

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

SPECIAL MEETING
APPROVED MINUTES

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER: Vice 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: 5 (approximately)
Zoom Attendance: 1 (approximately)

ROLL CALL: Secretary Peltonen called Roll.

Present:

Rene Stratton, Vice Chair
Denise Peltonen, Secretary
Scott Trumbull, Member
Sadie Merchant, Member
Randy Mielnik, Township Board Trustee

A quorum was established.

Absent: Keith DeYoung, Chair (excused)

ALSO PRESENT:

Zoning Administrator Deb Graber
Recording Secretary Kay Held

SET/ADJUST AGENDA:

- On Page 2 of the Agenda under Item 6(b) the Special Meeting on 1/19/26 should read "6:00 p.m." not "7:00 p.m."
- On Page 2 of the Agenda under Item 6(c) the STR Workshop on 1/21/26 is hosted by the PC and ROWG
- On Page 3 of the Agenda under Item 9 (Next Meeting) add the 1/19/26 PC/Giffels Webster Special Meeting at 7:00 p.m. at the Township Hall and 1/21/26 PC/ROWG Public Workshop at 6:00 p.m. at Mill Creek Academy.

(Note: The 1/19/26 meeting will be rescheduled)

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

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. M. Jacobson: Asked the PC to inform the Township Board the Township website is difficult to navigate including locating meeting agendas. He requested hard copies be made available again in the Township Hall as was previously done.

PUBLIC HEARING:

Zoning Amendment Request SLUP #2025-05 Special Use Application – Major Home Based Business:

Board Action: Ms. Peltonen made a motion to open the Public Hearing. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Note: The Public Hearing was opened at 7:09 p.m.

Request those attending to sign attendance sheet.

Public Hearing Notice was published in the Record Eagle Tuesday, December 11, 2025.

State Purpose of Public Hearing: Vice Chair Stratton stated the Public Hearing is to consider SLUP #2025-05 Special Use Application - Major Home Based Business.

Brief Introductory Presentation (Zoning Administrator, Planner, Applicant/Agent, Etc.):

Zoning Administrator Deb Graber:

ZA Graber reported the Public Hearing is due to a request for a Special Use Application for a business on Cram Road. The applicants plan to open Kewadin Botanicals at a prior residence on their property. ZA Graber and PC Chair DeYoung held a preliminary conference to review the application according to checklist requirements and believe it to be complete, resulting in the scheduled Public Hearing.

Kewadin Botanicals is asking for a Special Use. They are in an Agricultural District, growing many of the products on their property and selling onsite.

Applicant: Mr. Paul Galligan and Ms. Rebecca Romine:

Mr. Galligan presented the history of the property in his family dating back to 1944; it was a working farm. Over time, parcels were sold off. Mr. Galligan and Ms. Romine purchased the 4.5 acre parcel after his father's passing in 2023. Kewadin Botanicals has been a licensed business for 15 years. They built a home on the property and plan to operate the business out of the original home/accessory structure his father built and lived in.

Ms. Romine spoke about her background and the business. They plan to produce natural, pure and organic products, growing much of it. Thirty-seven lavender plants have been planted. She also plans to grow garlic, strawberry popping corn and other unique items. She has consulted with an entomologist and has a focus on incorporating agricultural/nature/botanical items.

Products include essential oils and hydrosol, shave soap, beard oils, bath salts, lip balms, and more. Ms. Romine also plans to conduct on-property classes for adults and children.

PC Questions:

Ms. Peltonen: Inquired about the neon sign described in the application. It will be inside the building displayed in a window. She also inquired about parking for the classes; Ms. Romine will be limiting classes to six people and five vehicles. She is still planning hours of operation.

Mr. Mielnik: Inquired if surrounding property owners were notified. They have been. No comments have been received

Ms. Stratton: Asked where the vegetables would be sold. Ms. Romine replied at a self-serve, covered table on the driveway side of the property.

Read Any Written Comments Received: None.

Receive Public Comments in Person and on Zoom:

Comments from the Meeting Room: None.

Comments from Zoom: None.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to close the Public Hearing. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

Note: The Public Hearing was closed at 7:29 p.m.

PC Discussion of Proposed Zoning Amendment:

Merchant: Believes the application looks complete.

Trumbull: The application looks good. No additional questions.

Mielnik: No reservations. He clarified any substantial business changes in the future would need to require amendment of the Special Use approval, beginning with ZA.

Stratton: No concerns. Is in keeping with the Master Plan. Not creating any parking or noise issues.

Peltonen: No reservations. Great packet.

Board Action:

Ms. Stratton made a motion to approve Case #SPR/SLUP 2025-05 - Kewadin Botanicals requesting special use of an accessory structure to operate a home-based business. The proposed use shall comply with the general objectives and land use policies contained in the Zoning Ordinances.

The proposed use shall be designed, constructed, operated and maintained in a manner that is harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing character of the general vicinity and is in keeping with the Master Plan and support of agribusiness.

The proposed use is served by necessary public facilities that are adequate or could be made adequate to serve the proposed use, specifically existing streets, storm water drainage, water supply, public safety services, sanitary sewer disposal, solid waste disposal and public recreation shall be adequate to serve the proposed project.

The proposed use shall not be hazardous or disturbing to neighboring uses or cause any conflict to the existing use and quiet enjoyment of surrounding property.

The proposed use shall not involve activities, processes, materials, equipment and conditions of operation that will be detrimental to any person, property or the general welfare because of excessive production of traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare or odors.

The proposed use shall be consistent with the intent and purpose of this Ordinance.

Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Special Meeting Minutes of 11/24/25: Amendments: None.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to approve the Special Meeting Minutes of 11/24/25 as presented. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

Regular Meeting Minutes of 12/3/25: Amendments: None.

Board Action: Ms. Stratton made a motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of 12/3/25 as presented. Ms. Peltonen 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. She additionally reported: There were a total of 96 Land Use Permits issued for the year 2025. Complaints overall have dropped off; however, she has received some new ones.

Vice Chair Stratton inquired as to the status of the Elk Lake Trail resident STR court case. Ms. Graber reported a Final Conference was scheduled for 12/30/25, with the attorneys believing they could attend by Zoom. However, the Court did not allow it. It is rescheduled for Monday, 1/26/26, at 2:00 p.m. Township attorneys are required to attend in person.

The ZBA has a Regular Meeting and Public Hearing scheduled next Thursday, January 22, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.

There is one open seat on the ZBA, to be filled by a Planning Commission Member.

Chair – Keith DeYoung:

Reminder of Monday, January 19, 2026, 6:00 p.m., Special Work Group Meeting for the Planning Commission and Giffels Webster:

Giffels Webster was unable to accommodate the 1/19/26 date due to a conflict; therefore, it is canceled. PC Members discussed other options. They opted to include it on the Agenda of its next Regular Meeting of 2/4/26; however, are scheduling the meeting time one hour earlier, at 6:00 p.m. Note: due to the time change, this would make it a Special Meeting.

Board Action:

Ms. Peltonen made a motion to schedule a Special Meeting of the Planning Commission on Wednesday, 2/4/26, at 6:00 p.m. Ms. Stratton seconded the motion.

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

Vice Chair – Rene Stratton:

Reminder of the Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 7:00 p.m. STR Workshop at Mill Creek Academy

Ms. Stratton noted the Planning Commission is hosting, with the Resident Outreach Work Group (ROWG), a Short-Term Rental community workshop on Wednesday, 1/21/26, at 7:00 p.m., at Mill Creek Academy. (Note: this was rescheduled from 1/26/26). The Zoom link for the meeting will be posted to the website. PC Members will be in attendance to assist in group facilitation.

Secretary – Denise Peltonen: No Report.

Township Board Representative – Randy Mielnik:

The Township Board has two meetings coming up:

-Special Meeting, Tuesday, 1/20/26, 6:30 p.m., Township Hall. PRAC 5-Year Plan Public Hearing.

-Regular Meeting: Thursday, 1/20/26, 9:00 a.m., Township Hall.

A new appointment to the Planning Commission is expected. Budget preparation will begin shortly; the new fiscal year begins 4/1/26.

The Chair is working on the Planning Commission's Annual Report. Secretary Peltonen noted the PC By-Laws require appointment of a PC Member each year to write the Annual Report. This will be discussed later in the Agenda.

ZBA Representative – No Report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Zoning Amendment Request #2025-5 to Amend Zoning Ordinance Article 5.12C Fences Shall Not Exceed 6 Feet – Findings and Discussion:

Mr. Mielnik provided a memo in the meeting packet on existing verbiage in the Zoning Ordinance related to fences, suggested verbiage for the proposed Amendment, and content related to fence definitions and setbacks. Current Whitewater standards state a fence cannot exceed 6' and cannot be put within 50' of a river or stream. These Zoning standards were found in the Definitions section of the Ordinance; which is incorrect placement.

Mr. Mielnik believes the Planning Commission should further evaluate residential standards for fences; i.e., types, height, placement, districts, and other factors. He provided additional research material with his memo. Regulating fences is a

complicated endeavor, and many factors should be considered. The current proposed package is incomplete; he recognizes the differences in the Township between agriculture and village/urbanized areas and their densities.

Ms. Stratton believes it needs to be modified for R-1 and R-2 districts versus more dense areas. The Planning Commission needs more time to work on this matter.

Ms. Peltonen researched other areas as related to neighborhood fences and considerations related to traffic, views, heights, styles, etc.

Ms. Merchant believes there is much to consider regarding fences while at the same time considering the applicant's request. She believes the correct approach is to table this matter, conduct research and authorize an Amendment to the Ordinance once and correctly.

Mr. Trumbull agrees the overall matter is complex.

ZA Graber noted this Amendment request applies to the entire Township; it is not a Variance Request for/by one resident or parcel. The applicant had the opportunity to go before the ZBA but declined.

There was further discussion among PC Members.

Board Action: Mr. Mielnik made a motion to table action on "Zoning Amendment Request #2025-5 to Amend Zoning Ordinance Article 5.12(C) Fences Shall Not Exceed 6 Feet." Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.

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

The Planning Commission will discuss this subject with Giffels Webster as they continue to work through each bundle in reviewing the Zoning Ordinance.

Note: The Agenda references "Article 5.15C;" however, it should be "Article 5.12C."

Gourdie Fraser (GFA) – Private Roads Ordinance:

Mr. Travis Munn of Gourdie Fraser (GFA) was present at the meeting to follow-up from last month's discussion of the first draft. He made modifications and incorporated them into the new draft in the meeting packet. Mr. Munn detailed each of the changes with Planning Commission Members, answering questions and providing clarification. There was additional discussion with Mr. Munn, including clarification on a multitude of topics in the document including road signage.

Legal counsel will ultimately review this document. The PC discussed forwarding it to the Township Board for review.

Board Action:

Mr. Mielnik made a motion to recommend approval of the 12/17/25 Draft Private Road Ordinance to the Township Board for consideration. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.

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

ROWG – Resident Outreach Work Group:

Discussion on White Papers Distributed at the Last Meeting -

Vice Chair Stratton reported on the update to the most recent White Paper on STRs. It added Townships that do not allow STRs or are permitted in small districts, etc., to ensure review of Townships that allow STRs in greater numbers and those that are more restrictive. She asked PC Members to review and provide any feedback.

The ROWG is also investigating a proposed law by two State of Michigan Representatives and its verbiage related to taxation. Michigan will also be updating its 2021 version of the Michigan Residential Code. This will affect Grand Traverse County codes.

Ms. Stratton distributed Facilitator Guides to each PC Member for their assistance at the ROWG public workshop. She emphasized neutrality in gathering information and assisting small groups. She further discussed the structure of the workshop, comments, and attendee data. The Agenda will be distributed to the Zoning Administrator.

LIAA will also be at the meeting, managing Zoom service.

Wineries and Tasting Rooms Ordinance – Review:

Mr. Mielnik referenced the previous PC meeting which requested PC Members put forth findings, facts and conclusions that support the Ordinance. He distributed a detailed draft of such which also references the Master Plan with regard to agritourism as related to wineries and cideries.

Ms. Peltonen discussed concerns about noise issues, music, hours of operation, parking regulations, building size, public vs. private events, setbacks, maintaining rural character, etc. The Noise Ordinance should be updated. She spearheaded discussion about parcels of 20 acres or more where wineries/cideries may be allowed in the Ag District, and has asked the Assessor for a list of these parcels.

Mr. Mielnik stated there may be a need for Special Use Conditions with regard to parking/attendance limitations. Ms. Peltonen stated Elk Rapids requires a 100' setback from the road to the building; Townline is 700'. The current setback in Whitewater's Ag District is 30'. Ms. Peltonen suggested 300' front, side and back setbacks to accommodate noise issues. The PC discussed parcel sizes. They also referenced wineries in Ag or Commercial Districts.

Further discussion on this subject will be continued.

Outside Venue Ordinance Update: No update at this time.

NEW BUSINESS:

Yearly By-Laws Review:

Vice Chair Stratton stated an Amendment to the Planning Commission By-Laws was made at last month's meeting.

Based on the Clerk's concerns about the Open Meetings Act with regard to Sub-committees in "Section 3 (Meetings) J (Sub-committees) 3(b) (Sub-committee Operations)," the PC would like to have this material legally reviewed. This subject will be revisited in the future.

As noted earlier in the meeting, Secretary Peltonen stated the By-Laws require an individual be selected at the beginning of the year to prepare the Planning Commission's Annual Report as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act. Chair DeYoung is preparing the 2025 Annual Report. Ms. Peltonen suggested the author of the Annual Report maintain ongoing notes throughout the year.

Election of Planning Commission Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary:

Board Action - Chair:

Ms. Stratton made a motion to nominate Mr. Keith DeYoung as Chair of the Whitewater Township Planning Commission. There were no other nominations. Mr. DeYoung was not present at the meeting to accept the nomination. Vice Chair Stratton tabled nomination of the PC Chair until the next meeting.

Board Action - Vice Chair:

Ms. Peltonen made a motion to nominate Ms. Rene Stratton as Vice Chair of the Whitewater Township Planning Commission. There were no other nominations. Ms. Stratton accepted the nomination. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion. ROLL CALL VOTE: Mielnik-Y, Trumbull-Y, Merchant-Y, Peltonen-Y, Stratton-Y. Motion carried.

Board Action - Secretary:

Mr. Mielnik made a motion to nominate Ms. Denise Peltonen as Secretary of the Whitewater Township Planning Commission. There were no other nominations. Ms. Peltonen accepted the nomination. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion. ROLL CALL VOTE: Stratton-Y, Mielnik, Trumbull-Y, Merchant-Y, Peltonen-Y. Motion carried.

Selection of Planning Commission Member to Represent on the Zoning Board of Appeals for 2026:

The ZBA seat recently vacated by Mr. Carl Wroubel, representing the Planning Commission, is open. ZBA meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis; however, are only held when there is an Appeal to be heard.

Board Action: Ms. Stratton made a motion to appoint Mr. Scott Trumbull to the Whitewater Township Zoning Board of Appeals for 2026. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.

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

Note: Mr. Mielnik stated the PC Chair provides a recommendation to the Supervisor for appointments to the ZBA. The above motion is void.

Board Action: Ms. Stratton made a motion to recommend Mr. Scott Trumbull to the Township Supervisor for appointment to the Zoning Board of Appeals for 2026. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

Resolution #PC26-01 2026 Meeting Dates:

A schedule of 2026-2027 Planning Commission meeting dates was in the meeting packet. It is from April 1, 2026, through March 3, 2027.

Board Action: Ms. Stratton made a motion to approve Resolution #PC2026-01, the 2026-2027 Whitewater Township Planning Commission meeting dates, as presented. Mr. Trumbull seconded the motion.

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

Noise Ordinance Ideas of How to Proceed (will be an ongoing review):

Mr. Mielnik will ask the Township Board how they would like the PC to proceed.

Capital Improvements Plan Ideas of How to Proceed (will be an ongoing review):

Vice Chair Stratton spoke with Chair DeYoung who suggested the ROWG be involved in information gathering for the Planning Commission. Mr. Mielnik prepared a draft RFQ for architectural services to evaluate Township buildings. Ms. Peltonen noted that East Bay Township contracted with a consulting service on their CIP as well.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to extend the meeting beyond the three-hour mark. Ms. Peltonen seconded the motion.

VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: No. Motion carried.

NEXT MEETING(S):

-Planning Commission and ROWG Special Meeting / Public Workshop on STRs:

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, 7:00 p.m., Mill Creek Academy

-Planning Commission Special Meeting:

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 6:00 p.m., Township Hall

(Note: This is the same day as the monthly Regular Meeting; however, the time is changed to 6:00 p.m., resulting in it being a Special Meeting)

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. K. Mangus: Concerned about asking or requiring attendees of the ROWG workshop for their personal information while asking them for their opinions on Short-term Rentals. Some people may feel intimidated and not speak up. Chair Stratton verified she earlier stated attendees' addresses were optional. Ms. Mangus was pleased to know this.

Mr. M. Jacobson: Agrees with Ms. Mangus. At the CIO Public Hearing at Mill Creek, many people were put off by the sign in sheet. Regarding the wineries, he does not want to see setbacks get too extreme; 300' is too much. The farmer needs to use the land to his best interest. With a 10:00 p.m. limit on hours of operation, any noise concerns should be quelled. Farmers are well-adapted to getting along with their neighbors.

PC DISCUSSION / COMMENTS:

Action Items for PC Members Reviewed (Discussion):

Vice Chair Stratton noted the physical sign-in card for the ROWG workshop says the attendee's address is optional.

Mr. Mielnik thanked Ms. Stratton for leading the ROWG and putting the workshop together.

Ms. Stratton stated that a second PC Member is needed on the ROWG as there is a vacancy due to Mr. Boesler's resignation. The ROWG meets on the first Tuesday of the month.

Ms. Peltonen agrees that some people may not speak at the STR or public meetings if required to give their names/addresses. Some individuals who received the STR postcard stating "study group" had the impression a decision had been made. Ms. Stratton noted it states "we are gathering community input on this issue" and that it is important to ensure data gathered is from Whitewater Township residents.

Ms. Merchant noted that Mr. DeYoung stated the goal for a Public Hearing for the Wineries Ordinance was for the March meeting. Public input will be beneficial. She is hoping the Hearing is still on track for March. Ms. Stratton stated the PC will move forward with the continued goal of a Public Hearing on the Wineries Ordinance at the March meeting. Members discussed other methods for gathering public input.

CONTINUING EDUCATION:

Mr. Mielnik stated Giffels Webster is delivering a training presentation on Master Plans to East Bay Township; he will forward the dates to PC Members.

Ms. Peltonen stated the Michigan Association of Planning is holding seminars (webinars and in-person):

- Building Your Community Leadership Pipeline (3/11/26)
- Getting the Development You Want - Capital Improvement Planning (3/18/26)

Other courses are listed in their January 12 email.

ADJOURNMENT:

Board Action: Ms. Peltonen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

The meeting adjourned at 10:22 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary