

CALL TO ORDER

The Special Scheduled Meeting held on Monday, March 9th, 2026 of the Benton Charter Township Planning Commission was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Members Present: Chairperson Matt Davis, Marletta Seats, Gregory Whitehead, Joseph Taylor and Wesley Koza
Members Absent:
Staff Present: Loyall Bennett, Caleb O'Toole and Deeann Scalf
Also present:

SILENT INVOCATION:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mr. Taylor motioned and support of approval by Mrs. Seats. Motion passed.

AGENDA AMENDMENTS: Mr. Davis added to compile some dates to have a joint Meeting with the ZBA Board and the Township Board. Motion by Mr. Taylor, and supported by Mr. Whitehead. Motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS: Mr. Davis advised there was still no Application submitted yet to have the ZBA Meeting for the 1819 Sweet Street for the Cell Tower.

NEW BUSINESS:

Discussion of the Master Plan Update

Lake Michigan Industrial Park / Industrial Development

The Planning Commission discussed the importance of supporting business expansion and job creation within Benton Charter Township and agreed that the Township's Master Plan should continue to encourage economic development opportunities. Commissioners expressed a preference to see continued progress in filling the existing industrial park near the airport before significant time and resources are invested in developing additional industrial parks. However, it was acknowledged that the proposed Lake Michigan Industrial Park (LMIP) may be intended to accommodate larger development sites that are not suitable for the existing park.

The Commission generally supported the concept of developing an industrial area near the Napier Avenue and US-31 interchange. Members noted that the area has limited residential development and natural features, making it a practical location for industrial growth. While some farmland would likely be lost, commissioners felt the potential economic benefits and job opportunities for residents represented a reasonable tradeoff.

Infrastructure capacity was also discussed. Commissioners noted that sewer capacity in the area is currently limited, while some water capacity is available. It was recommended that any future industrial development include a clear strategy and cost structure to ensure that developers contribute toward the cost of necessary infrastructure improvements.

Commissioners expressed strong support for industrial development sites west of US-31, with priority given to the Meadowbrook Road and Yore Avenue area due to the presence of significant existing industrial activity. Opinions were more divided regarding sites east of US-31. Some commissioners felt those areas should only be considered once the west side is fully developed, while others indicated they would support development if developers are willing to fund the extension of utilities.

The Commission also suggested confirming the current status of the approximately 140-acre parcel northeast of the US-31 and Napier interchange owned by Benton Harbor Area Schools, which was purchased in the past with the possibility of relocating school facilities to that location.

Housing Readiness Package Discussion

The Planning Commission reviewed several potential policy changes associated with the Housing Readiness Package legislation. Commissioners expressed support for exploring smarter parking standards and reducing minimum dwelling unit sizes as potential ways to help address housing affordability.

There were mixed opinions regarding allowing duplexes in single-family zoning districts, though some members indicated support if such allowances were limited to specific areas. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) also received mixed support, with greater acceptance if they were permitted only in limited areas and subject to clearly defined conditions. Commissioners noted the importance of identifying potential unintended consequences and ensuring that any changes include strategies to mitigate those impacts.

The Commission also discussed the possibility of reducing setback requirements. Members were generally more supportive of reducing front and rear setbacks than side setbacks but emphasized that reductions should not trigger increased fire-rating requirements that could ultimately raise construction costs.

Commissioners did not support proposals to modernize protest procedures, establish maximum lot sizes, clarify development study requirements, or impose maximum timelines for development approvals. The Commission generally felt these measures were not addressing any specific challenges currently faced by the Township.

Overall, commissioners recognized that while some of the proposed changes could help reduce housing development costs, significant zoning adjustments could also affect the character of the community. Members agreed that any policy decisions should be approached thoughtfully and with careful consideration.

Sidewalk Infrastructure

The Planning Commission discussed the value of expanding sidewalk infrastructure, particularly in areas that connect higher-density uses such as the mall, multifamily housing, senior housing, and schools. Commissioners agreed that sidewalks can improve pedestrian safety in areas with higher traffic volumes and potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.

Members acknowledged that community resistance to sidewalks is often tied to the cost of construction and long-term maintenance. The Commission recommended exploring strategies used by other communities to address these barriers, including reviewing the sidewalk funding and implementation strategy used by Saginaw Township.

Master Plan Review and Update

The Commission outlined a timeline for reviewing and updating the Township's Master Plan. Commissioners will review the current action items and identify which items have been completed, remain priorities, or are no longer priorities prior to the first meeting in April. Rebecca will present proposed edits to the Master Plan at that meeting. The Planning Commission will then review, discuss, and identify recommended revisions during the second meeting in April. A joint meeting with the Township Board is planned for the first Township Board meeting in May to review and discuss the proposed updates.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT REPORT: None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS OR REQUESTS: None.

Benton Charter Township
Special Planning Commission Meeting
Monday, March 9th, 2026 at 6:00 pm

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS: None.

TOWNSHIP BOARD REPRESENTATIVE REPORT: None.

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS REPRESENTATIVE REPORT: Meeting to be scheduled on this Project once an Application is submitted to the Building Department.

OTHER COMMENTS/CONCERNS: None.

ADJOURNMENT: Ms. Seats motioned to adjourned Mr. Taylor supported. Motion carries and Meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business before the PC, the Meeting was adjourned:
Minutes: Deeann Scalf the Secretary of the Planning Commission.

Loyall Bennett, Building Inspector