



CITY OF BUCHANAN PLANNING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2026 – 6:00 PM
CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI

AGENDA

The City of Buchanan Planning Commission, in compliance with Michigan's Open Meetings Act, hereby gives notice of a Planning Commission meeting to be held in the Chamber of City Hall.

** Comments may also be submitted in writing at least 4 hours in advance to the Community Development Director Richard Murphy at rmurphy@cityofbuchanan.com*

** Buchanan City will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aide and services to those individuals with disabilities who wish to attend the public meeting upon receiving at least one (1) week's prior notice. Any such individual requiring such aids or services should contact the city in writing or by telephoning: Buchanan City Clerk; 302 North Redbud Trail, Buchanan, MI 49107, 269-695-3844.*

I. Regular Meeting - Call to Order

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

IV. Approve Agenda

V. Public Comments - Agenda Items

VI. Approve Minutes

A. *Consider approving the Regular Meeting Minutes from November 18th, 2025.*

VII. Old Business

VIII. New Business

A. **Master Plan Timeline & Update**- Marcy Hamilton, Senior Planner/Deputy Executive Director, SWMPC

B. **Annual Report**

C. **Unified Development Code Discussion:** *Signs*

IX. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only

X. Community Development Director Comments

XI. Commissioner Comments

XII. Adjournment



CITY OF BUCHANAN PLANNING COMMISSION
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2025 – 6:00 PM
CHAMBER OF BUCHANAN CITY HALL - 302 N REDBUD TRAIL, BUCHANAN MI
MINUTES

The City of Buchanan Planning Commission, in compliance with Michigan's Open Meetings Act, hereby gives notice of a Planning Commission meeting to be held in the Chamber of City Hall.

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I. Regular Meeting - Call to Order

Meeting called to order at 6:39pm. Meeting start delayed due to an initial lack of quorum.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

McDonald led in the pledge of allegiance.

III. Roll Call

Present: McDonald, P. Lysy, Vigansky, Pleasant, Brown

Absent: Garry, Houser

IV. Approve Agenda

It was proposed to move agenda item Urban Forestry Plan Update under New Business, to before agenda item Old Business.

Motion by Pleasant, seconded by Brown, to approve agenda as amended. Voice vote carried unanimously.

V. Public Comments - Agenda Items

Alan Robandt – Regarding the vacant property ordinance, Robandt believes it is already covered in the International Maintenance Code. He doesn't think a new ordinance will address the issues it states it will or solve any problems, when commercial property in Buchanan isn't worth anything and there isn't demand in Buchanan to warrant the ordinance. He asked the Commission to vote no on the current iteration of the proposed ordinance.

Joe Paolucci – Electronic communication shared with the Planning Commission.

VI. Approve Minutes

A. Consider approving the minutes from October 14, 2025.

Motion made by Vigansky, seconded by Brown, to approve the minutes as presented. Voice vote carried unanimously.

VII. New Business

A. Urban Forestry Plan Update

Brian Murphy presented the Urban Forestry Plan Update for Buchanan.

Motion made by Pleasant, seconded by P. Lysy, to approve Urban Forestry Plan Update as presented. Voice vote carried unanimously.

VIII. Old Business

A. Vacant and Underutilized Building Draft Ordinance

City Manager McGhee presented the background on the Vacant and Underutilized Building Draft Ordinance. The City Commission requested it be explored by the Planning Commission. Some similar municipalities, such as Berrien Springs, have instituted policies like this. The International Property Maintenance Code addresses some of the concerns an ordinance like this might address, but not all; especially not regarding community development.

McGhee also presented a rough draft for the Planning Commission to review. It is meant to be a starting place for discussion. McDonald's priority is property owner's rights and prefers a carrot rather than stick approach. McGhee stressed that City resources are limited, and he'd appreciate ideas for a middle option or approach. Vigansky spoke to years of neglecting code enforcement.

The Planning Commission reviewed the draft. They asked for more clarity in the definitions section and to expand on potential fees and exemptions. There was discussion of the potential process of registration and what the program would look like long term, in addition to what situations it would apply to.

McGhee will make changes to the draft based on the Planning Commission's comments, then it will be sent to the City Attorney for review, and presented again to the Planning Commission.

IX. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only

None.

X. Commissioner Comments

XI. Adjournment

Motion made by Brown, seconded by Vigansky to adjourn. Meeting adjourned at 7:50pm.

Memorandum



Date: January 7, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Master Plan Update Kick-Off**

Background

The current Master Plan was adopted in 2021. During late 2025, the city entered into a contract with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) to complete an update to the document.

Master Plans are a guiding document that create goals and objectives of how the community should look 10 – 20-years into the future. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires adopted plans to be reviewed every 5-years to determine if any changes are needed. In 2024, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act was amended to add housing related requirements to master plans.

Three Sections of Act 33 of 2008 were amended, below is one excerpt from Section 125.3807 with the new language underlined.

125.3807 Master plan; adoption, amendment, and implementation by local government; purpose.

Sec. 7.

(1) A local unit of government may adopt, amend, and implement a master plan as provided in this act.

(2) The general purpose of a master plan is to guide and accomplish, in the planning jurisdiction and its environs, development that satisfies all of the following criteria:

- (a) Is coordinated, adjusted, harmonious, efficient, and economical.
- (b) Considers the character of the planning jurisdiction and its suitability for particular uses, judged in terms of such factors as trends in land and population development.
- (c) Will, in accordance with present and future needs, best promote public health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare.
- (d) Includes, among other things, promotion of or adequate provision for 1 or more of the following:
 - (i) A system of transportation to lessen congestion on streets and provide for safe and efficient movement of people and goods by motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other legal users.
 - (ii) Safety from fire and other dangers.

Memorandum

- (iii) Light and air.
- (iv) Healthful and convenient distribution of population.
- (v) Good civic design and arrangement and wise and efficient expenditure of public funds.
- (vi) Public utilities such as sewage disposal and water supply and other public improvements.
- (vii) Recreation.
- (viii) The use of resources in accordance with their character and adaptability.
- (ix) A range of housing types, costs, affordability, attainability, ages, and other characteristics, including single- and multiple-family dwellings, to serve the housing demands of a diverse population.

Next Steps

Marcy Hamilton, Deputy Director/Senior Planner is the primary staff person representing SWMPC for this project and will be attending the meeting to review the attached Time Schedule for the next 15-months and provide additional information and answer any questions.

City of Buchanan Master Plan Update

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB
Community Inventory/Analysis Phase														
Social Characteristics (demographics, housing, employment, economics, transportation/circulation, etc)														
Physical Characteristics (topo, soils/geology, hydrology, etc.)														
Infrastructure/Services (water, sewer, roads, transit, trails, parks, broadband, materials mgt, education, etc.)														
Land Use w/Cover (housing, business, industry, historic patterns, etc.)														
Review Existing Plan & other documents														
Additional Maps														
PC Meetings (2 - kick off and survey development)	X		x											
Public Involvement														
Online Survey* (develop, refine, tabulate, analyze)														
Public Vision Session (one)														
Stakeholder Interviews														
Inventory/Analysis Writing														
Goals and Objectives Phase														
Goals and Objectives														
PC Meetings (2)								x	x					
Future Land Use Alternatives														
Develop future land use descriptions														
Update future land use map														
PC Meetings (2)										x	x			
Implementation Strategies/Action Steps Phase														
Develop Action Plan														
Develop Zoning Plan														
PC Meetings (2)											x	x		
Draft Plan Review & Adoption														
Draft plan sent to elected body for review and approval prior to distribution to mailing list														
Transmittal letters (at initiation & end of process)														
List of comments/revisions														
Final document editing/production														
Public Hearing														
Resolution of support/adoption														

*note - community pays for any distribution and printing of hard copies of the survey

*City is responsible for publishing public hearing notices; templates provided by SWMPC.

Memorandum



Date: January 7, 2026
To: Planning Commission Members
From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director
Subject: **Draft 2025 Planning Commission Annual Report**

Background

Attached is the draft annual report for 2025. The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires the Planning Commission to complete a report annually which includes three reporting areas.

Requested Action

Please review the draft document and if determined acceptable, a motion to approve the 2025 Planning Commission Annual Report would be appropriate.



City of Buchanan Michigan Planning Commission Annual Report Calendar Year 2025

Approved ____ by
City of Buchanan Planning Commission

Background.

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires the Planning Commission to complete a report annually to the City Commission discussing three specific areas. Following are the three reporting areas and the Planning Commission's report for 2025.

- A. The operations of the Planning Commission during the past year.
- B. The status of any ongoing planning activities.
- C. Recommendations regarding City Commission actions related to planning and development.

On ____, the City of Buchanan Planning Commission reviewed the draft Annual Report. After finding it to be appropriate, they directed staff to forward the finalized document to the City Commission.

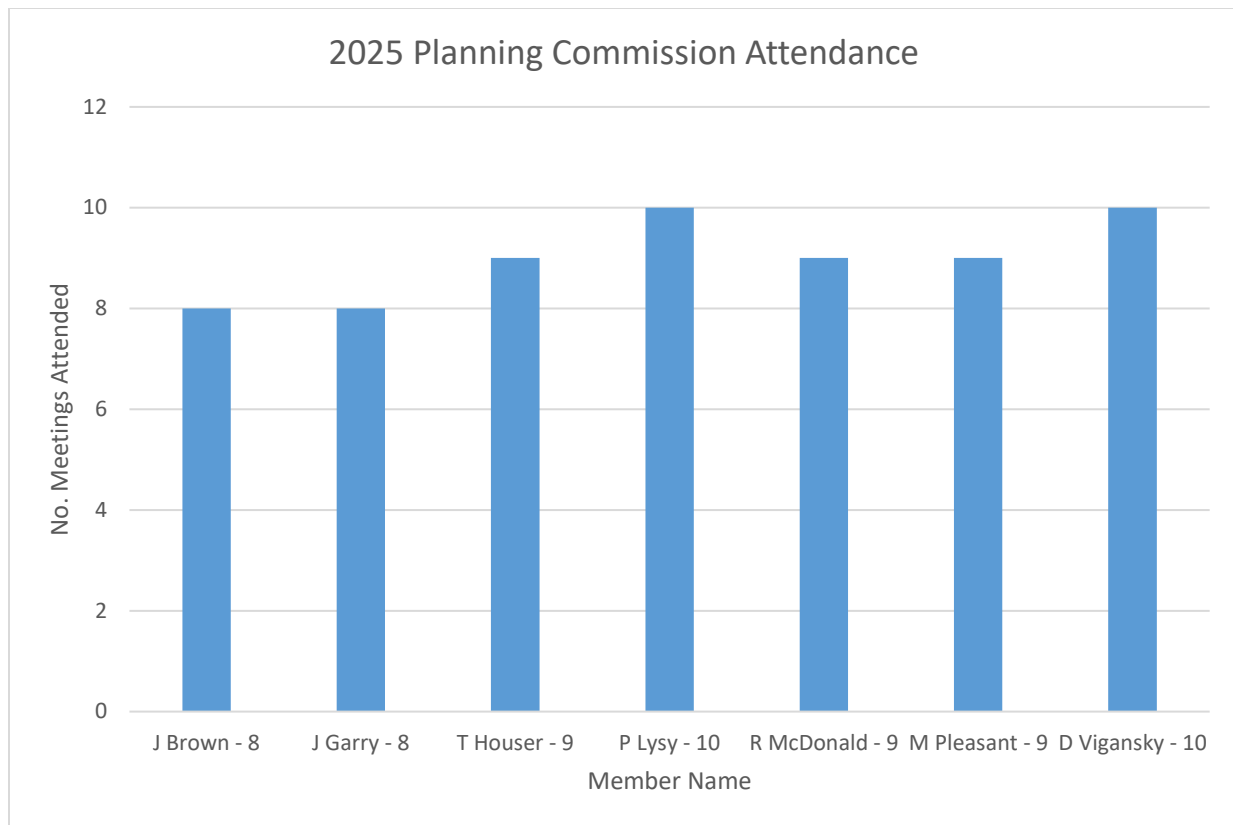
Planning Commission Membership, Attendance and Training.

The Planning Commission met 10 times in 2025. The August and December meetings were cancelled. The meetings ranged between 1 to 1.75 hours for a total of 12.75 hours. All meetings are held in person at City Hall on the second Tuesday of each month.

The Planning Commissions of seven members which includes one City Commissioner. The six appointed members serve a 3-year term and can be reappointed. Terms expire June 30th of each year, and members can remain on the Commission until re-appointed or a new appointment is made by the City Commission. An organizational meeting typically take place in July of each year for the Commissioners to elect the Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary.

During 2025 Ralph McDonald is the Chairperson, Tony Houser is the Vice Chairperson, Jen Gerry is the Secretary and Dan Viganksy is the City Commission Representative. The remaining members are Jacob Brown, Peter Lysy and Matt Pleasant. There were no new members on the Planning Commission in 2025.

Planning Commissioners spend additional time reviewing the agenda packets prior to the meeting and visiting property that have pending applications. The overall member meeting attendance rate for the year was 90%. Staff was informed of absences prior to the meeting. Following is a table which provides information on member attendance.



All members of the Planning Commission are encouraged to participate in additional learning opportunities. During 2025 the city did not host any on-site training opportunities. Money is budgeted annually for members to complete additional training. There are several organizations that provide on-line training free of charge or at reduced rates. In addition, many previously recorded training opportunities can also be found on YouTube for viewing.

Staff Support and Packet Creation.

In 2025 the Planning Commission was staffed by Community Development Director Richard Murphy; City Clerk Kalla Langston; City Manager Tony McGhee; and Administrative Assistant Emma Lysy. Mr. Murphy left the city in September, and position was vacant for the remainder of the year.

All packets were created using Municode Meetings software. Once completed, packets were typically emailed to members before the scheduled meeting and are posted on the city's website under "Agenda & Minutes". By utilizing the software-package it has allowed for the packets to be available to the public prior to the meeting in an easily searchable format that also includes the City Commission packets and other appointed Boards and Commissions.

2025 Planning Commission Meeting Information and Agenda Items.

During 2025, the Planning Commission spent most of

Map Amendment (rezoning).

- None.

Planned Unit Development.

- None

Acceptance of Design Review Committee Recommendations.

- 116 Main Street – B & W Pour – February 2025

Text Amendment – Unified Development Code (Zoning Ordinance).

- Worked on and recommended approval of the Unified Development Code. Work started on this document in 2022. Discussions took place during January, February, March, April, May, June, August before public hearing in September 2025. *The City Commission adopted the Code of November 24, 2025, and it became effective on December 12, 2025.*

Text Amendment – Code of Ordinance -.

- Short-term rental discussions – April, May, June, July recommendation
- Vacant Building/Cold Storage – October, November recommendation
- Urban Forestry Plan – November recommendation

Future Activities for 2026.

In addition to applications submitted for review and action by the public and development community, the Planning Commission will be involved with the following activities in 2026:

1. Update to the 2021 Master Plan. The city has engaged with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to complete in early 2027.
2. With the adoption of the Unified Development Code (UDC) in late 2025 it is anticipated revisions will need to be made as the document is used.
3. It is anticipated that FEMA will be issuing new Floodplain Maps associated with the St. Joseph River watershed that will require amendments to the UDC so the City remains compliant with the Flood Insurance Program.

Memorandum



Date: January 7, 2026

To: Planning Commission Members

From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director

Subject: **Discussion - Unified Development Code – Signs**

Background

The Unified Development Code became effective on December 12, 2025, and staff has been using it to answer questions and review requests. Staff reached out to the consultant to learn more about this section of the code and how it was created and would like to hear from the Planning Commission members what the intent of the regulations were thought to be.

Section 71-30 Sign standards provide the regulations for signs. Following are some concerns:

1. Table 71-T provides standards for different types of signs.
 - a. “Copy Height” which ranges between 8” and 30” for pole (30”), projecting (8”), reader boards (12”), wall (18”) and window (12”) signs.
 - i. The term “Copy Height” is not defined and three of the four signs being reviewed exceed the maximum “Copy Height” as there are logos included which are greater than the allowed height. The maximum copy height ranges between 8” and 30”. The term “copy height” is not defined.
 - ii. Section 71-30.B.3 states window signs are exempt from obtaining a permit and no maximum size is stated
 - iii. Table 71-V Development Review Processes states signage that does not comply goes to the Zoning Board of Appeals for action. This requires a public hearing before the ZBA, noticed provided to all property owners and occupants within 300’ of the property and a legal notice in the paper.
 - iv. Section 71-36.F allows administrative adjustments of not more than 10%. In the case of the “Copy Height” limits, the 10% administrative adjustment would not help.
 - v. Some communities allow the Planning Commission to review modifications to signs that do not meet the requirements of the sign regulations. Requests could be limited to a set increase in height or size or type of sign. Review by the Planning Commission could be set up so no public hearing is required.

Memorandum

- b. Maximum Area.
 - i. Allows a pole sign to be no more than 200 square feet in the NC, D, SC and I districts while a monument sign is limited to 36 square feet.
 - ii. Review of the previous sign ordinance found a maximum of 76 square feet for free-standing signs in the C-2 and M-1 and M-2 districts and 32 square feet in the C-3 district. There is no difference between a pole sign or monument/ground sign.
 - c. Maximum overall height.
 - i. There is no maximum overall height for a pole or monument sign.
 - ii. Review of the previous sign ordinance found a maximum height of 32 feet for free-standing signs in the C-2 and M-1 and M-2 districts and 6 square feet in the C-3 district.
 - d. Hanging and Projecting.
 - i. Regarding hanging signs there is no minimum clearance provided. Table 71-I Facades provides information for facades of 8' clearance but the exhibits do not include signage. Typically, a minimum 6'8" clearance is necessary for signage.
 - ii. Projecting signs there is no maximum projection from the building or minimum clearance provided.
 - iii. The previous sign ordinance had a maximum 36" projection from the building wall and below the second-floor window. Clearance of 8' was required.
 - e. Pole and monument signs. It is unclear if there is a minimum setback to a lot line.
2. Section 71-30 Permits required. "All signs with the exception of the following require a sign permit".
- a. A list of 5 sign types is provided.
 - b. A frame ground signs.
 - i. Table 71-T allows a maximum 9 square foot sign, there is no maximum height.
 - c. "Small signs" are considered any sign that does not exceed 4 square feet.
 - i. It is unclear if there is a maximum number of these types of signs.
 - ii. It is unclear if these are permanent or temporary signs.
 - iii. It is unclear if the intent was for name plate wall signs that would provide a business name, historic plaque or similar.
 - d. Window signs. No additional language is provided.
 - i. Table 71-T there is a maximum coverage of 25% of the window and maximum copy height of 12".
 - ii. Many sign ordinances allow maximum coverage of 40 or 50%. The previous sign ordinance had no maximum window covering.
 - iii. Temporary signs. Section states "Not more than one temporary sign is permitted per façade and may not exceed 32 square feet in area. Temporary signs must be removed within 48 hours after the event.

Memorandum

Temporary signs may not be displayed longer than the event or 30 days.”

- iv. It is unclear if this sign type is for all zoning districts or just nonresidential.
 - v. Many communities have updated their sign codes to address a Supreme Court ruling from 2015 which addresses temporary signage and how it is regulated.
 - vi. One of the widely used regulations for temporary signs in residential areas is a maximum square footage of 24 with individual signs not exceeding 6 square feet. This allows the property owner the opportunity to have several temporary signs on the property in differing sizes.
3. Section 71-30 does not provide guidance on how signs are measured.
- a. Typically, information is provided and sign ordinances rely on drawing a box around the largest dimensions to determine the overall size of the sign.
 - b. The previous sign ordinance provided language regarding how sign area is measured using the smallest square or rectangle. There is a reference to a circle, many sign ordinances rely on a box to decrease math errors.

Next Steps

Discuss the intent of Section 71-30 Sign standards. If it is concluded changes are necessary, direct staff to prepare draft language for further review and discussion at a future meeting.