WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Whitewater Township Hall, 5777 Vinton Road, Williamsburg, MI 49690
231-267-5141 Phone

REGULAR MEETING
APPROVED AMENDED MINUTES
Wednesday, April 1, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:
Chair Stratton called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
A microphone check was done.

Public Attendance On-site: 3 (approximately)
Zoom Attendance: 5 (approximately)

ROLL CALL: Secretary Peltonen called Roll.

Present:
Rene Stratton, Chair
Sadie Merchant, Vice Chair
Denise Peltonen, Secretary
Scott Trumbull, Member
Michael Sherman, Member
Rod Rebant, Member
Randy Mielnik, Township Board Trustee

A quorum was established.

Absent: None.

ALSO PRESENT: Recording Secretary Kay Held

SET/ADJUST AGENDA: None.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to approve the Agenda as presented. Ms. Peltonen seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST:
Ms. Merchant referenced the prior meeting where she was asked to recuse herself from the Wineries and Cideries Ordinance subject. She spearheaded the proposed Ordinance at the suggestion of the former PC Chair. She owns a farm and farm market; however, has no current or future plans to open a winery/cidery. She noted that any topic has the potential to have relevance to any PC Member's life. This should not prevent a Member from contributing to the work; if she were to move forward with a winery in the future, she would recuse herself at that time.

There was extensive discussion among the Planning Commission with support of Ms. Merchant's comment, agriculture background and contributions thus far. Ms. Peltonen emphasized the need to maintain impartiality and asked Ms. Merchant to consider refraining from filing an application for one year. Ms. Merchant restated she has no plans for a winery; however, declined this suggestion as it would be unfair.

Mr. Mielnik read aloud the language of the By-Laws with regard to Conflict of Interest, which was also discussed.

A suggestion was made to consider a formal attorney opinion on the matter.

Board Action: Mr. Trumbull made a motion that Commissioner Merchant does not need to recuse herself from the subject of the proposed Winery Ordinance. Mr. Sherman seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Rebant-Y, Sherman-Y, Trumbull-Y, Peltonen-Y, Stratton–Y, Mielnik-Y, Merchant-Y. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Carl Wroubel: He was not allowed to comment publicly via Zoom at the last meeting and contacted an attorney to determine if it was in conflict with ADA compliance. He read aloud the attorney response. The Chair advised him to put in a written request to the Board for an ADA accommodations request.

Mr. Wroubel referenced the By-Laws and educational requirement stating the PC should consider the MSU Lakes and Streams course and ZBA course certification.

He disagrees with the PC's three-minute limit for Public Comment, which is an inadequate amount of time. The Township Board has a five-minute rule, and the PC should offer five minutes. Zoom attendees should also be allowed to comment.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Regular Meeting Minutes of 3/4/26: Amendments: A minor change was noted.

Board Action: Mr. Trumbull made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of 3/4/26 as amended. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion. VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE:
Ms. Tracy Spincich – Winery Ordinance Support
Mr. Frank Hymore – Land Division Act (10 for 10 Rule)

REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS / COMMENTS:

Zoning Administrator – Deb Graber: ZA Graber's report was in the meeting packet. She additionally reported 13 permits were issued and there was one property line adjustment. There will not be a ZBA meeting this month.

She attended Stand by Your Plan training presented by Ms. Jill Bahm of Giffels Webster; information was in the meeting packet. She also attended a Land Division training program through MSU. It strongly suggests review of General Ordinances, Land Division Ordinances and the Master Plan to ensure there is no conflict in verbiage between the documents with regard to the terminology in the new House Bill approved by Governor Whitmer on 12/23/26. The new Bill goes into effect in 2027.

She attended a meeting with other Zoning Administrators and Planners in the Grand Traverse area discussing the EPIC online system which documents Zoning and Planning activity. Several Townships are already online with the program. She encouraged the ~~ZA~~ PC to explore this.

There are several new proposed House Bills being considered. House Bill 5531 could affect Whitewater Township regarding Site Plan Review procedures and a 60-day decision deadline.

Mr. Rebant expressed interest in review of computer mapping; he will meet with the ZA who will show him the EagleView program. ZA Graber will send the interface to PC Members and encouraged them to familiarize themselves with this application.

Planning Commission Chair – Rene Stratton: She attended the Township Board meeting on 3/12/26; the Board approved a budget for the PC regarding STR survey proposals. This will be discussed in tonight's Agenda.

She distributed a preliminary timeline of progress to date regarding a potential Short-term Rental Ordinance.

Township Board Representative – Randy Mielnik: The Township Board was unable to schedule a Joint Meeting in April. The Board would like to meet once the PC has more progress on the STR survey and Capital Improvement Plan prior to scheduling a Joint Meeting.

A proposed rezoning application will be discussed by the Board at the 4/13/26 meeting. The PC's budget request for professional services related to the STR survey was approved. At the 3/26/26 meeting, the Board discussed

consideration of live streaming meetings. There will be no Public Comment during Public Hearings via Zoom moving forward.

ZBA Representative – Scott Trumbull: No meeting. No report.

ROWG (Resident Outreach Work Group) – Rod Rebant: There is no ROWG meeting in April, and moving forward the meetings will be held the second week of the month to allow time to create and forward reports to the PC. The ROWG completed turnover of STR data to the PC.

Ms. Peltonen attended an online MSUE session on Capital Improvement Plans (CIP). ~~He~~ She received information from the program and believes it may be helpful with the CIP. An inventory of capital assets should be made. Ms. Peltonen stated slides from the webinar are helpful; she can forward them to any PC Members.

Mr. Rebant sent a communication to ROWG Members asking those who worked on the STR project to consider contributing to the CIP project. There is one vacancy on the ROWG at this time.

Mr. Mielnik stated a draft RFP for architectural services is available as the CIP project moves forward. Chair Stratton noted that Township Board Member Tim Arends might be an additional resource to the ROWG in identifying capital improvement items.

Additional Items: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Winery and Cidery Ordinance Next Steps:
Giffels Webster Review:
Legal Review:

Ms. Merchant distributed a copy of the current proposed Winery/Cidery Ordinance with revisions and comments from the 3/10/26 meeting and Public Hearing as well as a packet detailing many of these items. PC Members discussed each notation and held an extensive discussion and review of them. Numerous points were discussed with regard to clarification, edits, definitions and Ordinance language. Specific topics included Agritourism, Promotional Activities, Events, Entertainment, Parking, Attendance and more. There was also discussion about existing content in other Ordinances that are noted in the Winery/Cidery Ordinance.

~~Chief~~ Chair Stratton suggested the PC consult with Giffels Webster and/or the PC's attorney to review the draft and provide feedback. There was PC consensus to do so.

Giffels Webster – Zoning Ordinance Review: The Planning Commission received revisions discussed with Giffels Webster at the 3/4/26 meeting for final review in advance of an anticipated Public Hearing.

The topics of this first bundle review with Giffels Webster include:
-Condominium Development Standards
-Development Process
-PUD Section Update
-M-72 Corridor Overlay District ((formerly Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development – COPUD)

Commissioners noted any additional questions and suggested modifications of each portion of this bundle in advance of the Public Hearing. Giffels Webster will be in attendance via Zoom at the Public Hearing.

Board Action: Ms. Peltonen made a motion to extend the meeting past the three-hour mark. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

A five-minute break was taken at 9:55 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 10:01 p.m.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing at the next Regular Meeting of Wednesday, May 6, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. to discuss Bundle #1 of the Zoning Ordinance review. Ms. Stratton seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Private Roads Ordinance Update – Randy Mielnik: The draft Private Road Ordinance was sent to the Township Board who forwarded it to the Township attorney for review. Comments were received, most of which were typographical changes. Mr. Mielnik will also be speaking with Jennifer at Gourdie Fraser who had minor questions. He expects the draft to go before the Township Board for consideration shortly.

Fence Ordinance Update – Randy Mielnik: The Township Board concurred with the recommendation of the Planning Commission and rejected the Amendment proposal. This subject may be reviewed with Giffels Webster.

Joint Meeting Topics: Chair Stratton reported the PC should have a draft of the STR survey questions and methodology of the survey for the Township Board at a Joint Meeting. Mr. Mielnik stated the Board would also like to discuss progress to date on the Capital Improvement Plan.

Additional subjects for the Joint Meeting were suggested:

-Mr. Hymore's proposal regarding minimum size on an agriculture lot
-Revisiting the Planning Commission's stand on Public Comments via Zoom
-ADA compliance with regard to Public Comment
-Township Board's insight as to expectations of the PC

The PC will consider a Special Meeting dedicated solely on the survey questions and methodology. This will be addressed after a vendor is approved.

NEW BUSINESS:

STR (Short-term Rental) Survey Vendor Selection: Chair Stratton reported the Township Board approved the PC expenditure not to exceed $20k for vendor services to develop and execute the STR survey.

PC Members reviewed each proposal for service regarding the STR survey. They also explored survey methods and general topics to consider for survey questions.

Board Action: Mr. Mielnik made a motion to hire Epic MRA per their proposal dated 3/4/26, not to exceed $20k. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.
ROLL CALL VOTE: Sherman-Y, Trumbull-Y, Peltonen-Y, Merchant-Y, Stratton-Y, Mielnik-Y, Rebant-Y. Motion carried.

General Categories for Survey Questions: Discussed above.

Acme Township Master Plan Comments: Acme Township distributed their draft Master Plan for review/comment. Mr. Mielnik included a draft memo to Ms. Lindsey Wolf, Acme Township Planning and Zoning Administrator in the meeting packet, asking for clarification of several maps at adjacent jurisdictional boundaries and identified each of them. There was discussion and PC consensus for Mr. Mielnik to forward the memo.

NEXT MEETING: Planning Commission Regular Meeting: **Wednesday, May 6, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Township Hall**

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Randy Steelman: He believes a 100' setback could be problematic for many wineries. He also discussed size limitations of structures. Regarding STR discussion and corporations, he is not a large corporation. However, his STRs are under an LLC for personal protection. This is common practice for individuals and trusts. The public overwhelmingly supports STRs; the Township should focus on how to regulate them. He inquired how the survey provider would secure cell phone numbers for the survey and stated the survey coverage should be broad.

PC DISCUSSION / COMMENTS:
Mr. Trumbull stated a Special Events Ordinance should be considered. He believes the current Noise Ordinance covers any noise compliance issues. Acme Township's is the same as Whitewater Township's Noise Ordinance.

Ms. Merchant appreciates the PC working together and encouraged them to keep an open mind regarding the Winery/Cidery Ordinance. She noted the ag industry is difficult, with many farms being sold. Being too restrictive deters people from purchasing property and the process for establishing fruit production and a winery. She agrees outdoor events should not become too large and the rural character of the Township should be maintained.

CONTINUING EDUCATION:
ZA Graber suggested the Planning Commission review the proposed House Bills in the Senate as earlier noted. She emailed this information to the PC and Township Board in February. Citizen Planner training begins in April.

ADJOURNMENT:

Board Action: Mr. Trumbull made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary