



ADA TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES OF THE MEETING JUNE 24, 2025, SPECIAL MEETING

A special meeting of the Ada Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., at the Ada Township Hall, 7330 Thornapple River Drive, Ada, Michigan.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair VanderVennen called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Butterfield, Carter, Cooper-Surma, Ellixson-Andrews, Kluting, Moyer, VanderVennen

Members Absent: 0

Staff Present: Bajdek, Buckley, Said

Others Present: 4

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Moyer, supported by Carter, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - none

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Zoning Ordinance Update – Proposal Reviews/Interviews

a. McKenna

Hunter Whitehill presented McKenna's proposal. He introduced the project team and their qualifications, and he referenced the other community names that McKenna has worked on zoning ordinances for (in western Michigan).

Hunter went over the project timeline; project initiation in July, full draft for review in November, revisions and input, with proposed Township Board adoption by March, 2026. He said McKenna understands what Ada Township is looking for. McKenna's goal is to make the Zoning Ordinance transparent and efficient, create a product that benefits all future Zoning Ordinance users, and make appropriate adjustments for recommendations from the 2023 Master Plan.

Referring to the graphics/charts included in the presentation, Hunter explained details on the reorganization process with sections of the Zoning Ordinance and each district showing (proposed organization vs. existing), transparency and efficiency (existing uses/proposed uses), permitted land use charts, a schedule of regulations table (showing max. & mins. in lot size, area, height, width, etc.), and a Zoning District Summary chart (everything you need to see is on one page).

Hunter concluded with questions for the Township to consider; will the Zoning Ordinance stay in Municode, are there parts of the Ordinance don't want to change, and parts that definitely need to be changed.

There was a question-and-answer session amongst the Commissioners, Planning Staff and candidate regarding the scope of the project; public engagement strategies and how they are handled, and experience with other communities. In response to concerns on ensuring the drafts reviewed are legible/editable, and the consultants process if a team member leaves during the project (Township at risk of timeline, budget, etc.), it was noted that the proposal is a fixed cost, even though project team members and their specific responsibilities (content editor, graphic artists, team leader) were identified. There was also a concern mentioned that Hunter is not on the list as part of the project team.

VanderVennen inquired whether McKenna was aware of the Ada budget for the project. Hunter responded that he was not aware of Ada's budgeted amount but noted the proposal may be modified/edited for cost.

Ellixson-Andrews asked what the most challenging part of the project is and what makes McKenna the most qualified. Hunter responded that the most difficult part of a Zoning Ordinance is to think about it in its entirety and not in pieces. Hunter said that McKenna's experience is what makes them most qualified.

Carter asked for an example how McKenna handles a problem during a public engagement session. Hunter responded that people that are against something show up more than people that are for something, but they need to be heard, and that we need to listen to what people have to say.

Q&A concluded at 5:35 p.m.

b. Progressive Companies

Julie Tschirhart and Jaclyn Walker, Planners with Progressive Companies, presented their proposal. Julie shared the reasons why to choose Progressive for the Zoning Ordinance Update; history and familiarity with Ada Township (worked with Ada on Envision Ada in 2013, Connect Ada in 2020 and most recently the Master Plan in 2023), leaders in zoning strategy, prioritized and customized process, and working with their experienced multi-disciplinary team. Julie said that Progressive brings a breadth of knowledge in terms of zoning strategies, pointing out that their team being active in both state and national levels. She noted from the RFP that a big priority of Ada is translating zoning concepts and turning into a more straightforward language, as well as expanding housing choices and supply.

Jaclyn noted the familiarity Progressive has with Ada and their involvement with the previous projects. She said that Progressive's involvement with the Master Plan will directly guide them with the Zoning Ordinance Update. She noted that Progressive has attorneys on staff (including herself) and it's helpful in terms of translating legalese into normal everyday language. She went over details on Progressive's prioritize process; understand local plans and experience, zoning audit, update ordinance deliberately, to the adoption. She went over the project timeline; kickoff in July, review zone districts, maps, uses, definitions, review new chapters & edits, with document review by September, and final draft/adoption in January-March.

Julie concluded their presentation with introducing the Progressive multi-disciplinary team and

their backgrounds. She added that Ada has created a firm foundation for what is started, and they look forward to working with Ada on the Zoning Ordinance Update.

There was a question-and-answer session amongst the Commissioners, Planning Staff and candidates regarding the scope of the project; inquiry was made about the number of community engagements required compared to the Master Plan (at most two-Progressive believes more engagement is building trust), there was a concern on ensuring the drafts reviewed are legible/editable, meeting the Ada budget amount for the project, how often feedback is received during the project timeline, and identified project team members and their specific responsibilities (content editor, graphic artists, team leader).

Cooper-Surma asked what Progressive's biggest risk is. Jaclyn responded that she thinks the biggest risk is not meeting the objective by not systematically working through the document and not having enough feedback going through the process. She said Progressive has a great knowledge of the best practices in the nation, with the tools at their hands and understanding how to use them, so at the end of the day, there is a very limited amount of risk.

VanderVennen inquired whether Progressive is aware of the extended work already done by the Planning Staff and the Ada budgeted amount. Said confirmed that the RFP provided strong bullet points that stressed the amount of involvement the Planning Staff provided (the framework) and that both consultants are coming into the project with eyes wide open and aware of everything, including setting up the program and Ada's budget.

Q&A concluded at 6:14 p.m.

2. Commission Discussion/Recommendation

Said stated the desired goal tonight is to have the Planning Commission carefully consider both proposals and upon conclusion make a recommendation of one consultant to the Township Board for final approval at the July 14th board meeting.

There was extended Planning Commission discussion regarding; the consideration of the items that were specifically called out/requested in the RFP, cost/budget (Grant fund received for \$50,000 with no funds budgeted from the Township), staying within the timeframe/timeline, McKenna's thorough and perceptible presentation though justifying higher cost, consideration of Progressive's work done on the Master Plan, the project benefiting from an attorney on the project team, and overall presentation comparisons.

VanderVennen stated we have two great consulting firms, however, one cost is significantly more than the other. Carter inquired to Staffs perspective. Said stated if the Commission selects the higher bid, the challenge is justifying the cost difference to the Township Board, which would require Township funds.

Carter made note that his daughter-in-law works for Progressive Companies. He assured the Commissioners he would be fair and unbiased on the subject matter, and the Commission agreed that no conflict of interest exists.

Discussion concluded as the Commissioners compared the two consultants noting that both

proposals effectively address the items requested for the project and the Planning Commission's desired outcome.

VanderVennen moved to the Commissioners for a recommendation.

Moved by Carter, supported by Kluting, to recommend to the Township Board, approval of Progressive Companies for the consulting firm for the Ada Township Zoning Ordinance Update. Motion carried unanimously.

Carter left the meeting at 6:42 p.m.

VIII. COMMISSION MEMBER / STAFF REPORTS

Said confirmed that the next Planning Commission meeting is on July 17, 2025, and there is one item on the agenda, a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENT - none

X. ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Ellixson-Andrews, supported by Cooper-Surma, to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo DeMarco, Ada Township Clerk

rs:eb