



**HELENA TOWNSHIP  
ADVOCACY GROUP, NFP**  
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Helena Township Planning Commission  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
SEPTEMBER 3, 2026, at 7:00 pm

**HTAG 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**

David Hunstad – Chair  
Fay Vandenberg – V-Chair  
Jim Gurr – Secretary  
Rian Wanstreet  
Rachel Byron  
Darren Whipple  
Butch Peebles - Supervisor  
Jackie Peterson – Zoning Administrator

**Absent**

Jim Schilling – Board Trustee

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL**

See above. Hunstad announced Schilling would not be in attendance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Gurr made a motion; Vandenberg seconded. Motion passed.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Hunstad asked if there were any Conflicts of Interest for any of the items on the agenda. All PC Members responded "no."

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES – AUGUST 6, 2026, MEETING**

Wanstreet asked the Minutes to reflect she was not in favor of not having a meeting during the month of July. Gurr made a motion to approve the correction; Vandenberg seconded. Motion passed.

## **COMMUNICATIONS:**

### **5.02.02 Ordinance (Shoreline / Boats & Docks)**

Gurr mentioned he received a communications from a person “affected” by the final version of Ordinance 5.02.02 which did not include the listing of “legal non-conforming” properties which the property owners insisted upon to ensure they were “grandfathered” in after the ordinance went into effect. Based on the advice of legal counsel, this information was removed.

Peterson mentioned the communication she, Leffew, Hunstad and Peebles received from HTAG (Helena Township Advocacy Group) also regarding the 5.02.02 Ordinance. The letter outlined the history of the Ordinance amendments and the fact the version currently posted on the township’s website is incorrect. The Planning Commission was not prepared to discuss; Peterson said she and Leffew would look into it.

Peterson also mentioned the letter she received from Leslie Meyer (Drain Commissioner) and put on Hustad’s desk which he had not seen.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Several attendees mentioned they Planning Commission was difficult to hear and should consider using a microphone.

### **SHORT TERM RENTAL CONCERNS**

B. Wedemeyer shared his concerns, once again, about an Airbnb/VRBO in his neighborhood which has been “a rotten experience.” He shared how noise early into the morning, including vulgar language and threatening and combative behavior are the basis for his concern for the community. He emphasized the need for the Township to do something about this with the Zoning Ordinance to prevent this type of “COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY” from taking place in a R-1 Residential Zone.

J. Klein: shared her ongoing concerns (which have been for 4 years now) about the Short-Term Rental next to her home. She mentioned she has provided the Township with many letters during this time without even a response or confirmation they were received.

Leffew asked Klein to provide her with the letters; she would record them and provide them to the Planning Commission for review.

### **REVIVING 2<sup>ND</sup> PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

G. Mayes again shared his concern about the Planning Commission removing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Comment Period in August 2024. He shared the importance it, particularly in how the PC announced it would be conducting its meetings per Robert’s Rules. He stated the PC meeting is the ONLY meeting he attends which has only ONE Public Comment period and having a 2<sup>nd</sup> one would create a better opportunity for engagement with the public.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (Misc.):**

L. Wilcox asked about the status of a couple “administrative matters” the PC had been discussing / working for the last several months.

### **Submission of Inquiries, Complaints & Feedback to the Township:**

A discussion on how residents can provide information to the Planning Commission took place. With the new website there is not an ability to upload or attach documents to an email to any Commission member. **Leffew indicated a resident should go to the “Contact us” page on the website, fill out the form to the person the resident wants to contact. The Township member will then reply via email, and any correspondence or information can be securely shared via email between the parties.** Leffew encouraged ideas and appreciated the input and ideas.

### **POSTING OF MINUTES – DRAFT vs. FINAL**

L. Wilcox mentioned the Version of the 5.02.02 Ordinance on the Township website is the wrong version.

L. Wilcox also mentioned the Minutes posted on the Township’s website since 12 months ago still reflect “DRAFT”. She asked if they will be made “final” and reposted to help prevent confusion.

### **ZONING ADMINISTRATOR’S REPORT:**

Peterson referred to her monthly report distributed to the Planning Commission.

### **DATA CENTERS:**

**Data Centers:** Peterson has attended (3) Data Center Seminars in the past month **and the last one discouraged combining Renewable Energy and Data Centers in the same ordinance. (Which is the format the Planning Commission voted on and approved at its August 2026 meeting)** because the State took away the local municipalities' ability to regulate so much of the renewable energy, when Data Centers are included (which the Township is still allowed to regulate) it makes things very confusing.

Peterson referred to the MTA (“Michigan Township Association) has published the new Data Center Grant Ordinance which she provided to the PC which she thought “was a gift.” She also mentioned the word “moratorium” being mentioned and would like more time to think about it to get something back to the Planning Commission for consideration.

Wanstreet asked if the MTA Data Center Ordinance was in the meeting packet; Leffew asked if the Public was able to review it as well. Hunstad confirmed “yes.”

## Planning Commission Training

Peterson asked who would be interested in attending so she could provide the facilitator with an approximate number of attendees.

Peterson also asked the Planning Commission if they were interested in participating in a multi-planning commission collaborative for data center discussion?

Leffew shared per Antrim Review, ER News, ER Township, Forest Home, and Banks all have data centers on their agendas. Milton is also going to look at it after things settle down.

Hunstad: Perfect.

Gurr: I think our experience might be helpful to people. "What we've learned, because we've been mulling this over for a year..." **(\*Note\*: PC briefly mentioned Data Centers during its December 4, 2025, meeting and then not again until its February 5, 2026, meeting).** "...thank goodness MTA's come through with what they have but as Dave suggested, we've really had to do an awful lot of work, and maybe our experience compared to what's currently happening might be useful information for other planning commissions."

Leffew: "...the idea is for a couple people from each board, a couple residents from each township and maybe an official from each township, all come together. I think Mary Riley even suggested it in our Citizen Planning Course."

## Zoning Amendment Procedures:

Peterson mentioned Leffew had put together a procedure on amending Zoning Ordinances which outlines the following:

It starts with the need to amend the ordinance

The ordinance amendment will go through all of the discussions here.

The motion will be made for public hearing.

The notices will be made by me in the paper;

The public hearing will be held"

The Minutes will be treated as they normally are;

The Ordinance amendments will come back and forth between you (the PC) and the ZA

Peterson will then bring it back to the PC until "we get it right."

Peterson mentioned the PC will be writing the Ordinance Amendment, but she will help by preparing it in the proper format. She will then submit it to the county and bring it back if needed.

Hunstad asked if a legal review was necessary; VandenBerg also was unsure.

Peterson stated she would ask the Board to do that before a public hearing is held.

Gurr said the PC does not have the authority to contact the attorney directly.

### **MUNICIPAL CIVIL INFRACTION ORDINANCE:**

Peterson stated the Municipal Civil Infraction Ordinance was approved at the board level last month. It was published in the Antrim Review and will go into effect September 26, 2026.

### **Short-Term Rental Ordinance**

Wanstreet asked if the Municipal Civil Infraction Ordinance can be applied to STRs?

Peterson: "That's the goal."

Wanstreet: "Great, it's the path for enforcement...just wanted to say that out loud..."

### **Nuisance Ordinance**

Peterson indicated she has turned in the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft to the Board for review.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

### **DEFINITIONS (ZONING ORDINANCES):**

VandenBerg provided a summary about progress she and Rachel are making on revising the Definitions. She was unsure of the next steps to finalize them (e.g., the PC, Board, legal counsel, etc.) but indicated she and Leffew should have something sent to the PC by next meeting.

### **DATA CENTERS (UPDATE)**

Hunstad provided an update on the Data Center Ordinance the PC had just decided at last month's meeting to proceed with finalizing before being presented with new information by Jackie Peterson, Zoning Administrator. **[See 8/6/26 Planning Commission Meeting "Packet" for complete Ordinance]**

Hunstad: "So, we've been working on data centers for, as Jim said earlier, for a year or so **(Again, the PC briefly mentioned Data Centers during its December 4, 2025, meeting and then not again until its February 5, 2026, meeting)** and, you know, it hits and starts, and, you know, it is our goal is to be out in front. And the state has the ability to override anything that the townships do and say. However, if we don't have any wording or any in our ordinances, then the concern is that we lose the seat at the table.

**Hunstad: So, we really would like to have some wording in effect for Data Centers. Initially we had discussed and created the wording and approved data centers to be intertwined within Renewable Energy.** The MTA several weeks ago has done us a big favor by creating a standalone ordinance separate from renewable energy. It covers **sound concerns** that we've discussed at several of our meetings in the past. The MTA has a scientifically based ordinance, section concerning sound. It's very, very well done. Briefly, no sound should exceed 55 decibels...**And that's from daytime hours, and then it drops down to 45 decibels between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. and they've done a very, very good job with that and they even mentioned total sound levels and octave bands - That's something we didn't have.**

**They also cover lighting, including implementing dark sky, friendly lighting solutions, vibrations, which is another issue you can have the sound levels within specs of whatever your sound ordinance would be, and yet you can still have very upsetting vibrations that pass beyond the**

**boundaries of the property where the data center would be.** Also, another very big issue is **concern over water usage.** And their ordinance language states very clearly, evaporative cooling is prohibited. And generally, data centers that do not use evaporative cooling, then their water usage comes down to that and any other commercial business.

Energy usage – the MTA Ordinance states a Data Center will supply its own energy needs independently of the current energy available within the township.

Generators – Running and Testing of Generators. Transmission distribution lines shall be buried underground, for example.

Hunstad: So, this data center ordinance has been very, very well thought out. Oh, and also there's an entire section on decommissioning and removal, and that financial assurance would need to be put aside in the form of a bond at 125% of the estimated decommissioning value, and that needs to be reevaluated every fifth year. **I can't see any way that any research that we could do here on the Helena Township level could supersede what has been done by the MTA.** I think they've done an outstanding job. I'm very pleased that they came out with this, and **I would suggest strongly that as a planning commission in Helena Township that we unwind our previous thrust to put data centers within the renewable energy...I would suggest that we step back from our approval of going forward with that wording to the county and to the board of the Lena Township, and I would strongly recommend that we look at this wording and possibly with the idea of looking at approving this as we see fit with modifications that might apply to the Lena Township.**

Gurr: Are you looking for someone to make that motion? That we disengage the previous work and look at it?

Hunstad: Yes, please.

Gurr: Anybody else like to go on record as being the person to do that? I've been advocating for data centers for a year (**\*Note\*: The PC briefly mentioned Data Centers during its December 4, 2025, meeting and then not again until its February 5, 2026, meeting) (Not True, only 3 months).**

Wanstreet: I'll make the motion that we disregard..

VandenBerg: Not disregard it but just....set it aside.

Gurr: Yeah...that we stop the process that we initiated and look at new information.

Peeples: Then, why don't you vote Moratorium like everybody else is doing?

Huntad: We could do that.

Peeples: It gives you 15 months.

**Hunstad: "No, it doesn't - It does not give you 15 months. The MTA states possibly 6-9 months. Anything over 9 months is not, in their opinion, is not legally enforceable. A moratorium doesn't help the situation at all - It just kicks the can down the road, and I don't think that's very helpful for Helena Township. I wouldn't support that. I would support moving ahead with adopting an ordinance that is very, very effective."**

Peeples: I'm still not excited about the 55 Decibel level – How far outside your door? Is that three miles down the road?

Hunstad: Yeah, our current ordinance for renewable energy is 55 decibels at the property line.

Gurr: “Any zoning ordinance is amendable.” May I address the concern about a moratorium?

**DATA CENTERS (Moratorium):**

Gurr: “The problem with moratoriums is if a municipality goes on record requesting a moratorium, the broad assumption is that we are necessarily opposed, and the State comes back and says, we've got 2040 goals. Municipalities and residents have been resisting; therefore, we're taking that ball away from you. And they've not done it with data centers, but they will....we're in a discussion of a motion that's been made and seconded about whether we stop what we've been doing, and that we look at it with new eyes, with new Public Hearings, and all the rest of the stuff. So, there's still many months before anything is going to happen. We needn't be afraid of proceeding.”

Peeples: “Well...Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, all are running the same problems, and putting moratoriums on. This has happened all over the United States. Nobody's happy about it. So, you jump right in something, or we do it next week, we just found out more information tonight. What happens two months down the road, you've got to go back and amend it?”

**INDUSTRIAL ZONE (Currently Non-Existent in Township) & Required for Data Center Ordinance:**

Wanstreet: “You just said if we walk this back, it will take us a few months to research this...**I have questions about this. I think it is a gift, but...it was NOT written for a small township like us. It talks about sewers...municipal waters...it was not written with us in mind. So, we have to look at it very carefully. While we're looking at it very carefully, we have a gap where nothing is in place. That is what the moratorium is for...Let's say while we're looking at something, nothing can come in until we pass it. That is my understanding of why it is important to have a moratorium.**”

Peeples: “I'm not saying drop everything. It gives you months to continue to work on this and make sure you cover everything...my concern is, is we make sure we've got all our T's crossed.

**Peeples: “When it goes to the board, my recommendation is it's got to be a moratorium. I don't care if it's a month or 10 months. And I'm one vote, but that's from what I've been listening to. I'm scared to put an ordinance in place and six months later come back; you didn't have all of that covered. I'm very concerned.”**

**Peterson: I think there's a lot of merit to putting a moratorium. It just allows us time. The only thing that we have to be sure is that we're diligently working on it and it's placed correctly. I don't believe the township has a resolution in its Bylaws...so, it would have to be an Ordinance and if it's done at the Board level, that's great, no public hearing. If it's done at the planning commission level, it needs to be a public hearing, but it needs to be an ordinance for moratorium both in zoning and the police power. Two ordinances need to be written...for a moratorium.**

Gurr: If I'm hearing you correctly, then there should be action from the planning commission recommending a moratorium?

Peterson: If the board conducts it, you don't. Or we could give it back to you and see if you want to have a Public Hearing..."

Gurr: I'd rather have an effective moratorium sooner than later; the board should do it. There's a two-step resolution process.

**Hunstad: Ok...we've got a motion before us at this point. Uh...restate the motion, please.**

Gurr: Um...that we...

Peterson: Fay was making the motion.

Gurr: What's that?

Leffew: Fay was making the motion.

Wanstreet: Fay made the motion

Gurr: That we, I'm trying to think of the verb I used...

Wanstreet: Rescind...

Gurr: Stop progress going forward on our current iteration of our data center amendment to section 19, I think it is, 15, whatever it is. Anyways, that's the more formal version of it. Where we were going to include renewable energy, we're not looking at that prospect anymore."

Hunstad: 5.09.

**Gurr: 5.09. Just so we can refer to it specifically. So, my motion, or Fay's motion, I've given an imprecise version...That we stop forward progress on our proposed amendment and that we revisit data centers with new information recently made available.**

**Hunstad: Ok.**

**Gurr: Fay made that motion and who seconded it?**

**VandenBerg: I don't know if anybody did.**

**Gurr: No, we didn't.**

**Wanstreet: The conversation started...**

**Gurr: Well, once it's seconded then we have that discussion. We've already had most of it.**

**Hunstad: Yeah.**

**Gurr: Well, I'll second it if no one else is going to.**

**Hunstad: Alright, so, we got a motion that was just stated and seconded, ok, so further discussion...**

**Attendee: So, does that mean we're doing a Moratorium.**

**Gurr: No, we're gonna leave that to the Board.**

Hunstad: "No. This is just about stopping the 5.09 action we approved and voted to proceed with. The motion is to stop that and not move forward with that at this point."

Wanstreet: Okay, I understand.

Hunstad: Further discussion? Okay, we'll call a vote to that motion. All in favor?

PC Members: Aye.

Hunstad: Opposed? So, approved.

**Hunstad: "I think we've got a lot of great new information thanks to the MTA. If we want to have quick action on the moratorium, the Board can do that. Otherwise, I look forward to everyone's input on the MTA's ordinance wording, and we can move forward with that on our next meeting."**

## **DEFINITIONS (ZONING ORDINANCES) Cont'd:**

Gurr: "Is anybody else prepared to go forward with some suggestions this evening...because I, you know, there are a few things we could address very quickly.

Hunstad: Sure. Go to it.

Gurr provided a summary of his suggested changes to the Definitions.

Water Usage

Permits

Site Plans

Decommissioning

Transmission and Distribution Lines

Utility Scale

Wanstreet pointed out the language was referring to industrial districts which are currently non-existent in the Township and something which the Planning Commission first needs to structure.

Gurr: **"I've made a pitch for over 20 years for us to have a white industrial district somewhere in Helena Township (Not supported).** It doesn't go anywhere."

Wanstreet: We have to carve it out which is a much bigger project at this point right now.

Gurr: "You've just heard what it is that I will tell other municipalities that we all get together and start talking about what it is we [need to] do. My feeling is I would like to let the public know it's not a bunch of crazy people either advocating for or against. You're finding commissioners, people looking out for the best interests of the township as we understand it, and we do it with the ultimate transparency we can make available."

Wanstreet offered to send to the Planning Commission, prior to their next meeting, a list of her questions regarding the language after completing her analysis. She asked the Planning Commission how our Master Plan specifically calls for the use of high-tech in the industry to be handled with overlay zones and **"how we want to lead those two together because we are supposed to follow our Master Plan."** "I'm also curious how we would go about identifying where the industrial zones might be. It's not, if you ask me the question, it's not a simple thing. Oh, special use permits we have to actually have.

Peterson: Yeah, I've never done an overlay zone. Why don't we (looking at Wanstreet) just look into that?

Wanstreet agreed to work with Peterson to clarify the matter.

Leffew commented that if the Moratorium is going to happen, she'd like to see the PC focus on just that issue instead of doing extra/other projects.

Gurr: Good idea.

## **POSTING OF MINUTES – POLICIES & PROCEDURES:**

Hunstad stated he thought it would be a great process...."we're still learning...figuring it out."  
Leffew: There needs to be a process that approved minutes come back. I've never received approved minutes.  
Peterson: Yeah, at the other Township I worked, they only published the approved.  
Leffew: I think the public wanted before and after. I think it's a great idea.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

Hunstad reference a copy of Bylaws from Milton Township for the PC to review and use as a possible "template" for revising for Helena Township which will need to go before and be approved by the Board.

## **SECOND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD**

Gurr: "Let's make a motion we add a second public comment to our standard agendas."  
Hunstad: Go ahead.

**Gurr: "I'll make a motion we reinstate the second public comment to our typical Planning Commission meetings."**

Hunstad: Is there a second to that motion?

Wanstreet: I'll second.

**Hunstad: Okay...has there been a second to a motion to add a second public comment section to the agenda?**

Hunstad: Any discussion on that?

Gurr: Hallelujah

Hunstad: Okay, I call for a vote. All in favor?

PC Members: Aye.

Hunstad: Any opposed? Okay. We will adopt that now. Are there any further public comments for tonight's meeting?

## **PUBLIC COMMENT (2<sup>ND</sup>)**

**(Note: This was the first time a 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Comment Period was allowed since August of 2024).**

G. Mayes shared his thoughts on a Moratorium for the Data Centers. "The way I've understood it is you can do a one-year moratorium...with an option for a 6-month extension...which gives you time...Mary Riley (MSU Citizen Planner Training) said she recommends up to 10 months but up to 18 months is allowed. The extra time is ideal for changes, like new technology which may develop...let's get that in there...Because things are changing all the time. That's how it is.

Hunstad: Any other comments?

Wilcox: I do.

Wilcox thanked the Planning Commission, Leffew and Peterson for their work on making the changes to the website and administrative procedures. She also said she thought the Planning Commission now has a revived, energized and intelligent team.

She thanked the PC for reinstating a Second Public Comment Period – shows a good faith effort to re-engage the public.

**Hunstad:** “Thank you for that. I feel it is critically important that we move the meetings to 7pm. We're making an effort to try to get this 100% transparent. There are no meetings that are held elsewhere. There just aren't. It's as transparent as we can make it, I feel, at this point. So, that's our goal.”

Whipple: “I just wanted to mention, I'm sure and I'm going to assume the reason they eliminated the second comment was because we weren't being held to the three-minute rule. The first comment probably took an hour, hour and a half. By the time we got to the end, we didn't want to stay another hour, hour and a half. **(Not True)** So, if we continue to enforce the three-minute rule, I don't think the second comment is a bad thing.”

#### **WEBSITE FUNCTIONALITY:**

Leffew made a presentation with all the changes, updates and improvements which have been made to the Township's website including searchability of uploaded documents OCR (e.g., Zoning Permit Application, Minutes, etc. and becoming ADA compliant). A Visitor is able to view/search Zoning Ordinances as well. Additional changes and updates will continue with the website; she welcomed public input.

Renting of Community Space was then discussed including The Depot and Village Center.

#### **Adjournment**

No Motion was made to adjourn.

#### **Next Regular Meeting:**

**October 1, 2026, at 7:00 pm**

Provided by,  
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