

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

REGULAR MEETING
APPROVED MINUTES
Wednesday, November 5, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

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

Public Attendance: 5 (approximately)

ROLL CALL:

Vice Chair Stratton called Roll.

Present:

Keith DeYoung, Chair
Rene Stratton, Vice Chair
Carl Wroubel, Member
Sadie Merchant, Member
Randy Mielnik, Township Board Trustee

A quorum was established.

Absent:

Denise Peltonen, Secretary (excused)

ALSO PRESENT:

Recording Secretary Kay Held

SET/ADJUST AGENDA:

Add:
-“Whitewater Township Code of Ethical Conduct & Governance Policy” under “Reports” (Chair DeYoung)
-Clarification under “Unfinished Business”: Gourdie Fraser presentation will also include “Site Plan Review Process”

Board Action:

Mr. DeYoung made a motion to approve the Agenda as amended. Ms. Stratton seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Mike Jacobson: He would appreciate the Pledge of Allegiance being recited at ROWG meetings. There should also be Public Comment during these meetings for citizens to express opinions and share information.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Regular Meeting Minutes of 10/1/25: Amendments: Yes. (2 minor changes, page 2)

Board Action:

Mr. DeYoung made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of 10/1/25 as amended. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS / COMMENTS:

Zoning Administrator – Deb Graber: ZA Graber’s report was in the meeting packet.

Chair – Keith DeYoung:

Preliminary Conference – Site Plan Review:

Chair DeYoung referenced a Preliminary Conference worksheet in the meeting packet. He suggested implementation of this form and to schedule a preliminary review meeting between the Zoning Administrator and a PC Member prior to a Public Hearing for Site Plan Reviews. This would ensure the application is complete before it goes before the Planning Commission for consideration.

There was discussion regarding the By-Laws requirements for Public Hearings for Zoning Ordinance, Text Amendment or Map Amendment as well as for Special Use considerations. A Public Hearing is not required for a Site Plan Review that does not involve a Special Use.

There was group discussion to determine whether Zoning Amendments should move forward by motion of the PC and the appropriate time to hold a Public Hearing during this process.

Chair DeYoung asked PC Members to review content of the Planning Commission’s By-Laws. This subject will be on the January 7, 2026, meeting Agenda.

Whitewater Township Code of Ethical Conduct & Governance Policy:

Chair DeYoung presented the Whitewater Township Code of Ethical Conduct & Governance Policy and asked each Planning Commission Member to sign and return it to the Township Clerk. This document is to be signed annually.

Vice-Chair – Rene Stratton: No Report.

Secretary – Denise Peltonen: No Report.

Township Board Representative – Randy Mielnik:

The Township Board will be meeting next week. There will be two vacancies on the Board; one seat is expected to be filled at that meeting.

The Board will be discussing an RFQ for Architectural Services regarding the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Township facilities; i.e., Township Hall, Fire Station.

No Township Board meeting will be held on November 27 due to the Thanksgiving holiday.

ZBA Representative – Carl Wroubel: No Report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Zoning Ordinance - Giffels Webster Update:

Giffels Webster Planner Ms. Stephanie Osborn joined the meeting via Zoom. A Special Meeting will be set for Monday, 11/24/25 at 6:00 p.m. with Giffels Webster to review the suggested edits, deletions and verbiage additions to the Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Osborn provided a brief overview of the first bundle project encompassing the following:

- Development Processes for Site Plan Review and Special Land Uses
- Condominium Development
- Planned Unit Development (PUD)
- Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development (COPUD)

PC Members will review proposed red-line edits prior to the 11/24/25 meeting with Giffels Webster, at which time it will be reviewed in-depth.

Gourdie Fraser (GFA) – Site Plan Review Process and Private Roads Ordinance

Mr. Mielnik introduced Mr. Travis Munn of GFA, who was presenting in GFA Director of Engineering Jennifer Graham's place. He distributed information to the PC and delivered a PowerPoint presentation.

Site Plan Reviews (SPR) /Special Use Permits (SUP) Process:

Mr. Munn presented a flow chart showing the progression of this process as well as a detailed preliminary checklist based on the existing Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance. His presentation covered the following:

- Purpose of Zoning
- Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance History
- Future Development and Growth
- Purpose, Enforcement and Decision Making in the Site Plan Review/Special Use Permit Process
- Pre-application Conference, Preliminary Site Plan Review and Final Site Plan Review Procedures
- Approval Process (Denial, Approval, Approval with Conditions)
- Services from Gourdie Fraser (GFA)

He addressed benefits of utilizing a preliminary checklist and an informal, pre-application conference with the Zoning Administrator and up to three Planning Commission Members to verify the necessary documents are in receipt prior to its review by the entire Planning Commission.

There was discussion among the PC with Mr. Munn and how these tools can positively impact timing, costs and application completeness. They discussed other agencies that may be involved requiring approval mechanisms; i.e., Fire, Road Commission, Health Department, Construction Code, etc.

Mr. Mielnik noted there may be applicants with larger, complicated projects. Many applicants have firms assisting them; it will be helpful to enlist GFA in those projects in conjunction with the Planning Commission.

Private Road Ordinance:

Mr. Munn stated a draft Private Road Ordinance is being internally reviewed at GFA and will be forwarded to the Planning Commission. This subject will be reviewed and discussed at either the 11/24/25 Special Meeting or 12/3/25 Regular Meeting.

ROWG – Resident Outreach Work Group:

Vice Chair Stratton reported the ROWG held two meetings. They reviewed research gathered from Short-term Rental (STR) Ordinances of other communities and began developing survey questions.

At the 11/4/25 ROWG meeting, PC Chair DeYoung provided the ROWG with a set of topics for which they will be writing White Papers, a structured reporting tool to document and track information through the course of a project. This information will be put into spreadsheet format. White Papers will be updated and presented at each PC meeting to provide a synopsis of research. The presentation of the first round of White Papers will be at the January 7, 2026, PC meeting.

PC Vice Chair and ROWG Chair Stratton is requesting two requests for funds:

- MSUE will be holding an STR Zoom workshop. Ms. Stratton has asked ROWG members to participate. There is a \$25 per person fee.

Board Action:

Ms. Stratton made a motion that the Planning Commission reimburse ROWG (Resident Outreach Work Group) members \$25 each for fees paid to participate in the MSUE Short-term Rental Workshop. Mr. Wroubel seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Wroubel-Y, DeYoung-Y, Merchant-Y, Mielnik-Y, Stratton-Y. Motion carried.

- MSUE will provide two services. The first is to review the ROWG survey questions; there is no charge for this. The second is one or two workshops with MSUE. The workshop base fee is \$800 plus \$275 for facilitator fees, per workshop. MSUE will be providing research, planning, creating agenda and flip charts, developing materials

and preparing a final report. These workshops are to assist the ROWG in the STR research project. PC Members were in agreement of two workshops.

Board Action:

Ms. Stratton made a motion to request \$2,500 for two workshops provided by the MSU Extension Service. These are community workshops facilitated by MSUE, supported by ROWG and the Planning Commission. This also includes advertising and signs. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Mielnik-Y, Merchant-Y, Wroubel-Y, Stratton-Y, DeYoung-Y. Motion carried

Ms. Stratton is reviewing methodology for implementation and security of the survey. Networks Northwest was previously utilized in survey administration.

Wineries and Tasting Rooms Ordinance:

Feedback from the preliminary review of the draft Wineries and Tasting Rooms Ordinance was received from the PC's attorney; however, it was not received in time to include in the electronic meeting packet. It was emailed to PC Members. PC Members briefly discussed portions of the draft.

Chair DeYoung asked PC Members to forward him questions or discussion points in advance of the next meeting. This item will be on the December 3, 2025, Meeting Agenda.

Outside Venue Ordinance Update: Tabled.

NEW BUSINESS:

By-Laws Review:

Planning Commission By-Laws will be reviewed at the January, 7, 2026, meeting, as discussed earlier in the meeting.

Hogarth's Amendment:

Whitewater Township Zoning Ordinance - proposed Zoning Amendment Case #ZA-2025-5:

The proposed Amendment requests changing maximum fence height from 6' to 7'.

Chair DeYoung noted that Zoning Administrator Graber is working with Hogarth's Pest Control to bring them into compliance as a Home Occupation Business through a Special Use Permit, as they have been operating without one.

Mr. Wroubel noted his research shows that East Bay Township does not require a permit for anything less than 7' and Acme Township allows up to 7'. There was discussion about the possibility of issuing a Variance rather than changing an Ordinance.

There was Planning Commission consensus to move proposed Zoning Amendment Case #ZA-2025-5 forward to a Public Hearing.

Board Action:

Mr. DeYoung made a motion to set a Public Hearing regarding the proposed Amendment Review Case #ZA 2025-5 at the December 3, 2025, Regular Meeting. Ms. Stratton seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: DeYoung-Y, Stratton-Y, Wroubel-Y, Merchant-Y, Mielnik-Y. Motion carried.

NEXT MEETING(S):

-Planning Commission Special Meeting (Giffels Webster), Monday, November 24, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

-Planning Commission Regular Meeting Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Randy Steelman: Asked the PC to consider eliminating fence permit requirements for anything under 6'. As a builder, anything that makes work quicker and easier is great for the property owner, developer and builder.

Ms. Kim Mangus: Thanked the Board for discussing the process for setting Public Hearings, as was done this evening regarding the Hogarth Amendment request. The PC previously put forth the recommendation to eliminate all but two of

the requirements regarding fences. It has been in front of the public many times in the past 10 years. It had public support, but the Board pulled it. She believes there would be community support for it.

The PC should not be using a lawful Amendment request from July to try to bully someone on another matter—the Home Occupancy Business Permit compliance. They are two different issues.

The Lighting Ordinance mandates all security lighting be on motion sensor. Wildlife set off sensors. This has not been enforced; other line items need to be addressed that are unreasonable items for enforcement. She provided examples.

Regarding publishing about a survey, residents south of M-72 do not receive the Elk Rapids News.

Mr. Mike Jacobson: Agrees with Ms. Mangus' comments. He asked that ROWG surveys be mailed in paper form, not just electronic, to ensure every resident receives a copy.

PC DISCUSSION / COMMENTS:

Mr. Wroubel referenced the recent Peninsula Township lawsuit article in the Record Eagle which states the Township Supervisor is thinking of hiring a Planner. Whitewater Township is ahead of the process having a Planner in place.

Ms. Merchant: Younger individuals are less likely to read the newspaper and suggested promoting the ROWG survey through other methods; i.e., various social media outlets. She would assist in determining methods to distribute information to reach more residents.

Mr. DeYoung: Suggested considering a PC Facebook group or X group to disseminate information for the Planning Commission. PC Members discussed various groups that have a platform for providing information and generating interest, particularly to the younger population. Mr. Wroubel advised this be authorized by the Township Board first.

Ms. Mangus was recognized by the PC Chair and stated the Planning Commission should check the legalities of this. The Township Supervisor is the only person authorized to speak for the Township.

Ms. Stratton: Requested Chair DeYoung include the subject matter of the ROWG Report on Agendas moving forward so that members of the public can be aware in advance of a meeting.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

Board Action:

Mr. DeYoung made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Stratton seconded the motion.

VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary