

Ottawa County Planning Commission History

1990 - 2020



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1990

The Ottawa County Planning Commission met for the first time on February 6, 1990. Commissioners sought to attend local planning commission meetings to develop relationships and inform them of the county's initiative to develop a countywide development plan. An October 2, 1990 work session with local units of government identified key environmental issues facing Ottawa County that would be addressed in a countywide development plan. These issues included:

- Uncontrolled growth and development
- Inadequate zoning without performance standards and controls
- Decline in surface and groundwater quality, especially in agricultural areas
- Agricultural land being viewed as "land in a holding pattern for development"
- Stress on the lower Grand River and all water sheds in Ottawa County

It was identified that the Ottawa County Planning Commission would act as a "mechanism for coordinating planning between units" and would act as an advisory body that provides information and studies for countywide land use initiatives. The commission performed several rezoning and PA 116 farmland preservation application reviews.

1990 Important Items

- Countywide development plan work session with local units of government

1991

Throughout 1991, the planning commission hosted four regional seminars that gathered feedback from Ottawa County residents on countywide planning. Some of their concerns were:

- Water/air quality
- Grand Rapids sewer overflow
- Wetlands and natural resource protection
- Education
- Need for mass transit/ride sharing
- Major corridor planning
- Need for parks and recreation land
- Local planning assistance to county communities
- Consistency in regulations and language
- Community facilities
- Service consolidation
- Utilize the county as a source of information and education
- Relation of the county planning commission to local planning

These items would be addressed in the countywide development plan being developed by staff.

1991 Important Items

- Hosted regional seminars to gather feedback from Ottawa County residents

1992

The planning commission adopted the 1992 Ottawa County Development Plan on December 22, 1992. In addition to continuing reviewing rezoning requests for local units of government and PA 116 applications, the commission discussed a request to move Ottawa County from the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) to the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC).

1992 also marked the beginning of the commission's involvement with the US-31 bypass (M-231), as a letter of support was drafted for the project's environmental impact statement (EIS) to begin in late 1992.

1992 Important Items

- Approved the 1992 Ottawa County Development Plan
- US-31 bypass letter of support for beginning environmental impact statement

1993

With the Ottawa County Development Plan in place, the planning commission performed a strategic planning session on March 18, 1993 to better identify the commission's goals and action items for the county. These goals are listed below:

Environmental: Goal 1 – The county, working with state and federal agencies, will actively protect our environment and set aside and preserve natural areas throughout the county. **Action** – Compile existing environmental regulations and recommend their feasibility and effectiveness to appropriate legislative/policy boards.

Environmental: Goal 2 – The county will promote policies and adoption of environmentally friendly regulations which protect our natural resources and encourage conservation. **Action** – Compile existing environmental regulations and recommend their feasibility and effectiveness to appropriate legislative/policy boards.

Quality of Life: Goal 3 – The county will work to promote and protect the physical, social, economic, and environmental well-being of the community. **Action** – Training seminars will be provided to local planning commissions.

Growth: Goal 4 – The county will work with federal and state agencies and local units of government to resolve service and infrastructure needs of the county. **Action** – Identify potential public and private funding for infrastructure and act as a clearinghouse to share information with local units. **Action** – Seek funding for infrastructure through grants and demonstration projects.

Growth: Goal 5 – The county will improve communication, information exchange, and coordination among units of local government and area agencies on countywide service and infrastructure needs. **Action** – Sponsor joint meetings of planning commission chairs on a countywide or regional basis to discuss issues of common concern. **Action** – Prepare a capital improvement plan and promote its funding.

The commission also discussed the reviewing policy required under the Township Rural Planning and Zoning Act. The act required that all zoning amendments be submitted to the planning commission, however, this requirement could be waived by a Board of Commissioners resolution. It was decided that the planning commission's policy of requiring rezoning reviews only when the changes were within 500 feet of a neighboring municipality was adequate.

1993 Important Items

- Commission performed strategic planning session to identify countywide land use goals and actions
- 1992 Ottawa County Development Plan received the Planning Honor Award from the Michigan Society of Planning Officials

1994

The planning commission was informed that the county received a grant for a groundwater demonstration project. This project would involve a partnership with the Michigan Society of Planning Officials and the GVSU Water Resources Institute to identify ways to mitigate groundwater contamination. It was decided the project would focus on the Village of Spring Lake, Jamestown Township, Port Sheldon Township, and later Robinson Township.

The commission was also shown the plans for the Ottawa County Fillmore Complex to be constructed over the coming years.

1994 Important Items

- Received W.K. Kellogg Grant for County & Local Partnerships for Groundwater Protection Zoning: A Michigan Demonstration Project, created agreement with GVSU Water Resources Institute to administer project

1995

The planning commission continued reviewing rezoning and PA 116 applications.

1995 Important Items

- N/A

1996

A joint teleconference with MSU Ottawa County extension was held on April 2, 1996 and identified the “most important land use challenges for Ottawa County”. These included:

- Agricultural issues (conflict and market issues, economics of farming and public perception of farming)
- “Section line building” which consumes lots of open space
- Large lots and “suburban sprawl”

The teleconference also identified steps the MSU Ottawa County extension and planning commission could take to address these issues such as:

- Educate citizens
- Provide forum/mechanism for local dialogue on land use issues
- Facilitate cooperation between local units of government, frame issues in a regional context

The commission also provided input on the Rural Character and Open Space Guidebook being developed to provide best practices to preserve agricultural and natural areas of the county.

1996 Important Items

- Completion of Ottawa County Rural Character and Open Space Guidebook
- MSU-E teleconference identifying opportunities
- Voted in favor of constructing the Ottawa County Fillmore Complex

1997

1997 was a busy year for the planning commission. The planning department received a new director, a countywide transit study began, the Water & Environment Subcommittee was formed, and the commission began acting as a mediating body on the US-31 bypass project.

The US-31 bypass project would become a staple agenda item over the coming years, with numerous presentations, discussions, and public hearings taking place. The first of which occurred on May 7, 1997 where residents from Crockery and Zeeland Townships opposed the creation of the 120th Avenue route being considered. Their concerns stemmed from the loss of farmland and the urban sprawl the highway would encourage. The Zeeland Township Board of Trustees signed a resolution opposing the highway’s development and the planning commission decided it would play a larger role in the US-31 bypass project going forward.

On June 4, 1997, the planning commission decided it would develop a route recommendation and would meet with MDOT to gain a better understanding of the project. A representative from MACC shared an information packet that stated between 1993 and 1996 the following meetings took place:

- 13 speaker presentations were presented to local organizations (Kiwanis, Rotary Club, chambers of commerce, North Ottawa Association of Realtors, ASCE Grand Haven)
- 7 major investment meetings between MPOs and local units of government
- 3 public hearings

An August 6, 1997 meeting featured MDOT officials stating that local townships didn't have "veto" authority, but the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners did due to the county's status as an Act 51 transportation agency. A joint resolution from Spring Lake Township, City of Grand Haven, Grand Haven Township, and the City of Ferrysburg denounced the proposed route alternative that would convert US-31 into an elevated free-way through the Tri-Cities area. A month later, representatives from Spring Lake, Grand Haven, and the central townships discussed the project's proposed routes, with each party arguing the route should pass through the other's municipality. Letters from disgruntled residents began flowing into planning commission inboxes and it was decided the commission would wait for MDOT's draft environmental impact statement to be released. In the meantime, the planning commission and staff would visit the proposed sites before developing an opinion.

On July 10, 1997, the Water & Environment Subcommittee convened for the first time. This body was organized to address septic and animal waste from agricultural operations and was tasked with overseeing a wetlands waste removal demonstration project.

1997 Important Items

- US-31 bypass discussions
- Creation of Water & Environment Subcommittee
- Countywide transit study began

1998

The planning commission received a position paper from WMSRDC on January 7, 1998 that supported the US-31 bypass route on its current alignment through the Tri-Cities area. January also marked the first meeting of the Transportation and Land Use Committee, which sought to "discuss and initiate policy regarding future transportation and infrastructure needs in Ottawa County based on an analysis of land use, population, and development trends". This body approved membership in MACC and GVMC and opposed an MDOT proposal to assume control of 59 miles of local municipal roads within Ottawa County.

In October 1998, the planning commission received letters of support from Polkton, Wright, and Tallmadge Townships supporting the US-31 bypass route through the central part of the county along 120th Avenue.

1998 Important Items

- First meetings of Transportation and Land Use Committee
- Ottawa County membership with GVMC and MACC
- Ottawa County Rural Character and Preservation Guidebook Completed
- Ottawa County Public Transportation Study Completed

1999

The US-31 Staff Position Paper was made available and discussed with the planning commission. The paper argued that the 120th Avenue route through the central townships was the ideal choice, as it would divert traffic around the highly traveled US-31 corridor. The paper stated that the county “has to prepare for growth” and that limiting exit ramps coupled with zoning could limit farmland destruction. This prompted criticism from Olive Township, Crockery Township, and the Ottawa County Farm Bureau, stating that the planning commission’s release of the Rural Character and Preservation Guidebook in 1998 coupled with this route decision was contradictory.

The Ottawa County Smart Growth Demonstration Project was discussed as a way to illustrate farmland preservation and traditional land use patterns. Both Jamestown and Blendon Townships were selected for the project in October 1999 and would undergo revised zoning ordinances and master plans to account for population growth and agricultural preservation.

1999 Important Items

- US-31 Bypass Staff Position Paper
- Began Ottawa County Smart Growth Demonstration Project
- Purchase planning department library materials

2000

The planning commission discussed updating the Ottawa County Development Plan completed in 1992. Items to be accounted for included:

- The transportation/land use connection
- Timelines on updating document
- Infrastructure issues
- Possibility of one overlay map of the county to deal with infrastructure, zoning, land use, and master plans of local units of government
- Coordination through communication between local units of government
- Address urban blight/redevelopment issues
- Cross jurisdictional planning as it relates to watersheds and transportation
- County planning department becoming a “clearinghouse” of information relating to successful planning techniques used in other parts of the country

The Water & Environment Subcommittee also performed a strategic planning session on January 13, 2000. The body would “provide leadership and problem resolution in environmental and water quality issues that are affecting Ottawa County.” Specific items the body would address included:

- Water treatment
- Air quality rules
- Home stewardship
- Tree programs
- Stormwater retention
- Exotics
- Impervious surfaces
- Buffer strips

The planning commission also developed a contract with a consultant to conduct the Ottawa County Non-Motorized Pathways Study.

2000 Important Items

- First “Excellence Through Training” seminar held September 16, 2000
- Began Non-Motorized Pathways Study

2001

The planning commission continued reviewing rezoning and PA 116 applications.

2001 Important Items

- N/A

2002

On September 12, 2002, the planning commission passed a motion to waive the review of local government zoning changes if they occurred more than 500 feet from another unit of government.

The planning commission also discussed coordinating efforts with the parks department and the road commission on incorporating four-foot paved shoulders on repaving projects.

2002 Important Items

- Blendon Township Smart Growth Zoning Ordinance
- Planning commission extended waiving local government zoning review requirement

2003

With increasing budget constraints, the US-31 bypass was removed from MDOT's 5-year transportation improvement plan. This jeopardized the project, as this delay would render the environmental impact statement (EIS) out-of-date, requiring an additional EIS to be completed. The planning commission passed a resolution requesting \$30 million be returned to the project and requested local units of government send similar resolutions to the Governor/MDOT.

The planning commission also discussed Ottawa County's potential purchase of development rights (PDR) program. An August 6, 2003 meeting outlined the pros and cons of a countywide PDR program. At this time, the commission decided to oppose a farmland PDR program.

It was also decided that PA 116 applications would only be brought to the planning commission if the applications requested an agreement termination from the program. All other applications would be handled within the planning department and summaries would be presented to the planning commission as needed.

2003 Important Items

- Resolution to reinstate funding for US-31 Bypass Project
- Planning commission granted administrative oversight of PA 116 applications to planning department

2004

The use of internet and email within the planning department was discussed, as reviewing documents and responding to local units of government would be more convenient. Access to wireless broadband internet was also raised as an important objective for countywide planning efforts.

With disjointed local government planning and zoning maps, the planning commission saw value in a standardized mapping initiative to illustrate countywide land use in a coherent, uniform manner. The department began working with local units of government to develop these map documents.

Concerns over crop and vegetation damage from salt applications was raised and the Road Salt Commission was created to minimize the use and impacts of road salt within the county. Policies such as designating sensitive "low-salt" areas and considering de-icing alternatives such as sand were incorporated in the "Recommendations for Salt Management" made available in August 2004.

The planning commission also discussed the Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project, with the cities of Coopersville, Ferrysburg, Grand Haven, and Hudsonville chosen as potential partners. Out of these, Hudsonville was chosen, and the department began collaborating with the city on the project.

2004 Important Items

- Discussions on countywide wireless broadband initiative
- Approved Ottawa County Non-Motorized Pathways Study
- Began standardized mapping project
- Road Salt Commission created; Recommendations for Salt Management made available in Summer 2004
- North South Corridor Study (48th Avenue) was completed
- Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project began, Hudsonville selected as partner

2005

The planning commission continued reviewing rezoning and master plan amendments. With the Tri-Cities region incorporated into WMSRDC's MPO service boundary in 2003, the department prepared a report outlining methods of improving communication between Ottawa County's 3 MPOs.

2005 Important Items

- 2005 Ottawa County MPO Report

2006

Ottawa County's depleting bedrock aquifer was first discussed in 2006, as homeowners in Allendale Township stated that their wells were running dry. This prompted concerns and the first discussions on conducting a countywide groundwater study.

The planning commission was informed of MDOT's decision to proceed with Phase I of the US-31 Bypass Project. This would construct M-231 between I-96 and M-45, providing the additional river crossing central to the project.

The planning commission decided to waive the requirement of receiving zoning ordinances, zoning text changes, or rezoning requests from local units of government if they occurred more than 500 feet from a municipal boundary.

2006 Important Items

- M-104 District Overlay District Ordinance
- First mention of declining water levels in Allendale Township
- Planning commission extended waiving local government zoning review requirement

2007

The planning commission was informed that the department would work with USGS on conducting a countywide groundwater study as well as performing an administrative update of the 1992 Ottawa County Development Plan.

The planning commission also discussed the proposed county PDR program. This program would be administered by an appointed agricultural board. The department would create a draft scoring system to illustrate what parcels would be eligible for the program.

With the M-231 project advancing, including a non-motorized pathway was discussed with MDOT.

2007 Important Items

- Begin work on countywide groundwater initiative
- Develop draft scoring system for countywide farmland PDR program

2008

The planning commission discussed a potential public transportation study, as the Tri-Cities communities cited a need for connections to Muskegon County.

The planning commission also received preliminary cost estimates for Phase I of M-231; construction of the freeway between I-96 and M-45 was estimated at \$150 million and the bridge over the Grand River estimated at \$35 million.

The planning commission was also informed Ottawa County would develop a brownfield redevelopment authority.

2008 Important Items

- Created Ethanol Production Facilities Model Ordinance for Wright Township
- Ottawa County Housing Needs Assessment made available
- Road Salt Management Program received NACO 2008 Achievement Award
- Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project received “Honorable Mention” award from the Michigan Association of Planning
- Planning department moved offices into the west wing of the Ottawa County Fillmore Complex

2009

The 2008 Michigan Planning Enabling Act combined many of Michigan’s land use regulations under one law. The new legislation removed the requirement that county planning commissions review master plans of local units of government. Regardless, the planning department informed the planning commission that they would still review these documents to ensure consistency of land use decisions across Ottawa County.

With the Great Recession impacting Ottawa County, the planning commission discussed methods of attracting businesses. One of the discussions included creating a west Michigan metropolitan statistical area (MSA). MSAs are typically used by businesses to identify a region’s demographics and market potential, with areas of 1,000,000 or more in population seen as more attractive. Muskegon County, Ottawa County, Allegan County, and Kent County were separated into individual MSAs in 2003. These separate MSAs were discussed as not being representative of the region and the planning commission drafted a resolution to support including Ottawa County in a regional MSA.

2009 Important Items

- Supporting resolution for creation of a regional West Michigan MSA

2010

Michigan State University was selected to perform the Comprehensive Water Resource Study to research Ottawa County's groundwater challenges.

Following the removal of trees along Lakeshore Drive in Park Township by the Ottawa County Road Commission, the planning commission established the Tree Legacy Committee to resolve conflicts and establish guidelines for tree preservation.

The construction of the Musketawa White Pine Trail became a contested issue, as the trail would pass through the Triick Farm property in Wright Township. Concerns of vandalism and disturbing cattle were raised, and opposition from the farming community paused the project. The planning department would develop a report to weigh recommendations.

2010 Important Items

- Selected Michigan State University to conduct the Comprehensive Water Resource Study (Phase I Water Study)
- Establish Tree Legacy Committee
- Completion of the Zoning Ordinance for the Hudsonville Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project

2011

The Ottawa County Musketawa Trail/Triick Farm Impasse Report was presented in January 2011, with the planning commission deciding to pursue other route alternatives.

The planning commission decided that PA 116 renewal applications could be handled by the planning department without commission approval.

2011 Important Items

- Ottawa County Musketawa Trail/Triick Farm Impasse Report
- Planning commission waived administrative oversight of PA 116 renewal applications

2012

The planning commission was informed of rezoning reviews and PA 116 applications as needed and approved the final report of the 2012 West Michigan Transit Linkages Study.

2012 Important Items

- 2012 West Michigan Transit Linkages Study

2013

Phase I of the MSU Water Resource Study was presented to the planning commission. This prompted discussions of developing monitoring wells to measure bedrock aquifer conditions across the county.

Discussions of a non-motorized trail connection along M-231 continued. A Board of Commissioners resolution was created that stated the county's intention to connect the bridge trail segment to the greater Ottawa County non-motorized network.

The planning department also received a \$400,000 EPA brownfield redevelopment authority grant that would encourage the redevelopment of contaminated sites within Ottawa County.

The department also presented the Agricultural Technology Business Incubator Report to the planning commission, which was then sent to the Board of Commissioners. The planning commission bylaws were also amended to include an ad-hoc member of the Ottawa County Road Commission.

2013 Important Items

- Phase I of Ottawa County Water Resources Study
- Secured \$400,000 EPA grant for brownfield redevelopment
- Agricultural Technology Business Incubator Report
- Amended planning commission bylaws to include ad-hoc road commission member

2014

The Board of Commissioners appointed a 13-member Groundwater Task Force to oversee the county's groundwater initiatives.

The Spoonville Trail project to connect the M-231 non-motorized bridge segment was contested by Crockery Township residents concerned about its proximity to the Spoonville Gun Club. Some farmers also wanted fences installed so trail users wouldn't disturb their cattle. The trail was rerouted due to MDOT considering an I-96/M-231 interchange. This required project reengineering and applying for MDNR grants for the updated route. The planning commission was informed the non-motorized bridge segment would be named the Henry E. Plant Memorial Pathway after the Civil War hero and Medal of Honor recipient from Nunica.

2014 Important Items

- Groundwater Task Force appointed by Board of Commissioners

2015

To celebrate the completion of the Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project, both the Ottawa County and Hudsonville Planning Commissions featured a joint planning commission meeting on May 20, 2015.

The planning commission also discussed the potential agriculture technology incubator. The department received additional economic development staff to administer the incubator and the brownfield redevelopment authority.

The planning commission also forwarded a motion to waive all local government rezoning reviews. The commission would still review local government's master plan documents.

2015 Important Items

- Ottawa County Urban Smart Growth Demonstration Project Completion
- Ottawa County entered Remonumentation maintenance phase
- Planning commission waived local government zoning review requirement

2016

The planning commission discussed updating Ottawa County's Development Plan (last document was created in 1992 and updated in 2008).

The planning commission first discussed the West Michigan Pike Historical project, as pike markers were found along forgotten segments of the route.

2016 Important Items

- Phase II of Ottawa County Water Resource Study began
- Spoonville Trail Phase I completed

2017

The planning commission passed a resolution supporting the southern portion (Phase II) of M-231. The commission discussed how local units of government would need to amend their master plans to reflect the route.

Complaints of the Spoonville Trail Phase II complicated the trail's construction along Leonard Road, requiring the trail segment to be reengineered to pass through the Terra Verde Golf Course instead. This delayed the project and extended the construction timeframe.

2017 Important Items

- Resolution of support for M-231 Phase II
- The Ottawa County Agricultural Preservation Board hosts first "Farms are the Tapas" promotional event on September 17, 2017

2018

The planning commission discussed various broadband internet opportunities, as a survey conducted in Tallmadge Township identified areas of need within the county.

Phase II of the MSU Water Resource Study was made available and the development of a specialized Groundwater Commission was discussed.

2018 Important Items

- Phase II MSU Water Resource Study

2019

The planning commission passed a resolution opposing the Grand River Waterway proposal which would dredge the Grand River between Fulton Street in Grand Rapids and the Bass River State Recreation Area. The commission cited the damage to fish and wildlife habitats along with recurring costs that were unaccounted for in the study as reasons to oppose the project.

Staff also informed the planning commission that 10 townships had passed resolutions of support for the PDR farmland preservation program.

2019 Important Items

- Resolution of opposition for Grand River Waterway dredging project
- Ottawa County Groundwater Proactive Strategies Index

2020

On September 28, 2020, the planning commission voted to dissolve the body, approving a resolution repealing its 1989 establishing ordinance. Reasons for the body's dissolution were increased planning capacity in local units of government, improving efficiency in county government, and positioning the county to better address the increasingly-complex challenges associated with regional land use in the twenty-first century.

2020 Important Items

- Resolution to repeal the 1989 ordinance establishing the commission, dissolving the Ottawa County Planning Commission