

**Highland Township Planning Commission
Record of the 1444th Meeting
Highland Township Auditorium
May 7, 2026**

Roll Call:

Kevin Curtis, Chairman
Grant Charlick
Chris Heyn
Mary Ray
Roscoe Smith
Scott Temple
Russ Tierney
Guy York
Michael Zeolla

Also Present:

Elizabeth Corwin, Planning Director

Visitors: 2

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 offered.

Work Session:

Agenda Item #2:

Parcel # 11-22-176-010
Zoning: IM, Industrial and Manufacturing Zoning District
Address: 958 N Milford
File #: SPR 26-02
Request: Site Plan Review for Highland Treatment site expansion
Applicant: J&J of Highland, LLC
Owner: J&J of Highland, LLC

Chairman Curtis introduced the request for a site plan expansion to a parcel just north of the existing Highland Treatment facility at 958 North Milford, parcel 11-22-176-010. Ms. Corwin explained that the project involves modification of an existing house on the parcel to the north to provide records storage, demolition of outbuildings and the septic system, and the addition of a new pole barn. The Zoning Board of Appeals heard a request for a side yard variance of 10 feet for the north property line on May 6, 2026 and had denied the request. The applicant provided a sketch showing the barn moved south to the setback line. Ms. Corwin had accepted the sketch and advised the applicant to wait until the Planning Commission provides feedback on the layout to refine the entire sheet set. Mr. Temple asked why the variance had been denied. Mr. Zeolla explained there were alternatives that did not require a variance. Mr. Temple suggested that the ordinance should be reconsidered.

Ms. Corwin noted that this site has always been meticulously maintained and has attractive landscaping and functions well. The site details, such as lighting, landscaping and drainage facilities will follow the patterns already established in the existing site.

Mr. Brad Thompson, of BF Thompson, PC (site designer) and Mrs. Julia Dowson (property owner) were present to answer questions. He explained that the existing house will be equipped with overhead doors and converted to records storage, with a new concrete slab floor. The outbuildings were too dilapidated to serve any good purpose for the business and will be demolished. The proposed pole barn is for company vehicles for secure overnight storage. He noted that the existing one-way traffic pattern around the combined site will continue as before, except that the new driveway will be restricted to those turning northbound, while the existing driveway will provide for those turning southbound.

Mr. Thompson went on to explain that the site was originally developed in 1994. The drainage basins had been well maintained over the years and need only have an accumulation of silt removed to restore the original drainage volume. The basins will be extended to accommodate the new impervious surfaces. There has never been water standing on the site.

Mr. Charlick noted that the landscaping has always looked good and he trusts the new addition will also be well cared for. He believes this business reflects well on the community. He noted the sidewalk will be extended to the north property line, which appears to be a vacant house. Since the non-conforming use has lapsed, he is satisfied that the property to the north will be developed for commercial purposes and no longer serve as a residence. He is not overly concerned about screening. He asked if the fencing between those sites is existing. Mr. Thompson explained the chain link fence will be removed and replaced with six-foot high privacy fence, similar to the fence along the east property line.

Mr. Zeolla asked if the gate across the exit could be angled to provide more than an 18 foot drive to the storage at the remodeled house. Mr. Thompson explained the site constraints. Mr. Charlick noted that the public will not be given access to that paved area. Mr. Thompson noted that only golf cart traffic is expected on that driveway.

Mr. Zeolla asked if the lots would be combined. Mr. Thompson stated that the lots will be combined upon site plan approval and development.

Mr. Charlick asked about the engineering review and approval. Ms. Corwin noted that she has discussed the concepts with the Township Engineer and has reviewed the design with Mr. Thompson and is confident it is acceptable.

Mr. York verified that there is no plumbing in the proposed pole barn, but that there will be electricity. The purpose is for storage, and not necessarily for vehicle maintenance although some minor maintenance might happen there. He affirmed Mr. Thompson for a complete plan set and well considered site design.

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to approve the site plan for site plan amendment and expansion for Highland Treatment at 958 North Milford, Parcel 11-22-176-010 of the site plan upon incorporation of the relocated pole barn per the sketch presented at the Planning Commission table and authorizing staff to provide final administrative approval. Mr. Zeolla supported the motion. Roll call vote: Charlick - yes; Curtis – yes; Heyn – yes; Ray – yes; Temple – yes; Tierney – yes; Smith – yes; York – yes; Zeolla – yes. Motion carries (9 yes votes, 0 no votes.)

Agenda Item #3: General Discussion, Capital Improvement Plan

Chairman Curtis opened the agenda item for discussion among the Planning Commissioners.

Ms. Corwin provided an overview of the process and findings of the leadership team in developing the draft capital improvements plan. The plan includes projects that are in the active planning phase for the next two years, and some more “wish list” items that are farther out in implementation but represent priorities for the current administration based on current revenue projections and reasonable expectations about other fundings sources such as grants, bond sales or partnerships and millage renewals and requests.

Ms. Corwin explained some of the funding source descriptions. She identified categories including the Water System, Police and Fire Departments that are considered “enterprise funds” which are intended to be self-supporting with little or no support from the general fund. Enterprise funds derive revenue from millages or user rates. The general fund, on the other hand, derives revenue from property taxes and state shared revenues. She noted that elections is always a large budget item. There is expected to be a savings in the future through reduction in the number of precincts.

Mr. Temple asked about the 7.5 million dollars identified for watermain projects. Ms. Corwin explained that the Huron Valley School District will cover the costs of the South Milford Watermain project, which is primarily intended to serve the needs of their campus at Watkins Boulevard given the construction of the new middle school. The project has been proposed for Congressionally Directed Appropriations, which would offset some of the costs, but that funding is uncertain.

The remainder is for the Harvey Lake Road project, which is critical for strengthening the water system and particularly for providing a redundant supply and better pressures in parts of Axford Acres. The extension has been identified as priority for many years in the Water System Master Plan. This will also provide service to the proposed Timberland Estates subdivision and Spring Mills elementary school and allow for a robust connection to the future wells at the Levy Corporation site. She noted that although infrastructure is sometimes extended using Special Assessment Districts, where the benefitting properties pay for the capital improvements through a levy on their taxes, in this case the benefits accrue to all users of the system, so the debt would be retired through user rates.

As some of the Planning Commission members were unfamiliar with the terms of the mining agreement, Ms. Corwin briefly reviewed the reclamation plan and sanitary sewer master plan. Ms. Corwin noted that the mining permit expires in 2032, and that Levy expects to complete the operations at the site ahead of schedule.

Mr. York asked how the Board determines how much effort to extend in seeking grant funding. Ms. Corwin explained that grant funding generally comes with additional project demands for meeting the funder’s priorities and procedures. For instance, in the case of an infrastructure project, like watermain, the recipient is obligated to audit payrolls for compliance with Davis-Bacon wage rates, buy American, and adopt certain specifications that might exceed what a locally funded project would require. Mr. Charlick noted that this limits the pool of contractors willing to bid on a project and effectively bars many local businesses from the process. There are also often long-term obligations on the recipient, such as ongoing reporting and maintenance. In addition, the community generally has to “buy-in” to the project, offering matching dollars or in-kind donations, so the grant seldom covers the entire cost of a project. Ms. Corwin noted that the community must weigh the added cost to the project against the grant revenue and make a case by case determination as to whether the revenue outweighs the demands of the grant. Mr. Tierney noted that some communities take the position that no grant is worth pursuing.

On the other hand, projects that are mere equipment acquisition might be perfectly well suited for grant funding. Property acquisition grants do not usually add exceptional costs to a project either. Mr. York noted that it seems our administration seems wise in determining how much energy to expend in pursuing grants.

Mr. York noted that the roads are owned and operated by agencies other than the Township and that there are mechanisms such as special assessments to finance roads. He thinks that there should be some discussion of how the Township could better support efforts to maintain and improve roads. He would hate to see all the subdivision roads in the township turn to gravel. Mr. York noted the plan includes \$75,000 per year commitment to local roads and wondered if that was sufficient. Ms. Corwin described the tri-party road agreement which allows the local government to direct some spending on local roads under a partnership with the Road Commission for Oakland County and County Board of Commissioners.

Ms. Corwin noted that some Townships have a dedicated road millage to create a revolving fund to finance improvements for special assessment districts. Highland Township can establish a special assessment district, but it does not participate in either technical support or financing improvements. Two recent special assessment districts have been approved, but those homeowner associations had to seek their own financing through a commercial bank. This is a policy direction Ms. Corwin does not believe has ever been discussed at the Township Board. Mr. Charlick noted the problem is determining which projects would be eligible for such assistance. He noted the issue is very complicated by the structure of road financing in Michigan and the fairness of making general funds available for subdivision streets, when many residents do not access subdivision streets.

Mr. Temple asked about the improvements identified for the Sheriff's department, and why the Township is covering equipment for the Sheriff. Ms. Corwin noted that the contract for the Sheriff is covered by a dedicated millage, and when a specific piece of equipment is noted, it is purchased with these enterprise funds and used only in Highland Township.

Mr. Tierney expressed concerns about how millages are presented to the voters, and how such a small portion of the population votes to approve millages.

Staff will advertise for a public hearing for June 6, 2026. The Planning Commission will provide a recommendation to the Board for their final approval.

Agenda Item #4: General Discussion, Ordinance Amendments: Definitions (various), Fences, Animals, Commercial and Recreational Vehicle Parking in Residential Districts, Data Centers

Ms. Corwin provided a packet of information that included revisions of the proposed text amendment for Commercial and Recreational Vehicles in Residential Districts, as had been discussed in previous meetings and red-marked ordinances proposed by the Zoning Administrator based on input from the Code Enforcement Officer, the Zoning Board of Appeals, public inquiries and the Supervisor's Office. The proposed changes included some simple definition changes that will have implications for how permits are processed.

Key changes proposed include limiting the special use for kennels to commercial and rescue operations, adding concrete flatwork to the definition of landscaping so that it will not be subject to the same setbacks as structures, eliminating the setback of "pens" for farm animals, especially from a home on the same parcel, modifying the regulations regarding the placement of generators to eliminate possible conflicts with the building code. This garnered considerable discussion about other restrictions on generator use to eliminate potential nuisance to neighbors.

The discussion turned to Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). Currently, the ordinance allows only ADU's in only principal structure, which include an attached garage. The redmarks are the starting point for discussion

to allow an ADU in a detached structure with a separate structure, with its one electric service, well and septic system.

Mr. Charlick noted that his concern is that these units are established with the thought of providing for a family member, but then turns into a short-term rental. Mr. York noted there should be some discussion on future change use or occupancy of an outbuilding when the use is no longer needed for extended family.

Mr. York noted that there are a lot of interesting concepts presented, although he is not confident the numbers work. This ordinance would require considerable study and discussion. The commissioners discussed how to assure the ADU remains subservient to the principal structure and do not end up creating duplexes or a second full size single-family home on a single lot.

Mr. Smith pointed out that caution is needed to ensure that an ordinance is not created to deal with an exception that then becomes a norm. Mr. York thought one approach might be to allow the detached dwelling to be more like a private living space where all the occupants of the site come together to the principal structure to share meals, laundry and the like. The ADU would be where one goes to sleep and rest.

Mr. Tierney thought that the principal in all ordinances should be to protect public safety and protect neighbors from nuisance. He thought it was appropriate to allow the second dwelling unit as long as setbacks were met and appropriate sanitary and water service was provided. Mr. Charlick noted that this is moving away from the concept of single family and into multiple family districts.

Mr. Zeolla noted that affordability is becoming a serious barrier for young people to establish their own household. Mr. Smith countered that manufactured housing is meant to provide an affordable option, and that Highland Township has three distinct manufactured housing communities. Mr. Zeolla countered that this can become a trap for a young person, as then they are burdened with trying to sell a used manufactured home when they are prepared to buy their next home.

At future meetings, the Planning Commissioners plan to discuss fencing regulations and begin a discussion about land uses such as data centers and battery storage sites. Mr. York noted that he would like to include a discussion of fencing when residential and non-residential uses abut. Ms. Corwin also noted that Mr. Smith had pointed out that corner lots on major thoroughfares may need some relief. Mr. Zeolla would like to discuss a prohibition on barbed wire fencing in all districts. Many of the commissioners disagreed, and thought that security was sufficient justification for barbed wire fencing in non-residential zones.

Agenda Item #5: 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 #6: Minutes April 16, 2026

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to approve the minutes of the April 16, 2026, Planning Commission meeting as presented. Mr. Curtis supported the motion which was approved by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

Adjournment:

Mr. Charlick moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:55 p.m. Mr. Curtis supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote. (all ayes, no nays)

Respectfully submitted,
A. Roscoe Smith, Secretary
ARS/ejc