WHITEWATER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
Historic Elk Rapids Township Hall, 401 River Street, Elk Rapids, MI 49629
Whitewater Township Hall 231-267-5141 Phone / 231-267-9020 Fax

SPECIAL MEETING / WORKSHOP
APPROVED MINUTES
Monday, August 17, 2026, 6:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:
Chair Stratton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
A microphone check was done.

Public Attendance On-site: 7 (approximately)
YouTube Live Stream View: 10 (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: Correction: Add "Approval of Agenda" as Item #5 on Agenda.

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

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. M. Jacobson: Appreciates the addition of a large screen tv for the public to watch the presentation; however, the placement is poor as it blocks the audience from seeing PC Members.

PRESENTATION OF SHORT-TERM RENTAL (STR) RESULTS BY MR. KELLY SULLIVAN OF EPIC-MRA:
Mr. Kelly Sullivan, VP and CEO of EPIC MRA joined the meeting to deliver a slide presentation summarizing the results of the recent Short-term Rental (STR) survey in Whitewater Township.

He explained the survey topics/questions process, participant demographics and analysis of results. He also explained the sources of resident databases. Question sets were rotated to avoid any bias. Mr. Sullivan reported on the percentages of property owners surveyed, property size owned, voter registration status and personal use and experience with STRs (using, owning, neighboring).

Mr. Sullivan reported that 25% of people said STRs are allowed, when in fact they are not allowed. Nearly 60% responded they are not allowed and 20% did not know.

A live operator telephone survey of 100 residents was initially conducted, 78% of which were by cell phone. This initial survey represented a control group. A wider postcard survey with unique user IDs was distributed to 475 households with 563 total responses among the two datasets. The margin of error was 4 points.

He reported the following results of the 'first ask":
42% of respondents supported allowing STRs in with restrictions
19% respondents supported allowing STRs without restrictions
38% of respondents opposed allowing STRs with entirely

Results of the "second ask" at the end of the survey about allowing STRs changed very little.

He reported responses regarding rules, regulations, enforcement, housing availability concerns, occupancy, parking, property rights, fire and septic inspections, support of local businesses/property owners, property upkeep, attracting businesses, enforcement and fines, Township registration, property management and limit of rental days. The costs of managing/enforcing STRS, types of properties, ownership and Zoning Districts were also asked. Additionally, open-ended questions were asked. Mr. Sullivan specified multiple demographics of participants by percentage.

Regardless of respective views, main concerns were management, accountability, upkeep of rental properties, Ordinance enforcement limiting occupancy to two per bedroom and concerns about investment groups purchasing homes with the intent of creating STRs as a business were also noted. Perceived benefits were supporting local business and improving the upkeep and appearance of Township properties.

He closed by stating:
6 in10 support STRs in some form
4 in10 support STRs with restrictions
2 in10 support STRs with no restrictions
4 in10 opposed STRs in any form

He noted the more supportive residents are consistently business owners, parents, residents under the age of 50, property owners with two or more acres and those residing in agricultural areas.

Those opposed in any form are identified as Township residents for 20+ years, age 65 or older, those south of M-72 and west of Williamsburg Road, and those along shoreline areas.

All pre-determined and approved survey questions had been previously presented to residents. Survey results in their entirety will be available on the Township website. The Township will also receive survey raw data, with redacted identifiers.

There was extensive discussion between PC Members and Mr. Sullivan regarding total number of responses versus number of residents, Township demographics, cross-tabulation of data, EPIC MRA's survey experience (municipal, election, etc.) and metrics of this survey.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

NEXT MEETING:
Planning Commission Regular Meeting: **Wednesday, September 9, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Township Hall**
Note: this is scheduled for the second Wednesday of September, rather than the usual first Wednesday.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. J. Fitzgerald: Owns an STR, is pleased with results and happy the online/phone responses were combined and reflective of community sentiments. He noted he did not receive a survey postcard nor did several other STR owners.

Mr. M. Jacobson: The data presented is similar to that collected during the Master Plan survey. The community was then and is now in favor of STRs, with restrictions. There was good information on the types of restrictions desired. He is pleased to hear the confidence level of Mr. Sullivan's data and why. He hopes the Township resolves STR problems for owners and non-owners.

Ms. K. Mangus: The support of STRs from business owners and younger families is no surprise, as is the opposition from waterfront and older residents. The Township needs to move forward getting an Ordinance in place. There were no violations in 50 years of zoning until now. The biggest concerns are addressed by General Ordinance; if they were enforced, the majority of concerns would be resolved.

PC DISCUSSION:
Chair Stratton asked Mr. Sullivan to explain the process of postcard distribution and its application in the survey process. He did so, stating there was no selection criteria, they were all sent on the same day and method, and less than 20 were returned as undeliverable.

Chair Stratton reiterated the process to date and addressed next steps in the process. Mr. Sherman asked for an overview of the January, 2026, public workshop as he was not yet seated on the PC. Ms. Stratton noted the detailed report provided by MSUE as a result of that workshop. An ROWG was created with several meetings and much fact finding as well as the availability of White Papers summarizing information.

Mr. Mielnik noted the Master Plan survey had one question about STRs, with close to the same result as the STR survey; however, we now have a more detailed, complete picture.

Some PC Members agreed to move forward with a draft Ordinance followed by a public workshop, public input and a Public Hearing. Several Members disagreed with this path, stating the PC has already gathered public input through many exercises and now has a formal survey completed.

Secretary Peltonen stated Ms. Rachel Steelman submitted an Ordinance Amendment request 4/25. The case was assigned a number 6/25 and a Public Hearing was held 8/25. The PC has spent much time on this and agrees the PC should start writing a proposed Ordinance.

Chair Stratton will distribute pertinent information to PC Members to review in anticipation of discussing the Ordinance content at the next meeting.

At the next meeting, the PC will discuss Bundle #2 of the Zoning Ordinance review and consider returning to dedicated Special Meetings in an effort to reduce the length of Regular Meetings.

ADJOURNMENT:

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary