giffels webster

memorandum

DATE: April 14, 2026

TO: Whitewater Township Planning Commission

FROM: Andy Aamodt, Giffels Webster

SUBJECT: Bundle 1: COPUD Section Memo and Text Amendment

Introduction

Several needed updates to the Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development (COPUD) section of the zoning ordinance have been identified through the zoning audit and conversations with staff. These include procedural improvements, development requirements, and alignment with the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA). For example, parts of this section have been identified to be contradictory with the site plan and special land use review processes, as well as the Special Use Permits. Additionally, a review of the development standards such as density, uses, landscaping, building facades, and others have been called for.

M-72 is important both locally and regionally as a major access route to Traverse City and across (east-west) the Township. The COPUD currently applies to area 500 feet north and south of the centerline of M-72, from Cook Road westward to the west township line.

Amendment History

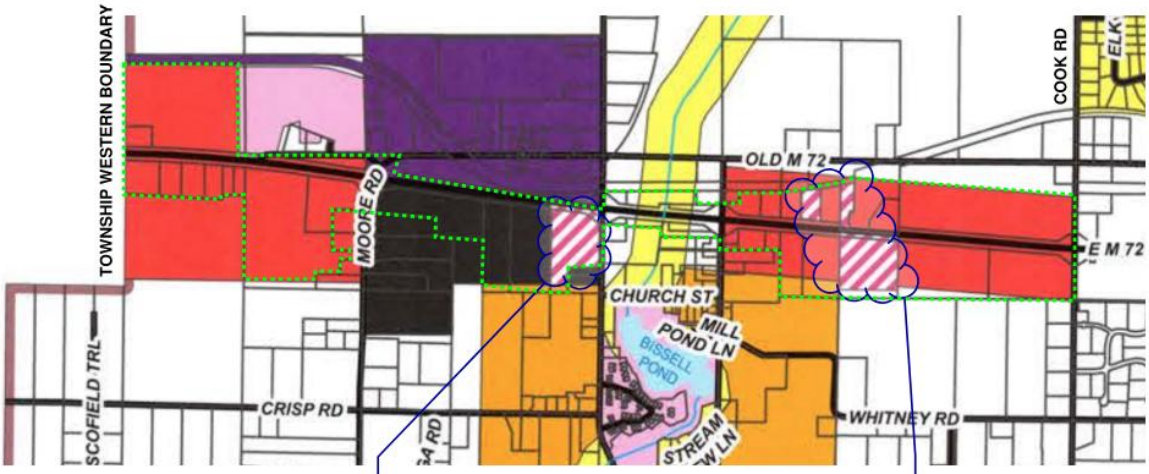
- **October 1, 2025** – The Planning Commission reviewed the existing language. It was noted that the Commission did not have any experience with the COPUD. Purposes of the COPUD that are provided in the language were rated, with the main purposes being to:
    - Provide applicants the greater flexibility of a PUD regulated via performance-based standards and cooperation in design (score: 4.0/5.0)
    - Preserve/enhance the visual character of the corridor for the economic benefit to local landowners and the region (score: 3.6/5.0)
    - Encourage the preservation of scenic vistas and viewsheds; Protection and enhancement of property values and encourage commercial/industrial development (score: 3.6/5.0)
- **November 24, 2025 –** The Planning Commission reviewed the drafted text. It was noted that the Commission did not have any experience with the current COPUD language. Because of this, and because lack of a distinct vision created by the Master Plan or other planning efforts, we decided to scale back and focus on simpler, tangible improvements. We made the following changes:
    - Continue permitting the underlying district's permissible land uses.

    - Delineate the geography of this overlay as the lots fronting M-72 from the western Township border to Cook Road, but excepting the V-1 zoned lots which will be under V-1 jurisdiction only.
    - Utilize simple screening of waste receptacles, mechanical equipment, and parking lots.
    - Ensure long facades are visually interesting with architectural features.
    - Provide for access management standards, including pedestrian access and shared access drive allowances.
    - Provide for landscape standards that are measurable/quantifiable, rather than encouraged or subjective. Foundation planting and frontage greenbelt standards are provided.
    - Require any signage to be in the form of freestanding ground signs and/or wall signs.
- **February 4, 2026** – The Planning Commission suggested removing the frontage sidewalk requirement for now.
- **March 4, 2026** – The Planning Commission reminded us to delete mentions of the public frontage sidewalk as one reference to that remained. We have deleted that. We also unified the frontage greenbelt requirements so that they are now more similar to the general landscaping requirements, with the small extra requirement that shrubs/flowers/native grasses/sedges also need to be mixed in.
- **April 1, 2026** – The Planning Commission set the public hearing for this text amendment for this May meeting.

Next Steps

After consideration of the fact that this amendment will inevitably require changes to the zoning map (rezonings), we recommend the Planning Commission not send this text amendment to the Township Board yet. Our recommendation is that the Township conduct outreach to the property owners of the four current COPUD properties regarding the proposed rezoning of these properties. Please see the map on the following pages showing how this rezoning may conceptually look.

Supplemental Documentation
Proposed Zoning Map Amendment (Rezoning)



Existing COPUD-zoned property at M-72 and Williamsburg Rd to be rezoned to N-1.

Existing COPUD-zoned properties on M-72 to be rezoned to C-1.

Legend: Existing Zoning Districts

- R-1 Residential
- R-2 Residential
- R-3 Residential
- RC-1 Recreational
- A-1 Agricultural
- C-1 Commercial
- N-1 Industrial
- V-1 Village
- CO-PUD Corridor Overlay PUD
- PUD Planned Unit Development
- MHP Manufactured Home Park
- Parcels (2024)

Legend: Proposed Amendment

Proposed new M-72 Corridor Overlay

Please note that this boundary is approximate for the purposes of this map visual. The proposed zoning text amendment states the following: "The M-72 Corridor Overlay zoning district shall apply to all lots fronting M-72 from the Township's western boundary to Cook Road, excepting lots zoned V-1 which shall remain V-1 without this overlay applied."

Proposed Text Amendment

Due to the extent of amendments to this Article, we are proposing new language altogether. This will mean the existing Article 6 will be repealed in its entirety and replaced with this Article.

ARTICLE 2 – DEFINITIONS

[Delete "Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development" definition]

2.01 DEFINITIONS

~~CORRIDOR OVERLAY PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (COPUD): A corridor overlay zone which employs the methods and techniques of a planned unit development~~

ARTICLE 3 – ZONING MAP AND DISTRICTS

[Delete reference to "COPUD Corridor Overlay PUD" and amend the zoning map to replace the four COPUD zoned properties to N-1 and C-1 as applicable.]

3.01 ZONING DISTRICTS ESTABLISHED

For the purpose of this Ordinance, Whitewater Township is hereby divided into the following zoning districts, which shall be known by the following respective symbols and names, and shall have boundaries as delineated on the Official Zoning Map.

R-1 Residential
R-2 Residential
R-3 Residential
RC-1 Recreational
A-1 Agricultural
C-1 Commercial
N-1 Industrial
V–1 Village
~~COPUD Corridor Overlay PUD~~
PUD Planned Unit Development
MHP Manufactured Home Park

ARTICLE 6 – M-72 CORRIDOR OVERLAY DISTRICT

[Repeal and replace entire Article 6 with new Article 6.]

6.01 PURPOSE AND INTENT

A Corridor Overlay (CO) zoning district is herby established consistent with the goals and objectives of the Whitewater Township Master Plan and pursuant to the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act.

A. The intent of the M-72 Corridor Overlay District is to enhance the economic climate of the M-72 corridor while preserving the visual character of the corridor, including scenic vistas and viewsheds. Further, it is intended that the district provide for various types of land uses planned in a manner which shall encourage the use of land in accordance with its character and adaptability; conserve natural resources and energy, encourage innovation in land use planning, provide enhanced housing, employment, shopping, traffic circulation, and recreational opportunities for the people of the township; and bring about a greater compatibility of design and use.

B. The purpose of the M-72 Corridor Overlay District shall be to encourage development and redevelopment of property in accordance with the township master plan and in a manner that will promote the image of the M-72 corridor as a high-quality corridor and an attractive investment environment; allow mixed-use development; promote development that is compatible with the character of the township; encourage the redevelopment and reuse of certain properties which are no longer capable of serving their intended purpose; ensure safe and complementary vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns; and, control vehicular access to M-72.

C. The provisions of this overlay district are specifically intended to establish the M-72 Corridor as an area which:

1) Promotes the goals of the master plan

2) Encourages economy and efficiency in the use of land, natural resources, energy and the provision of public services and utilities, thereby encouraging a compatible mixture of uses in close proximity to each other

3) Enhances the visual appearance of the corridor by preserving scenic vistas and viewsheds and coordinating building design, site arrangement and landscaping, signage, lighting and other elements

4) Encourages redevelopment of property by removing or making material modifications to the existing structures, discontinuing the existing nonconforming use on the property, and establishing a new use consistent with the intent and provisions of this section

5) Manages access to existing properties and future development while simultaneously preserving and improving the flow of traffic on the surrounding road system in terms of safety, capacity needs, and speed

6.02 DELINEATION OF THE M-72 CORRIDOR OVERLAY DISTRICT

The M-72 Corridor Overlay zoning district shall apply to all lots fronting M-72 from the Township's western boundary to Cook Road, excepting lots zoned V-1 which shall remain V-1 without this overlay applied. Please reference the zoning map for the M-72 Corridor Overlay's geography.

6.03 APPLICABILITY OF THE M-72 CORRIDOR OVERLAY DISTRICT

Within this Corridor Overlay, all development projects, including both new uses and structures as well as newly installed or renovated structures and/or site features, must employ the applicable provisions of this article described in sections 6.05 through 6.11 below.

6.04 PROCEDURE FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

A. Site plan review. For those uses that are permitted principal uses in the underlying zoning districts, the site plan review procedures found in Article 12 must be met and all required materials for site plan review submitted.

B. Special land use review. For those uses that are noted as special land uses in the underlying zoning districts, the special land use procedures found in Article 13 must be met and all required materials for special land use review submitted.

6.05 GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

A. The land uses permitted in the Corridor Overlay shall comply with the uses permitted in the underling zoning district.

B. All development projects shall follow the regulations in this Zoning Ordinance applicable to lot size, lot width, lot coverage, setback, parking and loading, and general provisions. However, if any overlay requirements of this Article conflict with other regulations of this Zoning Ordinance, the requirements of this Article shall apply.

6.06 SCREENING

A. Waste management. Solid waste collection areas, including recycling and composting if applicable, shall be placed in a side or rear yard and shall be screened with a masonry enclosure with a solid wood gate. The masonry enclosure shall be a minimum of six feet in height, or a height required to fully screen the receptacles. Any receptacles accessed by a trash hauler shall be placed on a concrete pad.

B. Screening of mechanical equipment. Mechanical equipment or other utility hardware on the roof, ground, or elevations of a structure shall, whenever possible, be located so as not to be visible from any public ways or adjacent residential areas. Where such limitation on location is not possible, the facilities shall be screened from public view with materials harmonious with the building.

C. Parking lots shall be screened from public right-of-way view by one of the following methods:

   1) Three (3) to four (4) foot high screen wall constructed of masonry or stone.

   2) A continuous evergreen hedge of three (3) to four (4) foot high.

   3) A continuous three-and-one-half (3 ½) to four (4) feet high berm. Such berm shall contain varying landscape plantings, including one tree, or an intentional landscape bed containing a cluster of hardy perennial shrubs, for every fifty (50) feet of linear parking lot frontage.

6.07 ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN REVIEW AND STANDARDS

A. Natural wood siding, log or quarter log siding, brick, stone, or other materials of similar texture and appearance are considered appropriate to the township character. Reflective surfaces are not acceptable. Metal or plastic surface materials which are visually similar in color and texture to natural materials may be considered.

B. Colors of paints, stains, and other finishes or materials shall be nature-blending in colors natural to the predominant hues of spring, summer and fall, with generally no more than three colors per building. Semi-transparent stains are recommended for application on natural wood finishes.

C. Facades of over one hundred (100) feet in length shall be broken up with varying building lines, windows, and architectural accents.

6.08 ACCESS MANAGEMENT

A. Site access and circulation shall be designed to promote vehicular and pedestrian safety. Site layout shall minimize curb cuts and reduce the potential for congestion and conflict between travel modes.

B. A maximum of one vehicular approach and driveway is permitted per lot. However, lots containing greater than 500 feet of frontage may contain two vehicular approaches so long as no approach is within 100 feet of another approach on the same lot or adjoining lots.

C. Shared access encouraged. A vehicular approach and driveway is not required if shared access is provided to- and from an abutting site and complying with the following requirements:

   1) The shared access drive meets the requirements for maneuvering lane width in Article 10. The shared access drive may be in the form of a parking lot maneuvering lane/aisle, but shall comply with the provisions of this Section 6.08.

2) Legal agreement to utilize the shared access drive is granted between properties, and the Township is provided a copy of such agreement or easement as part of the development of the shared access drive.

3) Emergency access is approved by the Fire Department.

6.09 LANDSCAPING STANDARDS

A. Landscaping objectives: The information required for Site Plan Review shall include a detailed and comprehensive Landscape Plan for the entire project which achieves the following objectives:

1) Addresses the functional aspects of landscaping, such as drainage, erosion prevention, wind barriers, provision of shade, sound absorption, dust abatement, and reduction of glare.

2) Enhances architectural features, strengthens vistas and important axis and sight lines.

3) Achieves unity of design by repeating certain plant varieties and other materials and by correlation with adjacent developments.

4) Enhances parking areas and related vehicular and pedestrian trafficways with landscaped areas, including trees and tree groupings.

5) Protects plants from injury by pedestrians or motor traffic with appropriate curbs, tree guards, or other devices.

6) Controls run-off of fertilizers and pesticides.

7) Minimizes watering and maintenance requirements.

8) Avoids monotony by offering visual variety to structural masses and helps the man-made structures achieve harmonious appearance with the retained natural trees, vegetation and features and with the setting as a whole.

B. Standards

1) Foundation landscaping shall be planted along the front façade of buildings. Such foundation landscaping shall take up no less than 50% of the linear frontage of the façade, and shall have a minimum planting bed width of four feet as measured from the front façade outward. The foundation landscaping contain a variety of perennial shrubs, perennial flowers and/or annual flowers, and flowering or ornamental trees when feasible.

2) A frontage greenbelt shall be provided in the front yard abutting the front lot line (street right-of-way line) and shall comply with the following standards:

a. The frontage greenbelt shall measure at least ten (10) feet in width, measured from the front lot line (street right-of-way line). If utility easements prevent the greenbelt placement at the front lot line, then such greenbelt shall be set back outside of such utility easement(s). If demonstrated that a greenbelt cannot be installed at either of the preceding areas, the Planning Commission may waive this requirement with the finding that sufficient front yard landscaping is provided where feasible in a front yard area, or in the form of larger parking lot islands if a parking lot occupies the front yard

b. One deciduous canopy tree shall be planted for every forty (40) linear feet or fraction of frontage abutting a public thoroughfare. Remaining greenbelt areas shall be planted with lawn, and a variety of native grasses/sedges or flower/shrub beds shall be included where feasible.

6.10 SIGNAGE

A. Signage in the Corridor Overlay shall be limited to the following sign types.

1) Freestanding ground-type signs where the entire bottom of the sign is in contact with a base structure or the ground. Such freestanding sign area shall not exceed 100 square feet and 10 feet in total height. If separate from the sign face, the base shall be excluded from the sign area calculation, so long as it does not extend more than two feet wider than the sign face and the overall sign structure remains less than 10 feet in total height.

2) Wall signs. Such wall sign shall be located on the front façade of the building, and its area shall not exceed 20% of total façade area or 100 square feet, whichever is less.

B. A maximum of one freestanding sign and one wall sign is permitted per lot. A multi-tenant or multi-suite building may contain separate sign faces, so long as the total area and height comply with the maximums provided in A.1 and A.2 above.