CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, March 2, 2026

BOARD MEMBERS:
Valeriano Gomez, President
Lilia Ramos, Vice-President
Lydia Lopez, Secretary
Marino Solorio, Commissioner
Stacy Winfield, Commissioner
Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner
Grayling Gordon, Commissioner
Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

STAFF:
Tracy Ailes
Eduardo Fontanez

Reported for Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde, court reporter

Call to Order: 4:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Present in Chambers: Val Gomez, Lilia Ramos, Lydia Lopez, Marino Solorio, Hashem Alhashem, Jaylen Johnson, Stacy Winfield, Grayling Gordon

STAFF - Present in Chambers: Tracy Ailes

MR. SOLORIO: Good afternoon everyone. We do have a quorum. I would like to call to order the Plan Commission meeting for Monday, March 2nd, 2026. For the record, Mr. Gomez just entered and will chair the meeting.

MR. GOMEZ: First on the agenda is approval of the minutes from February 16, 2026. I'd like to make a motion to approve the meeting minutes of February 16, 2026, as written.

MR. SOLORIO: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.
We have no Old Business, so we'll move on to New Business. Commissioners Comments: City

of East Chicago Comprehensive Plan Section 8: Zoning Ordinances. Marino?

MR. SOLORIO: So everyone should have that chapter in front of you, or if you read it already. So this pretty much describes the process for -- well, number one, the importance of zoning ordinances and why they are important and how they guide development in the City. Then basically how you go about if you need to make any changes to zoning ordinances.

Specifically there are two types of zoning changes. There is the textural changes and there is map changes. The difference, one could be you have a zoning ordinance that states, for example, in a C2, which is a commercial district, you can't have, let's just say a bar. But if you want to change it in text, you would say, okay, we would allow bars. Now that would need to be changed in the text so that in a C2 it is now allowable use in that zoning.

While a map change is going to be where you physically look at the City and say, a C2 is Indianapolis Boulevard, say 146 or Chicago Avenue area. And you all of a sudden didn't want commercial on Chicago Avenue, but you still wanted it on Indianapolis Boulevard. Then you would change the zone on a map that states that you only want it on Indianapolis Boulevard because currently it is on both Indianapolis and Chicago Avenue. You would make a physical change to the map. This now becomes the new zoning C2 District versus where it is at right now.

Both of them procedurally go through the Planning Commission for approval and there has to be a public hearing. And then legislatively, because both are zoning changes, they also go to the Council for formal approval because it's a legislative change.

So what does legislative mean. It means there is a code that you can hold someone liable for if they violate that code. And so that's the only way that you can trump the ordinance, that you are able to enforce it by code. That's the legislative body, like the Council, will take on that helm once everything is approved to support the new changes to the zoning and then therefore make it law, right.

So the legislative body, which is the Council, creates laws that the residents and the businesses have to uphold. A lot of times -- before the 1930's zoning didn't exist. So people were building all kinds of things anywhere, everywhere, it didn't matter. So the point of zoning was really to kind of curtail

where development happens. And that's why zoning is important because it identifies where you think or perceive where development should happen.

And so unfortunately cities like ours, which were created before the 1900's, which I said 1930's is when zoning really started, you get hodgepodge of industry with residential areas, with commercial. So it's all kind of mismatched. Any new development that you see now are well planned or at least planned better than they were before because you have these guidelines that kind of govern where things go. So you don't really see like an industry right next to residential area anymore. You see residential, single family, higher density residential, then commercial, and then industrial on the outskirts or farmland, depending on where you are at.

So, this is all important because we currently are going through a zoning text and zoning map changes to a specific area, and then eventually will wrap around onto this downtown area here.

The C3, which is in the Harbor, we have discussed, it's very restrictive of what can be developed and/or what can be built or what type of businesses can open up. And at that time it made sense when they created that district, but unfortunately now that the City has banked a lot of property there and even based on businesses now coming back to that area, it's becoming very cumbersome. It's too restrictive and that's sometimes the issues, that zoning could be too restrictive, where it doesn't allow development to happen where it should happen. So there is a balance to that.

So we'll be coming to the Commission to go over some changes, textural changes to the zoning code that would allow certain businesses that currently are not allowed in C3. And then map changes that will show the new zoning and the extension of the C3 on to Columbus Drive, and we'll go over that during that time.

But your role as a Planning Commissioner is to either approve or disapprove of those changes based on where you see development and how you see development, also based on the Comprehensive Plan.

And so obviously we have talked about the Comprehensive Plan being a little bit outdated, right, and things have kind of changed. So you would kind of govern yourself based on what you are seeing, what the recommendations are from the staff, etcetera, that we'll have outlined before we are making the changes and the case as to why it needs to change.

And, so, yeah, this is the formal procedure. So you will actually be part of a formal procedure to change the zoning in your lifetime because normally that doesn't happen very often. So coming to theaters near you. Any questions? (None) That is all I have to report.

MR. JOHNSON: I do have one question. Do you know if we are or will be updating our Comprehensive Plan?

MR. SOLORIO: We have requested funding to create a new Comprehensive Plan update, but currently that is not in the works funding wise. So now what we are doing is we are taking the things we need to fix immediately and we'll be bringing that here in lieu of. And I do believe, at least my goal is, within the next five years for sure we are going to have to do that Comprehensive Plan. There is no way around it. It's just too outdated.

MS. AILES: Any issues we've experienced in the past year are the ones we are trying to correct in the ordinance currently, so we can do that.

MR. SOLORIO: Correct. Which it is done in other communities, we are not the only community that changes zoning codes and stuff like that before the Comprehensive Plan changes. But as we mentioned before, the Comprehensive Plans are 30-year plans, right? So we are hoping to kind of maybe change that a little bit so it doesn't get as outdated as quick.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other questions or comments?

There being no further questions or comments, our next meeting will be Monday, March 16, 2026, at 4:30 p.m.

That concludes all our items on our agenda, so I'd like to make a motion for adjournment.

MR. SOLORIO: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.

Thank you everyone. Have a good evening. Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Monday, March 2, 2026

Approved and signed March 16, 2026

Valeriano Gomez, President

Lilia Ramos, Vice-President

Lydia Lopez, Secretary

Marino Solorio, Commissioner

Stacy Winfield, Commissioner

Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner

Grayling Gordon, Commissioner

Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

Tracy Ailes, Recording Secretary

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 5th day of March 2026.



Peggy S. LaLonde