



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Ontwa Township Planning Commission
Edwardsburg, Michigan



Prepared January 2025
Planning Commission Approved:
February 5, 2025



Planning Commission Members

- Chris Marbach, Chairperson
- Shane Szalai Vice-Chairman
- Mike Mroczek, Secretary
- Meryl Christensen (Township Board Representative)
- Don DeLong
- Richard Gates
- Todd Haberland
- Bill Mahaney
- Sandra Seanor

INTRODUCTION

- The Planning Commission of Ontwa Township is governed by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, State of Michigan Public Act 33 of 2008, and the Ontwa Township Zoning Ordinance.
- Dawn Bolock, the Ontwa Township Zoning Administrator, assisted the 2024 Planning Commission. Dawn has her Zoning Administrator Certification and also serves as the Zoning Administrator for the Village of Edwardsburg. Thank you.
- Tina VanBelle served as the Recording Secretary for the Planning Commission. Thank you.
- The Board of Trustees selected Williams & Works, a consulting firm, to assist the Township in zoning, planning, and land use issues.
- The Board of Trustees selected Bauckham, Thall, Seeber, Kaufman & Koches PC to represent the Township regarding legal matters.
- Under the Planning Enabling Act, the Planning Commission must provide an annual report to the Ontwa Township Board, as the Township's legislative body. This report discusses:
 - Activities of the Commission during the past year
 - The status of any ongoing planning activities
 - Recommendations to the legislative body related to planning and development

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

- The Planning Commission was scheduled to meet on the first Wednesday of each month in 2024 at 7 p.m. The January, March, May, July and October meetings were canceled due to a lack of business items. Eight other meetings were conducted in person at the Ontwa Township Hall.
- The Planning Commission sponsored and created a sub-committee project to complete a modernization of the current zoning ordinance. Completion of this in 2025 is currently planned
- The Planning Commission reviews all Land Division applications. In 2024, the Commission reviewed three applications, which were approved.
- During the April meeting, the Planning Commission conducted a special meeting to amend Section 3.26 related to residential dwellings. These changes were to eliminate conflicts with the Michigan Building Code.
- The June meeting was the longest meeting of the year, three hours. Two public hearings were conducted. The first public hearing was for a special land use for Trinity Church. This application was approved subject to a Final Site approval. The second public hearing was for the Eddies Market project. This was returned to the Planning Commission by the Board of Trustees to review a conditional rezoning request. The Planning Commission recommended approval by a 5 to 4 vote. The Board of Trustees ultimately denied the request.

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTIVITIES (CONT.)

- The August Planning Commission meeting included reviewing a final site plan for 69981 Rolan Drive. After reviewing the application, it was tabled pending additional information.
- During the September meeting, additional site plan information for 69981 Rolan Drive was reviewed and approved.
- During the November meeting, the Planning Commission conducted a Public Hearing to amend Section 3.21 related to accessory buildings. This change included the R-2 district that was left out by a scribner error.
- A special meeting was held on November 19th to review a non-conforming lot line adjustment. After consulting with the Township Planner and Attorney, the application was approved.
- The final meeting in December included a Public Hearing to Amend Article III Section 3.39 Docks and Piers. The meeting room was full of concerned lake residents. After much discussion, the Planning Commission took no action and referred this to the Planner and Attorney for additional review and comment to ensure a new ordinance does not introduce new conflicts while maintaining alignment with current state of Michigan laws on Riparian Rights or previous litigation.

Other activities supported by the Planning Commission in 2024 included the following:

Phase 2 – Claire St to Section St. @ US12 Traffic Signal/10ft. Concrete bike and pedestrian trail

- MDOT completed Phase 2 from Claire St – Section St. before the opening of the 2024/25 school year. This completes a 10ft concrete path connecting (Phase 1) the Edwardsburg Sports Complex to Section St. The project includes a traffic signal and pedestrian crosswalk completing the first two bike and pedestrian projects funded by federal grants. This intersection will serve the school, area residents, and the new library that is currently under construction. The Ontwa Township Board of Trustees partially funded this project as part of its Complete Streets initiative.

Phase 3 - Elkhart Road Trail (non-motorized pathway)

- Trustees Jeff Kosinski, Dawn Bolock (Village and Ontwa Zoning Administrator) and Village President Dennis Peak, Village member Laura Hughes, and Marcy Hamilton worked to develop both interest and support for the proposed path from Elkhart Rd to May St. non-motorized bike and pedestrian walkway. This Phase 3 project proposes to develop a 1.2 mile 8'-wide asphalt non-motorized path serving both the Village and Ontwa Township residents. An Open House to explain the project was successful in garnering community support for the project. The Recreation Committee is reviewing its options regarding project funding.
- The project will attract residents and provide access to several recreational opportunities and connections in the area. Marcy Hamilton, Deputy Executive Director and Senior Planner from Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, organized and developed the 2024 Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund grant to help fund the project, though the MNRTF grant was not approved for the 2024 funding cycle. If the Township and Village re-apply, a public hearing will be required in March and the 2025 application must be re-submitted by April 1.

ONGOING
PLANNING
ACTIVITIES



A joint Master Plan between Ontwa Township and the Village of Edwardsburg will be adopted in early 2025.



Williams & Works will continue to assist us in updating and modernizing our Zoning Ordinance in 2025.



Andy Moore, AICP is the Williams & Works planner assisting Ontwa Township.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ONTWA TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As a result of the Planning Enabling Act, the Planning Commission is requesting that the Township Board exempt the Planning Commission from having to prepare a Capital Improvement Plan.

This can be accomplished by creating an ordinance by the Ontwa Township Board of Trustees that delegates this task to the Supervisor or to a non-elected administrative official familiar with the Township budget.

Respectfully submitted,



Chris Marbach, Chairman
Ontwa Township Planning Commission
February 5, 2025