

**Highland Township Planning Commission  
Record of the 1426<sup>h</sup> Meeting  
Highland Township Auditorium  
March 6, 2025**

***Roll Call:***

Kevin Curtis, Chairman  
Grant Charlick  
Chris Heyn  
Mike O’Leary  
Roscoe Smith  
Scott Temple (absent)  
Russ Tierney  
Guy York  
Michael Zeolla

***Also Present:***

Elizabeth J. Corwin, Planning Director

Visitors: 3

Chairman Curtis called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

**Agenda Item #1: Call to the Public: Opportunity for anyone to bring forward issues of interest or concern for Planning Commission consideration. Each participant limited to 3 minutes.**

No public comment was offered.

**Agenda Item #2:**

Parcel #            11-02-300-017, -018, -019  
Zoning:            ARR, Agriculture and Rural Residential District  
Address:           1215 White Lake Road  
File#:              PLU25-0010  
Request:           Temporary Land Use for Farm Market Event  
Applicant:        Ronald Bonadeo, Bonadeo Farms  
Owner:             Ronald Bonadeo

Mr. Bonadeo explained that he is seeking permission to allow a one-day yoga event on May 17, 2025, at Bonadeo Farms. The event will be low-key, with 100 or less participants because that is what the barn has been rated for occupancy by the Fire Marshal and Building Official. There will be a food truck on site for lunch and perhaps one or two small tents for shelter outside the barn.

Ms. Corwin explained that Bonadeo Farms works under the terms of a Special Use Permit approved in 2014. Mr. Bonadeo is allowed events at the site, but only between October and December 31 of each year. Other events require a permit approved under the ordinance. Staff has determined that the appropriate body to approve such permits outside of the October to December window is the Planning Commission.

Ms. Corwin has discussed the operational plan with Ms. Ali Long, the operator Sunny Side Wellness who is leasing the use of the Farm Market venue for the day. Participants will park in the parking area on the west end of the site, with parking attendants overseeing traffic movements, and most of the activity for the day will take place in and around the barn. She is proposing to offer lunch from the Blue Pearl food truck, which is open only to participants of the retreat, and not to draw traffic from the adjacent areas. The hours of the operation are 9:00 to 6:00. Dinner is not offered. There will be small breakout groups, which may use tents if the weather suggests with small karaoke type systems for the leader to be heard among the group. There will be no amplified sound system broadcasting across the whole of the site. The operator is also renting porta potties for the day.

This retreat was held at a different, unvetted venue in 2023. There were no complaints, but the property owner was notified that this was an unlawful use of his land and could not be repeated without the proper review process. There have been no complaints about Bonadeo Farms events in the past either.

Mr. Charlick noted that this event seems appropriate for the site and that the text amendments to be discussed later this evening would allow for such events. He appreciated Mr. Bonadeo's investment in the community and he liked the event proposal.

Mr. Tierney moved to approve the request as presented in the application for a one-day wellness retreat on May 17, 2025, at Bonadeo Farms at 1215 White Lake Road. Mr. Charlick supported the motion.

Mr. Smith asked if the nature of the event was consistent with the agricultural activity approved on the site under agri-tourism. Ms. Corwin noted that if this event were proposed on any other agriculturally zoned property, it would require that applicant apply first for a Class C Farm Market. This event permit is a sub permit under the Special Use Permit, as allowed by the existing Farm Market permit. The reason it must come to the Planning Commission is that it falls outside the calendar parameters under which staff can approve a sub-permit administratively. The Wellness Retreat is deemed consistent since it relies on the natural setting to achieve its goals. The goals of the organizer suggest this retreat could not be effective in the industrial or commercial setting.

Mr. Curtis called for a vote. Roll call vote: Charlick -yes; O'Leary – yes; Zeolla – yes; Heyn – yes; Curtis – yes; York - yes; Smith – yes; Tierney – yes. Motion carries (8 yes, 0 no)

**Agenda Item #3:** Zoning Ordinance discussions- Farm Markets, Food Trucks, Commercial and Recreation Vehicles, Storage Containers as Accessory Structures and others as may be presented

Ms. Corwin explained that she had drafted actual ordinance language in proper format for adoption based on recent discussions. There are three separate ordinances so that the Planning Commission could have flexibility to advance some of the language to public hearing for some topics and hold back others if they are not ready.

The first ordinance is proposed Z-034 addressing changes to Farm Markets. The language acknowledges under Class C Farm Market, it may be appropriate for some parcels to allow other activities besides pumpkin sales, hayrides, corn mazes and other such activities. While some activities might not have a direct connection to agricultural activity, allowing such events would provide an additional source of revenue to the farmer. These activities are secondary to farming. It would not be allowed as a principal or accessory use on a property that is not an active farm.

If there is an active farm, the property owner can seek this Special Land Use Permit. The Planning Commission would consider the physical features of the land—topography, vegetative cover, adequate

physical separation from adjacent neighbors to buffer and mitigate from negative consequences such as light, noise, and the like.

Mr. Tierney noted that the farm would have to be able to accommodate off street parking and safe and convenient access from the street.

Ms. Corwin went on to explain that this simply opens the door to reviewing the property characteristics and proposal. The Planning Commission could apply conditions to any approval such as the frequency of events, the allowable attendance of events, hours of operation, or even the seasons when events are permissible.

Ms. Corwin noted that while the Right to Farm Act protects farming operations from nuisance complaints, it does not shield the operator in these events. The operator would have to present a solid proposal to show how the event will be operated without creating a nuisance.

Mr. Charlick noted that the ordinance seems well written. He appreciated that the ordinance has backed off such characteristics of land such as lot sizes and specific access. He thinks it is crafted so that an event venue can evolve onto the site, since the Planning Commission can impose limitations until an operator proves himself. He believes it will work to meet a community need for some properties—not every agricultural property.

Mr. Tierney asked about the regulations around food trucks in the ordinance. He thought it was important that the specific location of food trucks must be identified so the Fire Marshal would have an opportunity to review.

Ms. Corwin explained the general permitting scheme. The Class C Farm Market Special Use permit comes first. This established the general framework under which events could take place and act as a site plan. Then there would be an annual permit filed with staff for any venue intending to have events during the year. This would allow for onsite inspections and a review of the history of the site and complaints. Then for each event, there will be a simple form the property owner, with the event promoter would file with emergency contact information and a check list of things that are important for staff and public safety personnel to be aware of.

Mr. Tierney asked who would be responsible for applying for the permits. He believed strongly that the permit should go to the landowner. Ms. Corwin agreed, noting the Special Permit is in the landowner's name and the individual event form, needs to identify who is responsible for each event as it is planned.

Mr. Charlick thinks this ordinance is important that we can establish a baseline for property owners who are working under a presumed "grandfather" provision, so we can keep track of and bring existing operators into compliance. He would not want to stop an existing operation, but they cannot be allowed to grow forever in ways that we do not even allow in the ordinance.

Mr. Tierney asked about whether a Farm Market could allow a different food truck every week, with no notice to the Township. Ms. Corwin explained that the ordinance is written that the event comes first and that food trucks are only allowed during an event as acknowledged on a permit.

Mr. York asked about the language, specifically the title discussing Class C Farm Market, while other types of Farm Markets are discussed. Ms. Corwin noted that the only changes that address Class A and B markets are in place to clarify that such regulations do not apply to Class C Farm Market. The amendments do not allow anything new or require anything less under Market Class A or B, but rather clarify rules that apply to Market Class C.

Ms. Corwin turned the attention to Ordinance Amendment Z-035 which deals with food trucks. The ordinance would now include a definition of food truck. Changes under Section 4.16 alters the permitting scheme under which a food truck may operate. Under the current ordinance, food trucks are treated as other temporary land uses, except if the installation exceeds 180 days, the site must first have a site plan with developed improvements. Under the proposal, food trucks can only operate as an element of a permit for an event, such as a church festival, sidewalk sales days, or a DDA sponsored event. The proposal also moves the language that currently resides in the district specific language for Highland Station District to Article 10, Supplemental Use Provisions to apply to food trucks in any location as part of an event. This eliminates the option of a stand-alone permit for a food truck, which would now be allowed only as a vendor at a sponsored event. The other possibility is as part of an event at a Class C Farm Market as just discussed under proposed Ordinance Amendment Z-034.

Mr. Charlick asked that the language under the Farm Market be reviewed again to ensure that Food Trucks are clearly limited to events at the Farm Market and not as part of their day-to-day operations.

Mr. Charlick thought we could eliminate 10.35.G which limits the hours of operation, since it would be tied to the event.

Ms. Corwin noted that food trucks would no longer present themselves individually to the Planning Commission for any review, although events may be required to apply for review. An event would specify where the food truck(s) would be parked, but not necessarily what food trucks would be there. After the first year of the event, subsequent events could be approved by staff if there are not significant changes. As an example, each time the HDDA Farmer Market has relocated, it has been presented for review to the Planning Commission. But any given week of the market, the vendors are different.

Mr. Charlick remains concerned about the length of time an outdoor promotional sales event is allowed for commercial properties. Ms. Corwin suggested that this is part of a different ordinance, and that such events do come to the Planning Commission for review. She noted that this is part of Article 8, and she could not recall why such a long period of time is permissible. The only such event she can recall in the past is part of the Sav-A-Lot plaza which was a weekend festival and was approved by the Planning Commission.

Mr. York noted that we should address 10.35.H which prohibits alcohol sales as well, since there may be opportunities such as a church festival where alcoholic sales are desired. If the rule is in place, the applicant must seek an exception to the rule. Ms. Corwin thought it is harder to appeal a hard written rule with an exception. She suggested to add a phrase that would allow alcohol sales *if explicitly approved* as part of the event. The organizers are then on notice they must include alcoholic sales in their proposal to the Planning Commission. She would lift the language from Z-034 regarding mobile bartenders.

Mr. York posited there may be little reason to have a month-long event, except perhaps for something significant like a bicentennial celebration. Mr. Zeolla suggested the language could have a default position, such as events can last up to three consecutive days unless otherwise approved, which would put the organizers on notice that the typical event is only three days.

Mr. Tierney suggested we eliminate subsection 10.35G that discusses hours of operation. She reminded the Planning Commissioners that these rules apply to the food truck and not the event. Mr. Zeolla agreed since there is no reason to expect food trucks to either shut down before the event is closed for the evening or expect to remain open after the event is closed to the public.

Ms. Corwin suggested subsection H would be rewritten to read "H. Alcohol sales from a mobile bartender or caterer may be approved as part of an event, subject to the rules of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission." Mr. Heyn was concerned that the owner of the property must be party to the permit. Ms.

Corwin explained that there are only a limited set of circumstances where food trucks are permitted, and each of these festival or event settings will require a permit issued to the property owner.

Mr. Charlick noted that it is always necessary to have the property owner party to the permit, since an applicant without property ownership might make promises that can't be enforced. Ms. Corwin noted that this can be handled administratively. Mr. York thought this could be clarified by adding a phrase to Section 4.16 subsection 2 to read "Food trucks may be allowed under the land use permit issue for and event under the following circumstances:". This provision would clearly tie the allowance of the food truck to the land and therefore to the property owner.

Ms. Corwin next turned to Z-036, the ordinance amendment dealing with parking and storage of commercial and recreational vehicles on residential properties. She noted that she had included the full text of the definitions of recreational and commercial vehicles, although there are no changes proposed, so that the full text would be there for review. Mr. Curtis noted that he recalls the issue left hanging at the last meeting was how to deal with commercial and recreational vehicles in the ARR and R3 Zoning Districts. Ms. Corwin noted that the ordinance language is reordered slightly since December.

Mr. Tierney asked for clarification of storage containers, which are another component of this ordinance amendment. Mr. Charlick explained that the ordinance differentiates between containers that are simply stored on an industrial site, and those modified for use as a structure. There will be no new requirement to paint storage containers that are simply onsite in approved outdoor storage yards in the IM Zoning District.

Mr. Charlick remarked that the parking ordinance amendment is clearly very complicated. He would like to make small incremental changes to the ordinance and observe how it plays out. He noted it is difficult to roll back liberal provisions of the ordinance if there are unforeseen consequences. He noted that different property owners have different tolerances for what they are willing to see in their neighborhoods and there are so many variables in play.

Mr. Curtis thought it was important to make some amendment, to acknowledge that there are already so many commercial vehicles used as daily drivers in the township.

Ms. Corwin noted one concern she has is that there are no definitions of heavy equipment. Portable construction equipment such as graders and excavators are technically vehicles, although not ones that should be expected to be parked in a residential driveway. Mr. Zeolla suggested maybe the definition of commercial vehicle could include vehicles that are sold to the general public but can be used commercially. As examples, he mentioned Ford Transit, Chevy Express or Ram ProMaster. These are commercial vehicles that an individual might own and operate as a personal vehicle. Mr. Charlick noted you can find almost anything you want, including backhoes on Facebook marketplace. Ms. Corwin thought that definition would be indefensible.

Mr. Heyn thought that given that Highland Township is home to many small businesses, placing a limit of two commercial vehicles on a lot negatively and unnecessarily impacts many property owners. Ms. Corwin explained that the ordinance clearly states that not every business may be run from a home, and that only vehicles customarily associated with residential use should be parked and stored on residential lots. A business that relies on fleets of vehicles and employees that come to and from the site probably does not qualify as a home business. Mr. Heyn reminded the Planning Commission that the ordinance was recently amended to allow home businesses to have two employees plus any residents from the household, which would presumably include their work vehicles.

Mr. Charlick reiterated his concern that the ordinance should take an incremental approach. There are not a lot of complaints concerning large lots, so it might not be necessary to change the status quo.

Mr. York took exception to the idea that we should not weigh the fact that no one is complaining too heavily in our ordinance drafting. People may be afraid to complain. The Planning Commission should never assume that if there are no formal complaints, that there are no objections to a behavior or activity. He described several violations in his own neighborhood, but notes that no one in the subdivision turn in complaints. There is no organized association in his neighborhood, so he is left with little recourse unless he complains to the township. Most people just live with the objectionable condition.

Mr. Tierney noted that the ordinances should allow as much freedom as possible, provided people do not behave in ways to abuse the privilege. Mr. York agreed except that there should be clear standards. A business that has grown to include five pieces of equipment should be leasing a space in industrial zoning, not basing their business from a residential neighborhood just to avoid the expense.

Mr. York wondered if there could be a case for the township to own a parcel that allows storage space at a reduced rate to support growing businesses.

Mr. Zeolla suggested a two vehicle per lot standard, with a sliding scale to allow additional vehicles per acre. Mr. York agreed that larger lots should be allowed more vehicles, especially if the vehicles were shielded from view.

Ms. Corwin explained that the Milford Township Ordinance allows vehicles to park for up to two days subject to some criteria and allow others to be stored or parked behind the principal building. Their ordinance addresses equipment like backhoes and bobcats. She noted other ordinances even include airplanes as vehicles, which highlights the concern that people could stretch definitions to include almost anything on two wheels.

Ms. Corwin cautioned the group to consider that once the vehicles are stored fully shielded from view, the code enforcement staff cannot see them either, so it is pointless to cap the number. The township may have to revisit the blight ordinance and consider how to safeguard against vehicle “parking and storage” giving way to abandoned vehicles that create environmental and safety hazards.

Mr. Zeolla suggested there should be 200-foot setbacks for storage from all property lines. Mr. Tierney was concerned that this was too large a setback for most properties. Mr. Curtis noted that environmental concerns were valid, and that the storage should be clear of wetlands and ponds too.

Ms. Corwin reported that she had discussed the history of complaints regarding commercial and recreational vehicle parking. She said that these complaints are infrequent, often dealing with utility workers who park their large trucks with lifts at home when they are on call.

Ms. Corwin summarized what she heard needed to be clarified in the ordinance amendments: 1) equipment should be defined as distinct from vehicles and prohibited from parking/storage in front yards; 2) exempt farm equipment on working farms; 3) allow some commercial/recreational vehicle parking in front yards and more screened from view 4) a differentiation between “storage” and “parking”.

Mr. York thought it might be appropriate to allow a 48-hour exemption for all equipment. Mr. Charlick thought a more appropriate standard might be “plated and insured”. Ms. Corwin noted that this is already in the blight and nuisance ordinance.

Mr. Charlick noted that the definition of commercial vehicles needs to be refined. Box trucks, vans and crew cabs should be allowed on any lot. But semi-tractors and trailers are also defined as a commercial vehicle. He also noted the difficulty of whether a truck and trailer with a backhoe on the trailer constitutes one commercial or three commercial vehicles. Staff does not even agree on how to count such combinations. Mr. Tierney suggested using gross vehicle weight (GVWR). Ms. Corwin said that is trickier

to enforce than you might think. Mr. Charlick reminded the commissioners that not every enforcement officer is going to be able to differentiate between a 10,000 GVW vehicle and a 15,000 GVWR vehicle. The standard should be something simpler to administer, such as height and length, since it is the bulk of the vehicle that causes aggravation to neighbors.

Ms. Corwin noted that some ordinances limit commercial vehicles in front yards to eight-foot height and twenty-foot length, with or without lettering.

Mr. York offered some editorial comments as well, striking some duplicative provisions and modifying the provisions about living in stored recreational vehicles.

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to move ordinance amendments Z-034 and Z-035 forward with minor corrections to public hearing and table ordinance amendment Z-036 to a later date. Mr. Zeolla supported the motion.

Mr. Charlick amended the motion to include a hearing date of April 3, 2025. Mr. Zeolla supported the amendment.

Mr. Curtis called for a vote. Roll call vote: Charlick -yes; O'Leary – yes; Zeolla – yes; Heyn – yes; Curtis – yes; York - yes; Smith – yes; Tierney – yes. Motion carries (8 yes, 0 no).

**Agenda Item #4:** Committee Updates

- Zoning Board of Appeals:
- Township Board:
- Highland Downtown Development Authority:
- Planning Director's Update

Committee liaisons reported on the activities of their respective organizations.

**Agenda Item #5:** Minutes: February 6, 2025, and February 6, 2025, Joint Meeting with Boards

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to approve the minutes of both February meetings as presented. Mr. Heyn supported the motion which was approved by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

***Adjournment:***

Mr. Charlick moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m. Mr. Tierney supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote. (all ayes, no nays)

Respectfully submitted,

A. Roscoe Smith, Secretary  
ARS/ejc