July to allow the most number of residents to attend meetings throughout the year on all sorts of topics being discussed.

Gurr indicated the PC will “consider whether or not these months are the best months...”

Whipple indicated there would be times the PC can’t wait for people to return from being out of town and “it’s their burden to make themselves available.” **“If someone were given the dates, basically what...Six months in advance, those people that leave, they know when the meetings are...If they want to be a part of it, they know when it is.”**

AMENDMENT OF BYLAWS:

The PC discussed its current Bylaws (copy attached) and decided ALL items, EXCEPT #2 AND #6 REMAIN AS IS.

Below are the PROPOSED CHANGES to the Bylaws:

#2 – The Planning Commission shall meet the First Thursday of the following Months, at 5:00 pm., starting in February of 2026:

- **February**
- **April**
- **June**
- **August**
- **October**
- **December**

Resident L. Mayes asked for clarification of how the PC would advise and provide ample notice of additional meetings it may need to schedule in between the above-listed months.

Whipple indicated the PC had not developed a process of how and when it would notify the public , thanked her for her question and indicated the PC would need to make sure they were not violating any notification requirements. He mentioned the “fish bone” (previously discussed in a prior meeting) to allow the public to be aware of next steps.

#6 – At the **April** meeting, the Commission shall elect from its membership a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary.

Below is a list of the Current Planning Commission Roles, Terms and Expiration Dates.

OFFICER	NAME	APPOINTED	TERM / EXP
Chair	Mike Robinson	2/6/2025	1 Yr. / 4/2026
Vice-Chair	Jim Gurr	3/6/2025	1 Yr. / 4/2026
Secretary	Fay Vandenberg	8/1/2024	3 Yr. / 4/2027
Board Trustee	Jim Schilling	2/2025	3 Yr. / 4/2028
PC Member	Gordy Schafer	3/2025	2 Yr. / 4/2027
PC Member	Darren Whipple	6/2025	2 Yr. / 4/2027
PC Member	David Hunstad	6/2025	2 Yr. / 4/2027

Vandenberg made a motion to consider amending the Bylaws as stated above; Whipple seconded the motion.

Motion carried.

Notice of Additional, "In-Between" Meetings

A discussion then took place about how the PC would provide the public with sufficient notice of any additional meetings it may need to schedule in addition to the 6 Monthly meetings. It was decided the PC would present a process and procedure at the upcoming December meeting.

Gurr: "Before we considered amending the Bylaws, the previous meeting I tried to buy us additional time by telling the Planning Commission members that they're going to have to accept the fact that we may have a two-month window for virtually all of our proceedings to make sure that all of the deadlines are met inside of the timeline. This kind of obviates that. We have assurances we're going to observe the timelines that apply in every instance. We got ourselves in trouble by trying to make sure that we could duck and run when we had to get the public notifications done and meet those timelines and be able to make a decision in the following month. We may not be able to do that. Not ever be able to do that again. We're opening up opportunities for us to, you know, more deliberate about what we're doing."

Gurr: "It makes it complicated. So, my terminology would have said we're going to adhere to the strictest compliance regimen that applies, and we're going to make sure we meet it. The strictest..."

Vandenberg: "Ok, so we're going to call these a Special Meeting, then."

Schafer: "Okay."

Vandenberg: "Let's clarify that because there's separate rules on a special meeting, a public hearing. So, we're going to classify these as special meetings?"

Gurr: "You know, because if you start using adjectives that direct us toward statutory language, we're in trouble."

Hunstad: "Correct."

Gurr: So “previously unscheduled.”

VandenBerg: “Okay.”

Gurr: “That's good enough.”

VandenBerg: “Yep, okay.”

Gurr: “Let’s not put any tags on...For the public to know, that's how we got ourselves in a little bit of a tight spot when we started talking about public hearings and special meetings. There are different guidelines for both.”

G. Mayes referred the PC to MTA’s Little Red Book and its definition of “Special Meeting” (below):

Excerpt from MTA Little Red Book (Page 138):

“Special Meetings – A Special Meeting is simply a meeting that is not on the schedule of Regular Meetings, called as needed to address business between Regular Meetings. Frequent use of Special Meeting, with their short notice periods, can be perceived by the public as an attempt to circumvent their attendance at meetings. Major or potentially sensitive business items are best discussed at a Regular scheduled meeting if there is no emergency or other pressing deadline.”

Schafer: “So call it....What do you want to call it?”

VandenBerg: “No, we’re going to call it a Special Meeting.”

Gurr: “Until we figure out...”

Schafer: “So, it's a matter of proper terminology.”

Gurr: “Nope, do the homework that it takes to find out what notification requirements are in place for a given set of circumstances and make sure that...” (we follow them).

Motion to Adjourn

Schafer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:37 p.m.

Gurr seconded the motion

Meeting adjourned at 5:37 pm.

Next Regular Meeting:

Thursday, December 4, 2025 @ 5:00 p.m.

Provided by,
Helena Township Advocacy Group (HTAG)
HTAG@Groupmail.com
www.HTAGroup.org



**Helena Township
Planning Commission
By-Laws as Revised on May 9, 2024**

1. This commission shall be known as the Helena Township Planning Commission.
2. The Planning Commission shall meet the first Thursday of every month at 5:00 pm in the Helena Township Community Center, governmental room.
3. The commission consists of seven (7) regular members appointed by the Supervisor and ratified by the Township Board.
4. The commissioners shall serve one (1), two (2), three (3), or Four (4) year terms, as directed by the Township Board. Terms shall expire June 30th of the term limit year.
5. The terms shall commence the first meeting after appointed by the Township Board and end when term expires.
6. At the May meeting, the commission shall elect from its membership a chairman, vice chairman, and secretary.
7. The chairman shall conduct all meetings according to MTA'S Rules of Order.
8. The vice chairman shall preside in the absence of the chairman.
9. The chairman may appoint committees as necessary. Such committees shall expire upon completion of job assignment or at the end of the year unless extended by commission action.
10. Conflict of Interest
Before casting a vote on a matter on which a planning commission member may reasonably be considered to have a conflict of interest, the member shall disclose the potential conflict of interest to the planning commission. Failure of a member to disclose a potential conflict of interest as required by these bylaws constitutes malfeasance in office.
11. These by-laws may be altered, amended, or repealed by a majority of the commission present and the concurrence of the Township Board.