

***Douglass Township Planning Commission  
Annual Report  
Calendar Year 2023***

***Douglass Township  
Montcalm County  
State of Michigan***

***Douglass Township  
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## INTRODUCTION

The **Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA)** allows for the establishment of local Planning Commissions, Master Plans, and other associated activities. Douglass Township's Planning Commission is established by **Article II.125.3811 under Planning Commission Creation and Administration**. This report is prepared and submitted to the Township Board according to the **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws, section 4 (e) under Duties and Responsibilities and section 13 (a) and (b) under Annual Report**. The Planning Commission is responsible for:

- Developing/Reviewing the Douglass Township Master Plan which provides guidance for land use and future development
- Creating a zoning ordinance to align goals of the Master Plan to future land use regulations
- Reviewing proposed projects ensuring they comply with zoning rules
- Considering special issues or participating in projects as directed by the township board

## MEMBERSHIP

The **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws section 2 under Membership (a) and (b), and section 3 under Requirements of Membership (a-d)** outline standards for the Commission. In 2023, the Planning Commission held a total of 14 meetings which included Regular Quarterly Meetings, Special Meetings and Public Hearings. (The Douglass Township Board voted to approve funding for additional Planning Commission Meetings in 2023). Several of the meetings were held consecutively on the same night in order to be fiscally prudent, but are broken down as separate meetings. In 2023, the Douglass Township Planning Commission consisted of 7 members whose terms, attendance, and training are listed in the chart below.

Name	Membership start date	Term expires	Attendance	Trainings (hrs)	Field Trips
Rick Baldwin Chairman	Jan. 2001	Dec. 2023	13/14	2 hrs. Montcalm Co Planning Commission Training April 13, 2023, ZBA training July 18, 2023	
Mike Swan Vice Chairman	July 2022	Dec. 2025	11/14		
Kathy Craig Secretary	Jan. 2023	Dec. 2025	14/14	2 hrs. Montcalm Co. Planning Commission Training April 13, 2023	Florida Power and Light Solar Farm Feb. 2023, Gratiot county wind turbine sites along Warner Rd and various locations in Beal City June 2023

Eric Tester Board Liaison	Jan. 2023	Dec. 2025	14/14	ZBA training July 18, 2023	
Tammy Sweeris Resigned Feb. 21, 2023	Jan. 2022	Dec. 2024	0/1		
Melissa Bannen (replaced Becky Sowles)	March 2023	Dec. 2024	9/11 not appointed for first three meetings		Visited site of building dispute, proposed zoning change property
Matt Moorman (replaced Jack Jeppesen)	March 2023	Dec. 2023	10/11 not appointed for first three meetings	2 hrs. Montcalm Co Planning Commission Training April 13, 2023, ZBA training July 18, 2023	
Jon Bailey (replaced Tammy Sweeris)	April 2023	Dec. 2024	7/10 not appointed for first four meetings	2 hrs. Montcalm Co Planning Commission Training April 13, 2023, ZBA training July 18, 2023	Visited local building department for information on codes

**MEETINGS**

The **MPEA** requires that local Planning Commissions meet at least four times a year. The **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws section 7 under Meetings (a-d)** states rules for meetings. The Douglass Township Planning Commission met regularly on the last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm and held 4 regular meetings in 2023. The Douglass Township Board voted to approve funding for additional Planning Commission Meetings in 2023. The Planning Commission held five Public Hearings (February 22, April 26, July 12, October 25, and November 29) with five Special Meetings (February 22, April 3, June 14, September 20, and November 29). Several of the meetings were held consecutively on the same night in order to be fiscally prudent. The **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws section 9 under Minutes (a) and (b)** require a synopsis of meetings which is provided in the following chart:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Type of Meeting</b>	<b>Summary</b>
Jan. 25, 2023	Regular Quarterly Meeting	Election of officers, Wind Energy Conversion Systems setbacks, height, sound discussion, Master Plan discussion, setting of meeting dates for the year, scheduled public hearing for moratorium on wind and solar, scheduled special meeting following public hearing to discuss Wind Energy Conversion Systems and Solar Energy Systems.
Feb. 22, 2023	Public Hearing	Public Hearing held to discuss sending 2 resolutions regarding one year moratoriums on Wind and Solar projects to the township board for adoption.
Feb. 22, 2023	Special Meeting	2022 Annual report review, resolution on 2023 meeting dates, tabled Solar discussion, Wind Energy Conversion Systems (WECS) discussion. Motions and votes on sections of WECS ordinance.
April 3, 2023	Special Meeting	Review of wind ordinance draft from attorney, master plan discussion, and solar discussion. Voted to schedule a public hearing on WECS ordinance for April 26, preceding regular meeting.
April 26, 2023	Public Hearing	Gathered public input on proposed Wind Energy ordinance, voted on sending ordinance to board for adoption.
April 26	Regular Quarterly Meeting	Committee reports, solar ordinance discussion on height, setbacks, sound, contamination, toxins, screening, and vote to send a draft solar ordinance to the attorney for review.
June 14	Special Meeting	Discuss Solar ordinance draft feedback from attorney, regular meeting date change, ZBA report, rezoning request from resident. Voted to send solar ordinance to public hearing, and voted to change the next regular meeting date from July 26 to July 12.
July 12	Public Hearing	Public hearing on solar ordinance. PC voted to send it to the county and township board.
July 12	Regular Quarterly Meeting (rescheduled from July 26)	Committee reports, zoning request process discussion, training opportunities, updates from township board.
September 20	Special Meeting	Rezoning request and formulate plan on items that had previously been tabled. Supported resolution on keeping local control of zoning.
October 25	Public Hearing	Rezoning request

October 25	Regular Quarterly Meeting	Committee reports, action plan for items that need to be reviewed, discussion on pole barn variances (height, vacant lot).
November 29	Public Hearing	Pole barn height and building on vacant lot variance issues, lakeside definition
November 29	Special Meeting	Discuss items that had previously been tabled (campers. small/tiny homes/steel siding) but keep coming up to the ZBA and need to be addressed

## **MASTER PLAN REVIEW**

The Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing and updating the Master Plan to ensure it is a continuing reflection of the township's interests and needs. The township's current Master Plan was adopted in 2016. The **MPEA** requires a formal review (and update or reaffirmation) occur at least every five years. The **Dougllass Township Planning Commission bylaws Section 4 under Duties and Responsibilities (b) and (c)** direct the commission to consider its Master Plan. A summary of items reviewed and discussed follows.

<b>Master Plan Item</b>	<b>Section and page number</b>	<b>Planner comments/suggestions</b>
<b>Fire department</b>	Community facilities page 20	Fire department is incorrect. We use Belvidere, Day and Stanton.
<b>Private sewer/water</b>	Community facilities page 21	Clarify language on private water and sewer systems.
<b>Sidewalks</b>	Community facilities page 23	Clarify language on sidewalks and paths, as we do not have any.
<b>Industrial area</b>	Goals/Policies page 26	Do not need to keep industrial area. Specify why it is not suitable or we can keep it.
<b>Agricultural status</b>	Future Land Use page 28	5 acres in an agricultural district would be a good size for a house. Produce better language for agricultural districts.
<b>Lakes</b>	Future Land Use page 30	Add all lakes identified in Wind Energy Conversion Systems discussion (Christina, Hemingway, and Mud lakes) and get overlay maps.
<b>Land uses</b>	Future Land Use page 31	Better classification of general business or nonconforming uses.
<b>April 3, 2023</b>	Planning commission voted to keep the Master Plan on file as is, including keeping the industrial district.	

## ZONING AND PERMIT REVIEW

The Zoning Administrator for Douglass Township, Dave Kelsey, provided the following summary of all land use permit activity for 2023 and the previous 5 years.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Pole Barns</b>	5	2	6	11	11
<b>Barn Additions</b>	1	0	1	1	2
<b>Decks</b>	4	0	3	3	1
<b>Garages</b>	4	5	7	3	1
<b>Homes</b>	9	5	4	10	6
<b>Home additions</b>	2	2	3	2	3
<b>Accessory building</b>	3	3	2	0	
<b>Misc.</b>	3	5	14	5	6
<b>Variances</b>	9			4	
<b>Special Use Permits</b>	1				
<b>Lot line Adjustment and division</b>				1	3
<b>Violations</b>					

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The **State of Michigan Open Meetings Act 267 15.263 section 3.(5)** states a person must be permitted to address a meeting of a public body under rules established and recorded by the public body. The legislature or a house of the legislature may provide by rule that the right to address may be limited to prescribed times at hearings and committee meetings only. The **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws section 8 under Public Hearings (a) and (b 1-6), and section 7 (f 4 and 7)** sets forth procedures for gathering public comment. The Planning commission **heard and considered** a total of 77 comments from citizens during 2023. The breakdown is as follows:

	Jan 25	Feb. 22 Public Hearing	Feb. 22 Special Meeting	April 3 Special Meeting	April 26 Public Hearing	April 26 Regular Meeting	June 14 Special Meeting	July 12 Public Hearing	July 12 Regular Meeting
Comment related to agenda items	0	4	6	2	7	0	0	1	3

General Public Comment	7		3	5		8	2		3
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	Sept. 20 Special Meeting	Oct. 25 Public hearing	Oct. 25 Regular meeting	Nov. 29 Public Hearing	Nov. 29 Special Meeting
Comment related to agenda items	2	2	0	9	6
General Public Comment	3		4		0

## **PLANNING COMMISSION GOALS/WORK PLAN 2023**

The **Douglass Township Planning Commission bylaws under Duties and Responsibilities section 4 (f) (g) and (h)** instructs the Planning Commission to make recommendations, if desired, on zoning and planning changes/amendments. The points in the following chart were recommended for 2023:

- Finish Wind and Solar ordinance amendments
- Review pattern for denials and variances requested to determine if there needs to be an update in zoning book sections
- Review sections of zoning book regarding size of residences to accommodate potential tiny houses

## **SUMMARY**

In the calendar year 2023, the Douglass Township Planning Commission accomplished the following:

- Recommended a Wind Energy Conversion Systems ordinance to the township board for adoption that reflected the input of the citizens of the township.
- Recommended a Solar Energy Conversion Systems ordinance to the township board for adoption that reflected the input of the citizens of the township.
- Reviewed the Master Plan and ensured it was posted on the website for public review.
- Reviewed pole barn variance issues, held public hearing, and determined that they need to be reviewed for possible amendment to the zoning ordinance.
- Began a review and received public input on small houses, steel siding, campers, and definitions of lakeside yards.
- Supported and recommended a resolution to the board that would retain local control of zoning in the state of Michigan.
- Reviewed, heard public input, and recommended to the board a request for a conditional rezoning of a residential property.

## **WORK GOALS FOR 2024**

- Review feedback from attorney regarding zoning book language on height of pole barns and building on vacant property.
- Continue review of steel siding on buildings, small houses, and other issues that come up at ZBA.
- Receive, consider, and document all public input before making recommendations to the board on any ordinance.

