

**Helena Township Planning Commission
Public Hearing Minutes
Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 5:00pm
8751 Helena Road, Alden, Michigan 49612**

Call to Order

The public hearing was called to order at **5:00 p.m.**

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call

Present: Dave Hunstad, Jim Gurr, Darren Whipple, Fay VandenBerg, Mike Robinson,

Not in attendance: Rachel Beswetherick, Jim Schilling

Agenda Approval

The agenda for the March 19, 2026 meeting was motioned to approve by Jim Gurr and seconded by Fay VandenBerg. Motion passed unanimously.

Conflict of Interest

The Chair called for any declarations of conflict of interest. None were stated.

Public Hearing Topic

The Chair opened the public hearing regarding proposed zoning ordinance language related to **data centers**, to be incorporated into Ordinance Section 5.09 concerning renewable energy systems, battery storage, and utility-scale facilities.

Introduction and Overview

The Planning Commission discussed the increasing concern statewide and nationally regarding large-scale or "hyperscale" data centers. Discussion included the following concerns and considerations:

- Extremely high power consumption
- Heat generation and cooling demands
- Noise and vibration impacts
- Light pollution and security requirements
- Diesel backup generators and battery storage
- Traffic and infrastructure impacts
- Potential economic benefits, including tax revenue
- Questions regarding the actual number of jobs such facilities create

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The Commission explained that the proposed language was intended to place Helena Township in a better position to regulate data centers if a proposal were ever submitted, and to ensure the Township retained as much local oversight as possible.

Commissioners and attendees discussed the structure of the ordinance language, including whether data centers should be added under existing renewable energy language or addressed in a separate section. It was noted that the draft language currently proposes adding data center language while preserving the Township's authority through the special use permit and site plan review process.

Ordinance Draft Discussion

The Commission reviewed draft language posted on the Township website. Discussion included:

- Defining "data center" within the ordinance
- Applying utility-scale review standards
- Need for clearer language related to **noise limits**, including discussion of a **55-decibel standard**
- Whether that sound threshold should be lower
- How sound would be measured and at what location
- Whether legal review would be needed before setting a stricter threshold
- Concerns that water use, groundwater withdrawal, and water contamination should be more explicitly addressed in the ordinance
- Concerns about whether the proposed language adequately fits data centers, which differ from solar, wind, and battery storage facilities

It was noted that the Township cannot simply prohibit data centers outright, but can adopt standards and conditions that maximize local review authority.

Public Comment

1. G. W. spoke in opposition to moving too quickly on the ordinance language. Key points included:

- Data centers are substantially different from renewable energy facilities and may require separate treatment

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- The Township should slow down and study best practices
- Other communities are actively debating or delaying similar ordinances
- State and federal policy, technology, and tax treatment are still evolving
- A moratorium may be a better short-term option while additional research is completed

2. L. W. spoke and raised the following questions and concerns:

- Whether Helena Township has a realistic location large enough for a hyperscale data center
- Why data centers are being included under renewable energy language when they are fundamentally different
- Whether the proposed removal and remediation language is appropriate for a structure of this scale
- The need to address **water use, water protection, and environmental impacts** more directly
- Concern that the hearing was being held during the off-season when many residents are away, and that more time should be allowed for broader public participation

Zoom/Public Comment

The Chair asked whether any members of the public attending via Zoom wished to comment. No public comments were received from Zoom attendees.

Close of Public Hearing

Public comment was closed at approximately **5:37 p.m.**

(P.S., who had been monitoring proceedings via Zoom, requested to have a concern addressed. The Chair granted his request to be heard. Query was whether the PC possessed the authority to lower decibel standards.)

Planning Commission Discussion Following Public Comment

Following public comment, the Commission discussed the concerns raised, including:

- Whether the Township should proceed now or wait several months
- Whether the proposed noise limit is appropriate and legally defensible

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- How sound measurement standards would be enforced
- The importance of addressing water usage and other impacts in future draft revisions
- The benefit of having some ordinance language in place now rather than leaving a regulatory gap
- The possibility of further revisions before any final action

The Commission agreed that additional discussion and investigation were needed before reaching any final conclusions. It was noted that initiating the discussion now would allow the matter to remain on future agendas as old business.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately **5:55 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Jim Gurr, Helena Township Planning Commission

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