

**Highland Township Planning Commission
Record of the 1441st Meeting
Highland Township Auditorium
February 19, 2026**

Roll Call:

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

Also Present:

Elizabeth Corwin, Planning Director
Mary Ray, incoming Planning Commissioner for 2026-29 term

Visitors: 130

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.

Public Hearing:

Agenda Item #2:

Parcel # 11-02-436-002
Zoning: ARR, Agricultural and Rural Residential Zoning District
Address: 2115 White Lake Rd
File #: URSA 26-01
Request: Use requiring Special Approval for small scale institutional use for BARN 45
Applicant: James A Lee, IV
Owner: Lee Family Foundation

Chairman Kevin Curtis introduced the request for a special use permit for Barn 45, a small scale institutional land use at 2115 White Lake Road. Barn 45 is an existing land use, that was established without permit. The applicant is working with staff to bring the site fully into compliance with zoning ordinance regulations and building codes. Mr. Curtis invited the applicant to describe his proposal.

Joy and Jamie Lee presented their site plan and operational plan and explained how Barn 45 had evolved from its initial use as a small private retreat for Ms. Lee’s counseling practice and personal space for bible studies with friends, to its current use for gathering space for multiple groups, including men’s and women’s bible studies, a young adult ministry, a community garden and other groups coming together for faith and

service-oriented projects. The Lees asserted that they had not intended to create a “Church” in the traditional sense of the word, and that the growth that occurred throughout COVID had taken them by surprise. They noted that they do not operate a commercial operation, and any profits are directed to a children’s camp in Northern Michigan. They have established a foundation as a 501.c(3) non-profit organization to direct activities at the site.

Mr. Lee explained the efforts that they have undergone to bring the site into compliance since the Township notified them of the issue. Township staff met at the site to identify all deficiencies, including small accessory structures that had been moved to the site without permit, a parking lot that had been developed near the north property line without permits, and lighting. Some of the issues that he has discussed with staff and is working to address include:

- a) Limiting outdoor noise. There is one large concert each year
- b) Buildings without permits. Applications have been submitted, although some of the work is still under review.
- c) Sight distance at White Lake Road. A crew of volunteers are working to clear trees and improve sight distance to satisfy the Fire Marshal requirements.
- d) Lighting trespass. Light fixtures have been redirected downward to eliminate glare.
- e) The Health Department visits the site every two weeks to check on food preparation. The Lees bring in portable toilets to keep the load off the septic system.
- f) Parking lot location. Mr. Lee is willing to install a three foot berm and plant shrubs to control glare from the sweep or headlights
- g) The Little Store. This is not a commercial operation, and many of the products are given away. It does supply a small revenue to help offset costs of operation and allow for charitable projects such as mailing out bibles to those who request them. They produce 1200 pounds of food for community distribution.
- h) Future growth. The Lees would like to build an addition on the east side of the barn to accommodate the existing activities, add a “lean to” on the south side of the barn to create a resource center for single mothers, and move the community garden and increase its size.

He noted that when they learned that the sign that had been erected at White Lake Road did not comply with the ordinances, he had immediately taken action to remove it. He also noted that they take safety very seriously and have checked with the Sheriff’s office and report there have never been any complaints logged in conjunction with Barn 45.

Mr. Charlick briefly explained the Special Use Approval process, noting that every person who wishes to speak would be given an opportunity, but was expected to keep comments brief and not repetitive. The Planning Commission hoped to have an opportunity to discuss the project that evening, but that might not be possible if the public comment period lasts all night. By a show of hands, it was clear that most of the audience was present to support the request.

Mr. Curtis opened the public hearing at 7:52 p.m.

Ms. Corwin first noted that there were over 100 pieces of correspondence in the file showing support for the application, including out of state supporters and even one supporter from Kenya. There were no letters or emails of opposition. The character of the correspondence are similar to those included in the published online packet, so staff had not copied the letters for each commissioner, but they were free to look through them. She had copied two notes of support from adjacent property owners and provided them for each commissioner.

Mr. Dave Thompson, 4525 Highland Hills described his personal discovery of Barn 45 and explained how he frequented the chapel to unwind after a stressful day of work. He appreciated having the solitude of this site so near to his home.

Ms. Gayle Green was present to represent the Christian Service Commission of Holy Spirit Church on Harvey Lake Road. They are the frequent recipient of fresh produce for their crises center and benefit greatly from the partnership with Barn 45.

Mr. Mason Brown, Highland resident at Duck Lake near Wardlow, provided his personal testimony of how Barn 45 had touched his life through their young adult ministry.

Mr. Joe Youngs, 2300 Horseshoe Court has no issues with the concept, but noted that as a distant neighbor, he hears the music many Saturday nights. His only concern is noise.

Mr. Andy Dirks spoke as a leader of the men's ministry about the good work being completed at Barn 45.

Mr. Bradley Farquhar, 3902 Presidential Way also speaking on behalf of his father James Farquhar, 1965 White Lake Rd, which is two hoses west of Barn 45. His father wrote saying that he has never been disturbed by noise at Barn 45 and has no objections to the land use. Mr. Bradley Farquhar noted that as a public school teacher, he has seen the positive impact on the youth of having a place like Barn 45 to go for faith based activities.

Mr. Jim Lloyd, 2280 White Lake Road noted that his property is within 150 feet from the driveway to Barn 45. He commented that the neighborhood is very stable, with families with tenure of over 40 years. When he attended the public hearing for Pinefield Farms, located east of Barn 45, he had been surprised so many people came out with opinions jaundiced by the impacts from Barn 45. He had not been disturbed by noise from the site, and commented that the traffic noise from passing traffic is far more disruptive than any activity at this site. He has not seen a dramatic impact from traffic to and from this site but is concerned that lighting levels comply with the zoning ordinance regulations. He thinks it would be reasonable to impose a curfew on activity. He believes that the Special Use Permit for Pinefield Farms would be a good template to use drafting a permit for this site.

Personal testimony was offered by Barbara Roslin, Jim Blain, Hartland; Cecila Coelius, 1952 Woodridge Court; Sherri Meyers 1757 Bristol, Milford; Taylor Weinhart, Milford; Isabella, White Lake Township; and Amber, Holly, each of which witnessed to positive impacts on their life from the activity at Barn 45. Nicole, a former bible study leader spoke of a personal hurt arising from her time at Barn 45.

Adam Ward, 3235 Clyde Road spoke about his experience as a sargeant with the Oakland County Sheriff and firefighter and the circumstances he has encountered with youth as an undercover agent. He mentioned that there is a registration process for events to ensure that there will be space at Barn 45.

George Williams, 2029 White Lake Road (a parcel just north of Barn 45 with a vacant parcel lying between his home and the subject site) explained that although there was a lot of traffic on his driveway in the early days, he has had no issues with Barn 45 except for lights. He is not opposed to any expansion, but would appreciate if the lights would be turned down after hours.

Mr. Curtis closed the public hearing at 9:00 p.m.

Work Session:

Agenda Item #3:

Parcel # 11-02-436-002

Zoning: ARR, Agricultural and Rural Residential Zoning District
Address: 2115 White Lake Rd
File #: URSA 26-01
Request: Use requiring Special Approval for small scale institutional use for BARN 45
Applicant: James A Lee, IV
Owner: Lee Family Foundation

Mr. York expressed gratitude for the people who attended and the ministries they support at Barn 45. He noted that while it was uplifting to hear the personal testimony, the question is not whether there should be a Barn 45, but rather should it be located on this parcel, in this neighborhood.

Mr. York thanked Mr. and Mrs. Lee for their application materials, but noted that many questions remain unanswered, with even questions arising from the public hearing. He noted that a church may be allowed in a residential neighborhood, provided the use meets ordinance requirements. It is unfortunate that so much of the physical improvements were completed without review, because a fresh development would have been planned with a different driveway and parking lot location and configuration, and the lighting details would have been required for study before implementation.

Mr. York expressed concern about future growth. He suggested that a follow-up meeting will be required with better documentation.

Mr. Charlick reviewed the supplemental standards of Section 10.17, Institutional uses. He noted that the traffic management plan required could speak to many different things, such as sight vision at the driveway, accessibility for fire trucks, and the amount of parking. Those types of improvements generally lead to a need for detailed engineering design of drainage systems. He was not so concerned about involving an engineer and was content to let staff review and comment. Ultimately, the Planning Commission will have to review the solution proposed by the applicant.

He noted that the greatest scrutiny will be required for the outdoor activities. He noted that there are much different impacts of ten persons compared to one hundred persons on a site. He noted that although it good that the current neighbors are satisfied, the Planning Commission is responsible for approving a plan that protects future neighbors as well. He also noted that outdoor amplified sound has never been permitted. He explained that while it is likely that the Planning Commission could craft some guard rails in the terms of permit conditions, it will be essential for the applicant to self-police, so that the neighbors are not negatively impacted.

Mr. Charlick asked for better explanation of the Sunday Night Live activities. He asked the age of the participants and whether they are dropped off, or are they self-driving. Mr. Lee explained that the target age is 18 to 26 year olds. They tend to carpool. Adult leaders direct the parking activity and participant gather by the fire pit, under the pavilion or in the barn. Mr. Charlick asked about the occupancy of the barn as well. Mr. Lee explained that the Building Official had given him limits based on whether people were seated or at tables. The maximum occupancy is 99 persons. There was no basis for a limit for outdoor activities.

Mr. Charlick explained that Highland Township requires that all lighting fixtures must be dark sky compliant. It is possible that the existing fixtures could be modified to bring them into compliance, but more information is needed. He noted that when a commercial property is developed, a photometric plan is required. He does not think that is necessary.

Mr. Zeolla stated that he is concerned that the property is already overburdened, based on the turnout at this meeting. He asked Ms. Corwin what constitutes "small scale institutional" versus others. Ms. Corwin explained that most churches will be "small scale institutional" and that larger scale uses are things like

hospitals and universities. Mr. Zeolla noted that he would like to see lighting plans with a photometric study and a traffic study.

Mr. Curtis noted that he was not too concerned about the traffic, but was mostly concerned about lighting. He was also concerned about safety if the chapel is allowed 24 hour access. Mrs. Lee explained that the chapel is locked when the site is vacated each day, but that a visitor may text and request that day's key code to enter the chapel. He explained that there are security cameras around the site.

Mr. Heyn appreciates that the Planning Commission approaches each site with special care and attention and thought a solution could be crafted for this site to allow the use while minimizing impacts to the neighbors. Mr. Smith also noted that his concern was with planning issues, and not the good works of the church, and how the church impacts its neighbors. Issues have been identified where the site and its operations do not comply with the ordinance, and he is concerned with the types of solutions that might be offered and in not creating a precedence for use that undermines the zoning ordinance.

Mr. York asked for more information about the trails, noting that they are not indicated on the site plan. He recalled that at a recent public hearing, one neighbor did take exception to trails coming out at the property line, with the potential for inadvertent trespass and affecting their animals.

Mr. Lee reiterated that the goal of Barn 45 is to remain a small "boutique" space for people to come together in faith. It is not their intent to grow. Mr. York noted that the use had already grown past its original vision, but if the physical limitations of their building limit the potential attendance, and the parking lot is sized just for the building, and the applicant is content with that and complies with the permit, there would be no problem. Mr. York noted that the Special Use could be crafted for the current operations, and when there are the occasional bigger event, a special event permit could be sought.

Mr. Charlick explained how the Pinefield Farms Special Use permit had been structured, with limits on the events that would draw larger crowds, and fewer restrictions for events that drew fewer people. He suggested that Mr. Lee work with planning staff to supplement their application with the necessary information to allow for a thorough review. He suggested particular attention be given to a solution to buffer the parking lot from the neighboring property. The supplemental application and site plan should clearly demonstrate how the property can absorb the volumes of people anticipated.

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to table the application until such time as the applicant provides additional information to support the request. Mr. Curtis supported the motion. Roll call vote: Charlick-yes; Curtis-yes; Heyn – yes; Smith-yes; York – yes; Zeolla -yes. Motion carries (6 yes votes)

Agenda Item #4:

Parcel # 11-22-301-007
Zoning: C-1, Local Commercial Zoning District
Address: 140 W Highland
File#: SPR 25-01
Request: Site Plan Review for Jimmy John/Dunkin
Applicant: Steve Kolber, Kolbrook Design
Owner: OM Group

Mr. Curtis introduced the agenda item for the proposed Jimmy John and Dunkin site at the northwest corner of Highland Road and Milford Road. This is a resubmittal. The applicant, Mr. Steve Kolber, explained that his team has been working to resolve the issues identified in the past. The Milford Road driveway approach has been configured for right in/right out only as required by the Road Commission for Oakland County, the

landscaping plan along the north property line has been modified as requested to better buffer the cemetery and the signage has been reduced in conformance with ordinance requirements. He believes all the issues have been addressed

Mr. Charlick remarked that he had reviewed the minutes of the previous meetings and believed all concerns are addressed. He asked if the signage plan had been reviewed by staff. Ms. Corwin noted that staff had not verified the square footage of each sign, but adding up the numbers presented by the applicant, it appears the signage plan is now compliant with the ordinance. This will be verified in a detailed review during the permitting process.

Mr. Charlick asked if the entire parking lot will be reconstructed, or just capped. Mr. Kolber verified that where the base is sound, the pavement will just be capped.

Mr. Heyn noted that he prefers the landscaping plan over the fence that was previously discussed. He asked if local trades would be employed in developing the site. Mr. Kolber noted that the property owner has relationships with contractors in the region.

Mr. Zeolla asked if the sidewalk was being extended to the property line. Ms. Corwin noted there is a discrepancy between the engineered site plan and the conceptual site plan prepared by the architect, but it is noted that the sidewalk extension is required.

Mr. Heyn asked if all the HVAC units will be roof mounted. Mr. Kolber affirmed that is the case and those units will be hidden by the parapet.

Mr. Smith asked about the greenbelt, and in particular screening of the dumpster with living materials and not just the fence, as this would soften the appearance from the cemetery. The expectation is more lush landscaping than would be required if there was an office next door. Mr. Kolber agreed to that.

Parking calculations were discussed again. The Planning Commission agreed that the existing parking should be satisfactory given the nature of the uses and the fact that this is redevelopment of the site. It would be better to not overdevelop the site.

Mr. Charlick moved to approved the site plan for Jimmy John/Dunkin at 140 W Highland, parcel 11- 22-301-007 subject to the sidewalk being extended to the north property line, approval of the Road Commission for Oakland County for the Milford Road entrance and the Oakland County Health Division for the septic field and further subject to final approval of staff. Mr. Curtis supported the motion. Roll call vote: Charlick-yes; Curtis-yes; Heyn – yes; Smith-yes; York – yes; Zeolla -yes. Motion carries (6 yes votes)

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: January 15, 2026 and Joint Board on February 11, 2026

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to approve the minutes of the January 15, 2026 Planning Commission meeting and the February 11, 2026 Joint Boards meeting as presented. Mr. Zeolla supported the motion which was approved by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

Adjournment:

Mr. Curtis moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:15 p.m. Mr. Charlick supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote. (all ayes, no nays)

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