



CITY  
*of*

**HARRISON**  
MI

Planning  
Commission  
Annual Report  
2023

## 1. Introduction

The Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) are essential components in the City of Harrison's development and growth management. The Planning Commission is tasked with the creation and revision of the City's Master Plan, guiding land use and future development, alongside reviewing and recommending proposed zoning changes and development projects. The Zoning Board of Appeals is charged with hearing and deciding appeals of zoning decisions made by the Planning Commission, ensuring adherence to the City's zoning regulations.

This report outlines the activities, achievements, and efforts of the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals throughout 2023, encompassing new planning initiatives, zoning and land use changes, alongside comprehensive development reviews.

## 2. Members

The City Planning Commission consists of nine appointed members of the community, with the City Manager serving as an ex-officio and recorder member. The Commission also includes the City's Zoning Administrator and Code Enforcement Officer in all meetings, enhancing the governance and execution of city planning activities.

Planning Commission Member	Expiration of Term
George Muscott (Vice-Chair)	01/31/2024
Tom House	01/31/2024
Robin Witkowski	01/31/2024
Andy Saxton (Secretary)	01/31/2025
Don Patch	01/31/2025
Dena Woods	01/31/2025
Tom Mondeau	01/31/2026
Stacy Stocking (Chairman)	01/31/2026
Ed Kerr	01/31/2026
Justin Cavanaugh (Recorder, Ex-Officio Member)	Indefinite

### 3. Meetings Held in 2023

The Planning Commission's meetings are a cornerstone of the City of Harrison's planning and regulatory framework. In 2023, the Commission convened on the following dates, each playing a crucial role in advancing the city's developmental agenda:

- [February 7, 2023](#)
- [April 11, 2023](#)
- [May 17, 2023 \(Special Meeting\)](#)
- [August 08, 2023](#)

Please click on the dates to access minutes for each meeting.

During these meetings, the primary focus was on conducting site plan reviews, a fundamental responsibility of the Planning Commission. This process involves a detailed examination of proposed developments to ensure they comply with the City's Master Plan, zoning ordinances, and land use standards. The table below details the projects reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2023, highlighting the nature of each review and its outcome:

Address	Date of Review	Review Type
201 Beech Street	February 7, 2023	Conceptual Review
231 S. First St	February 7, 2023	Minor Site Plan Review (Approved)
576 N 1st Street	April 11, 2023	Minor Site Plan Review (Tabled)
286 S. First Street	May 17, 2023	Minor Site Plan Review (Approved)
190 E Oak Street	May 17, 2023	Minor Site Plan Review (Approved)
105 E Main Street	August 8, 2023	Minor Site Plan Review (Approved)

These site plan reviews underscore the Commission's dedication to overseeing development projects that align with Harrison's vision for growth and development, ensuring that each project contributes positively to the community's landscape and complies with established regulations.

### 4. Master Plan Update

In 2023, the City of Harrison embarked on a crucial initiative to update its Master Plan, alongside conducting an audit and comprehensive revamp of its zoning ordinance. This significant project, targeting completion in mid-2024, is steered by a dedicated committee composed of city officials, key

community representatives, and specialists from WadeTrim, under the leadership of Arthur F. Mullen AICP. The formation of this Steering Committee marks a collaborative effort to ensure that the updated Master Plan and zoning ordinances reflect the evolving needs and aspirations of the Harrison community, laying a solid foundation for sustainable development and strategic growth. This endeavor highlights the city's commitment to thoughtful planning, aimed at enhancing the quality of life for its residents and guiding Harrison towards a vibrant future.

## 5. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

The year saw several pivotal zoning ordinance amendments aimed at refining the City's zoning practices and regulations:

- **2023-01:** Reduced ZBA members from five to three, with the City Council acting as the ZBA due to difficulties in filling board positions.
- **2023-02:** Introduced multiple zoning code changes, enhancing clarity and usability of yard, lot dimensions, and set-back provisions.
- **2023-03:** Harmonized conflicting blight ordinances for clearer definitions and enforcement.
- **2023-04:** Established liability for hazardous material spills within the city limits.
- **2023-05:** Amended utility billing provisions to include charges for service or repairs on premises due to utility tampering.

## 6. Variances

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) reviewed two variance requests in 2023. The outcomes of these requests are summarized in the table below:

Address	Date	Outcome
1431 Douglas Drive	02/06/2023	Denied
678 N Lake Street	05/01/2023	Approved

Variance Request Details and Rationales:

- **1431 Douglas Drive (02/06/2023):** This variance request was denied. The denial was based on the determination that granting the variance was not necessary to preserve a substantial property right that is possessed by other properties in the same zoning district. The ZBA

concluded that the request did not meet the requisite criteria for hardship or practical difficulty that would justify an exception to the zoning regulations.

**678 N Lake Street (05/01/2023):** The variance for 678 N Lake Street was approved under special circumstances, where the City Council, acting as the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), had approved an ordinance amendment that would soon make the request for a variance unnecessary. This ordinance, which would become effective 30 days after its publication, aligned with the variance sought. Recognizing that the variance would be in compliance with the new ordinance upon its effective date, the ZBA granted the request. This decision illustrates the ZBA's flexibility in responding to changes in the regulatory environment, facilitating the property owner's adherence to updated city planning regulations in an efficient manner.

## 7. Trainings

The City of Harrison hosted a Zoning Essentials class on April 8th, conducted by the Michigan Association of Planning, and extended invitations to neighboring municipalities, underscoring the city's leadership in promoting educational opportunities for effective city planning. This session provided comprehensive coverage on Master Planning and Effective Zoning Ordinances, bolstered decision-making skills for the Planning Commission and ZBA, and offered in-depth insights into the appeals process and the critical skill of reading and evaluating site plans, equipping participants with the knowledge needed to navigate complex planning and zoning challenges.

## 8. Joint Meetings

There were no joint meetings between the City Council and the Planning Commission in 2023 due to the cancellation of meetings when there was no business to discuss, adhering to the Commission's by-laws.

The City of Harrison Planning Commission remains dedicated to fostering the city's growth and development through careful planning, regulation, and community engagement. This report underscores the Commission's commitment to these goals in 2023, laying the groundwork for continued progress in the coming years.