

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Comstock Charter Township

March 2019



Public Participation Goals & Objectives

Comstock Charter Township will continue to involve the entire community as key stakeholders in the future development of the Township.

The Township will...

- **Seek broad identification and representative involvement of all residents of the community.**
The diverse characteristics and needs of the residents require different communication and outreach activities.
- **Utilize effective and equitable avenues for distributing information and receiving comments.**
There are many techniques and mechanisms available to ensure that a diverse public is well-informed and able to play a role in the planning process. The special communication needs of the public will be considered in selecting the best approaches to accomplish this goal.
- **Provide educational materials and design participation initiatives that will support and encourage effective participation.**
Effective participation in the decision-making process requires an understanding of land-use issues and the framework for making local decisions. Planning professionals and officials need to be well-versed in and employ techniques that optimize public understanding of issues and concepts.
- **Solicit public participation in each phase of the master planning process.**
Throughout the multiple phases of the master planning process, extensive participation elements are incorporated to foster public participation. There are many opportunities for the public to play a role in shaping short- and long-term needs solutions.
- **Maintain and develop staff expertise in all aspects of participation.**
This includes techniques for bridging language, cultural and economic differences that affect participation, ways to convey issues and information in meaningful ways to various cultural groups and for ensuring equitable representation for all segments of the population and sectors of the economy.
- **Support and encourage continuous improvement in the methods used to meet the public need for information and involvement.**
Public information and involvement methods are continually evolving. The Township is committed to seeking new and innovative ways to engage and keep the public involved throughout the planning process.
- **Record results of public engagement and recount these results back to the public to the extent feasible.**
To properly capture the concerns, priorities and vision of the public, the Township will develop a system to track the various mechanisms of public input. To maintain transparency and consistency, the Township will develop a method for sharing public participation results with the public.

State and Local Regulations

Comstock Charter Township recognizes the following state and local regulations that address public involvement.

- Comstock Charter Township Ordinances.
- Michigan Open Meetings Act.
- Michigan Planning Enabling Act.
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act.
- Recodified Tax Increment Financing Act.
- Plant Rehabilitation and Industrial Development Districts Act.
- Other applicable local, state and federal regulations.

Key Stakeholders in Comstock Charter Township

In Comstock Charter Township, each project will be evaluated on an individual basis to ensure inclusion for all stakeholders in the community. Stakeholders will vary according to the project being reviewed and its location. Possible stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Local residents.
- Neighboring jurisdictions.
- Emergency personnel.
- Commercial business owners.
- Neighborhood organizations.
- Township Boards and Commissions.
- School administrators and teachers.
- Comstock Community Center.
- Comstock Library.
- Road agencies.
- Commercial property owners.
- Industries located in the Township.
- Senior groups.
- Recreational users.
- Churches.
- Utility providers.
- Visitors.
- Real estate professionals.

Development Review Bodies

This section describes the reviewing bodies involved in land use planning and zoning decisions in Comstock Township. Agendas and meeting dates and times of the below described boards and others can be found on the Township webpage at: <http://www.comstockmi.gov> under the Boards tab.

Township Board

The Comstock Charter Township Board is comprised of 7 members. The Supervisor, Clerk, Treasurer and 4 Trustees. All Township Board positions are voted in by the registered voters of Comstock Township. For ordinance changes, rezonings and master plan amendments, the Township Board is the final approving body. Full terms are 4 years in length.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission is a 7 member body including one Township Board member serving as an ex officio member with full voting rights. All members, other than the Township Board member, are appointed by the Township Supervisor with approval of the Township Board. Full terms are 3 years.

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

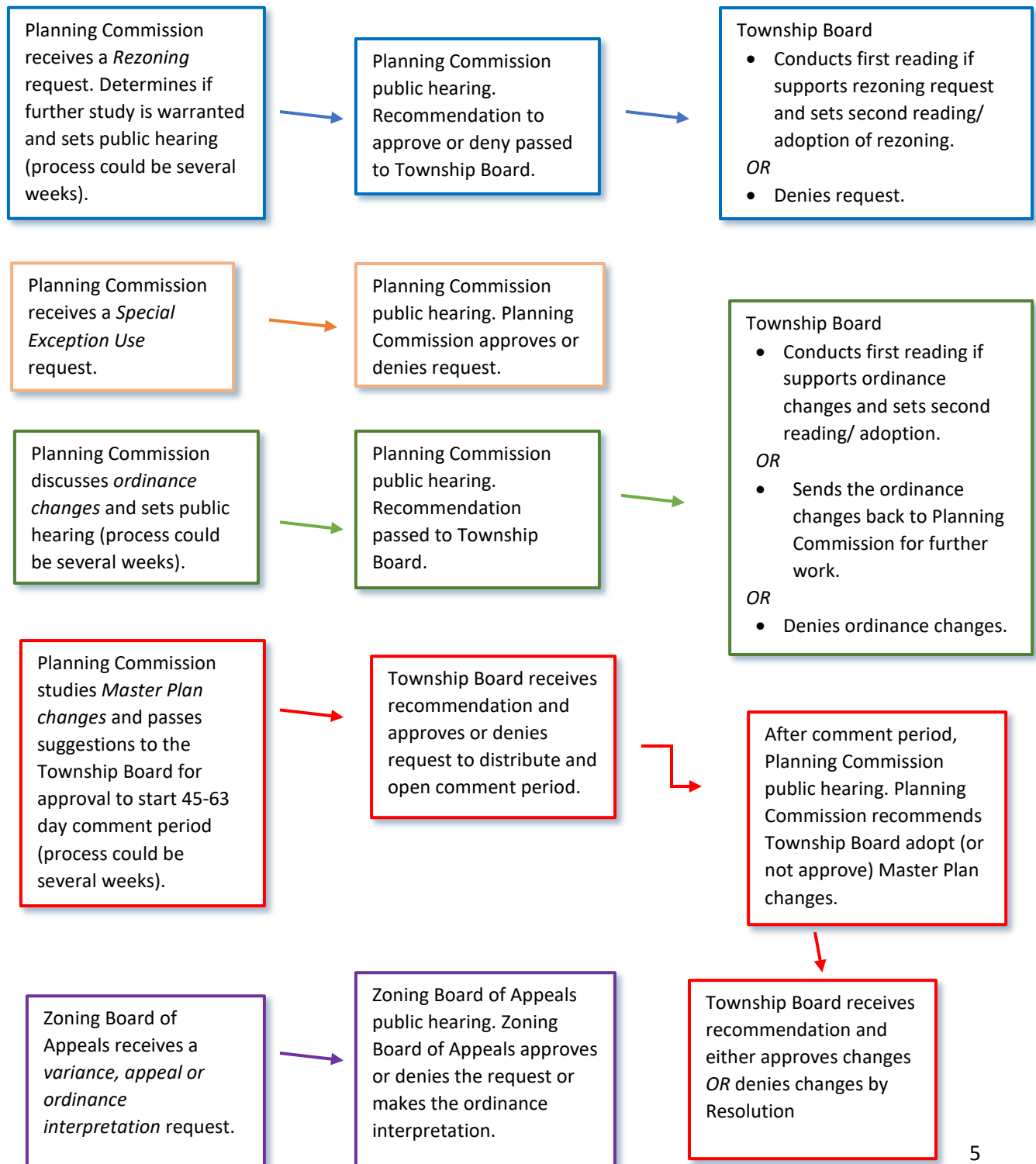
The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) has 5 regular members and 2 alternate members. One regular member is also a member of the Planning Commission. A Township Board member may serve as one of the 5 regular members. All members are appointed by the Township Board. A member of the ZBA who is also a member of the Planning Commission or Township Board cannot participate in a public hearing on or vote on the same matter that the member voted on as a member of the other body. Full terms are 3 years.

The Township encourages resident participation in local government planning and policy decisions. All residents are invited to apply for appointment to Township boards and commissions.

Applications are accepted all year long with appointments to open positions made in the fall or earlier in the year if an opening occurs. Applications may be found at: www.comstockmi.gov under the resources and applications tabs.

Processes for Development

There are various times in the planning process when the Township Board, Planning Commission and/or the Zoning Board of Appeals request public input. These processes include public hearings for the rezoning of land, development of Zoning Ordinances, the Master Plan, special exception use requests, variances, appeals and interpretation requests. The flow chart below depicts the processes.



Open Meetings

All meetings of the Township Board, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and the other various boards and commissions shall be open to the public in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, PA 267 of 1976, as amended, except for closed meetings as provided for in the Act. In accordance with the Act, public notices for these meetings are printed in the paper, posted at the Township Hall and are also included on the Township web page.

The following processes require that owners and occupants within 300 feet of a property are personally notified by regular mail.

- Rezoning of property.
- Special Exception Uses.
- Variance requests.

Statutes require these processes be noticed in a newspaper of general circulation in the Township (Kalamazoo Gazette) as well as mailed to owners and occupants within 300 feet at least 15 days prior to the meeting. All meetings are held in a facility accessible to persons with disabilities and the Township will provide reasonable accommodations. Individuals with disabilities requiring reasonable accommodations or services should contact the Township Clerk.

Methods of Community Participation

Each project's initial evaluation will determine the necessary level of involvement for the project. The following are methods that may be used to reach appropriate levels of public participation when taking action on land use planning or development applications. The Township will always attempt to use multiple tools or methods, depending on the specific project and target audience. This list is flexible and can change based upon each project's circumstance.

Inform – provide information and assist public understanding

- **Website** www.comstockmi.gov announces meetings, posts meeting packets, agendas and minutes and contains pages or links for topics of major interest.
- **Newspaper** The Kalamazoo Gazette is the Township's newspaper. It is published daily.
- **Cable** Public Media Network broadcasts Township Board and Planning Commission meetings.
- **Facebook** Notice of Township Board, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings is provided on the Township's Facebook page.
- **Facebook Live** Township Board and Planning Commission meetings are broadcast on Facebook Live.
- **Printed postings** Available for viewing at the Township Hall and also inserted in assessing notice and tax bill envelopes.
- **Announcements** Announcements during meetings of the Township Board and other boards and commissions.
- **Press Releases and Articles** At various times, the Township will issue press releases and information for articles to various news outlets including The Communicator (published quarterly).
- **Email** Interested parties may sign up via the web page to receive notice of meeting agendas.

Consult – obtain feedback

- **Social media** The Township uses Facebook and Nixle to announce street closures, weather-related alerts and for other announcements.
- **Surveys** The Township utilizes online and paper surveys to collect large amounts of data and opinions from the public on specific topics.
- **Public hearings** Public attendance at meetings is strongly encouraged and allows for an appropriate venue for public input.

Involve – work directly with public throughout the process

- **Open houses** To create two-way communication, the Township will host open house events for projects and initiatives as needed.
- **Workshops** Issues that require community feedback can benefit from a noticed workshop facilitated by Township staff or outside consultants/specialists.
- **Charrettes** Multiple day design charrettes and information gathering sessions facilitated by design consultants allow a larger group of people to participate in the community engagement activity.

Collaborate – partner with public in each aspect of decision making

- **Advisory Committees** Advisory committees for specific aspects of the community to enhance collaboration between Township Staff, the Administrative team and the public.
- **Focus Groups** Bringing together stakeholders to discuss and brainstorm decision making options.

Communicating Results

The Township will publicly communicate all results of community input on planning and development issues. The Township will utilize one or more of the **'Inform'** methods to relay results back to the public.

Updating the Public Participation Plan

Like all documents, the Township understands that this Public Participation Plan will need to be reviewed and updated on a routine basis. This plan will be updated as needed, at a minimum, every 5 years in conjunction with the Master Plan. Updates to this plan will be drafted by Township staff, reviewed and edited by the Planning Commission with a recommendation to the Township Board for approval. At least one public hearing will be held during the update by the Planning Commission to solicit new ideas and feedback.