

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

SPECIAL MEETING
APPROVED AMENDED MINUTES
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 6:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER:

Vice 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: 2 (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
Michael Sherman, Member
Randy Mielnik, Township Board Trustee

A quorum was established.

Absent: Keith DeYoung, Chair

ALSO PRESENT:

Zoning Administrator Deb Graber
Recording Secretary Kay Held

Vice Chair Stratton introduced new PC Member Mr. Michael Sherman.

SET/ADJUST AGENDA:

Vice Chair Stratton noted two corrections to verbiage in the Agenda:
Strike "(excused absence)" following Mr. DeYoung's name under "Roll Call" and "Chair Report" sections.

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

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Special Meeting Minutes of 1/14/26: Amendments: None.

Board Action: Ms. Merchant made a motion to approve the Special Meeting Minutes of 1/14/26 as presented. Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.
VOTE: YEAS: All. NAYES: None. Motion carried.

CORRESPONDENCE: Ms. Lynn DeLong – Private Road Ordinance

REPORTS / PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS / COMMENTS:

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

Land Use Permits #2025-03 and #2025-04 should be listed as #2026-03 and #2026-04 in her report.

The ZBA approved the applicant’s request for withdrawal of the 2023 Variance request regarding the Baggs Road suit. Planning Commission attorneys have prepared a Resolution, which will be signed by the ZBA Chair. It will then be submitted to the Court of Appeals.

Township Clerk Hoeksema has asked any PC Members who still need to complete the Citizen Planner program to notify her so that she can enroll and give them access. The program may be completed online or in person at Helena Township.

ZA Graber informed the PC the defendant in the Elk Lake Trail suit was a no-show at the recent 1/26/26 Final Preliminary Hearing. A bench warrant was issued.

An amicus brief was filed by a member of the Township claiming Whitewater Township is not enforcing its Zoning Ordinance properly and that the short-term rental of a home is an approved use. A court date of 2/12/26 has been set where a judge will evaluate the Zoning Ordinance.

Chair – Keith DeYoung: None.

Vice Chair – Rene Stratton: Chair Keith DeYoung has submitted his resignation from the Planning Commission, effective immediately.

Election of Planning Commission Chair:

Ms. Peltonen nominated Ms. Rene Stratton as Chair of the Whitewater Township Planning Commission. Ms. Stratton accepted the nomination.

No other nominations were made.

Mr. Mielnik seconded the motion.

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

Vice Chair: Mr. Trumbull nominated Ms. Sadie Merchant as Vice Chair of the Whitewater Township Planning Commission. Ms. Merchant accepted the nomination.

No other nominations were made.

Mr. Sherman seconded the motion.

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

Secretary – Denise Peltonen: No Report.

Township Board Representative – Randy Mielnik:

The Private Road Ordinance was sent to the Township Board for consideration.

The Township is beginning their budget process; the Planning Commission will need to submit their 2026-27 projected budget to the Township.

PC Members reviewed current year budget and discussed projected year expenses in depth, with specific attention on meeting schedule, training requirements and anticipated survey implementation. Each cost center in the budget was reviewed based on historical costs and projected needs.

There are likely to be meetings beyond the standard 12 Regular Meetings with Special Meetings for the Giffels Webster Zoning Ordinance bundle review projects and any unknown issues that might arise requiring a Special Meeting.

Chair Stratton and Secretary Peltonen will meet with Township Clerk Hoeksema to discuss certain budget line items.

Given the resignation of former Chair DeYoung, Ms. Stratton and Ms. Peltonen will complete preparation of the PC’s 2025 Annual Report.

ZBA Representative – Mr. Trumbull: No Report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Giffels Webster: Planners Andy Aamodt and Jill Bahm joined the PC remotely to review the draft changes as of 1/27/26. Previous Whitewater Township Planning Commission / Giffels Webster consultation reviews were held on 10/1/25 and 11/24/25 where there was extensive review of the first bundle related to review and amendment of the Township's Zoning Ordinance.

In addition to small typographical edits, extensive additional discussion and edit reviews were held this evening on the following areas:

- M-72 Corridor Overlay District ((formerly Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development – COPUD)**
- Condominium Development Standards**
- Development Process**
- PUD Section Update**

M-72 Corridor Overlay District (formerly Corridor Overlay Planned Unit Development – COPUD)

Proposed edits of this section were reviewed and discussed in depth.

The PC also discussed in detail Design and Site Overlay versus Use Overlay, Delineation of the M-72 Corridor Overlay District, Access Management Standards, Landscaping Standards, Signage, Screening, Zoning Map and Sidewalks.

Condominium Development Standards

Proposed edits of this section were reviewed and discussed in depth.

Additional focus was on Residential Cluster Density, Standards and Design for Site Condominium Developments.

Mr. Sherman will conduct research on this topic.

Development Review Process

Proposed edits of this section were reviewed and discussed in depth.

Additional focus was on Definitions, Environmentally Sensitive Areas, Fire Department reviews, Site Plan Review, Zoning Administrator Approval, Land Use Permits, Failure to Initiate Construction matters, Application and Fee, Special Land Use Approval, and Construction Code Permits.

PUD Section Update

Proposed edits of this section were reviewed and discussed in depth.

Additional focus was on Use, Yard, Density and Lot Arrangement Standards, Open Space Requirements and Residential Density Standards.

Additional Discussion

Mr. Mielnik reported a Zoning Amendment was proposed by a resident requesting amended fence heights to a maximum height of 7'. The current Zoning Ordinance limits fence heights to 6'. A Public Hearing has been held on the matter. There is complexity to regulating fence height and other aspects related to fences. The Planning Commission would like to add this to a bundle with Giffels Webster in order for the PC to properly respond to the resident.

Giffels Webster will make the additional edits discussed this evening and reach out to the PC next week to discuss review strategy.

The PC also discussed the Public Hearing process and timeline with regard to bundles, each of which will be reviewed individually with the public.

Giffels Webster will be hosting a workshop for county municipalities "Stand by Your Plan" on Wednesday, 3/4/26, 5:30-8:00 p.m., at the Traverse City Senior Center. This workshop falls during the same time as the Planning Commission's

next meeting. It is unknown at this time whether there may an opportunity for Whitewater Township's PC to review this program at another time. Zoning Administrator Graber will plan to attend.

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

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

Gourdie Fraser – Private Roads Ordinance:

Mr. Mielnik reported the proposed Private Road Ordinance will be forwarded to the Township Board. This is a General Ordinance. This will be on their Agenda next week.

ROWG (Resident Outreach Work Group):

Discussion Plan Moving Forward for the ROWG:

Chair Stratton reported the Resident Outreach Work Group (ROWG) met last night and is working on the final assignment related to Short-term Rentals. They are verifying that General Ordinances/Police Powers of townships researched are included in the ROWG spreadsheets. They are also researching prior Short-term Rental surveys to assist in creating an outline for survey development.

The research group will be focusing on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) next. Chair Stratton will be stepping away from the ROWG as she is now the Chair of the Planning Commission. Therefore, another PC Member is needed to assist the ROWG with the CIP research. Their next meeting is Tuesday, 3/3/26.

The majority of people in the ROWG are interested in continuing on with the work group after Short-term Rental research project is completed.

The Board has asked the Planning Commission to work on developing the Capital Improvement Plan.

Wineries and Tasting Rooms Ordinance – Review:

Ms. Merchant updated the proposed Ordinance based on past meeting discussions. She also added Findings and Conclusions as researched by Mr. Mielnik.

There was continued and extensive discussion on building coverage (sq. ft. versus percentage), acreage/parcel sizes, minimum setback requirements, noise concerns/abatement, zoning concerns, maintaining rural character and other topics.

On the matter of minimum setbacks, PC Members have conducted and discussed research on numerous other tasting facilities.

Ms. Merchant will make verbiage changes to the draft as discussed.

Setting a Public Hearing on this proposed Ordinance was discussed.

Board Action: Mr. Trumbull made a motion to schedule a Public Hearing on the proposed Wineries and Cideries Ordinance at the Wednesday, March 4, 2026, Regular Meeting. Mr. Sherman seconded the motion.

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

Yearly By-Laws Review: (continued)

The Planning Commission reviewed additional portions of the By-Laws.

Zoning Administrator Graber noted there are some inconsistencies between the way the PC's Agendas and its By-Laws read with regard to Agendas. These two should align with each other. The PC also discussed portions of the Agenda's structure and content.

Chair Stratton will make modifications to the By-Laws as discussed.

Board Action: Mr. Mielnik made a motion to amend the Planning Commission By-Laws as discussed, deleting Section 3(J) 3(b) and modifying Section 9, Order of Business with respect to #1. Ms. Merchant seconded the motion.

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

Fence Ordinance:

This item was tabled. Giffels Webster is researching this information as earlier discussed in the meeting. Mr. Mielnik suggested the PC prepare a written position on the matter and forward a recommendation to the Township Board.

Outside Venue Ordinance Update: No update at this time.
Mr. Trumbull will conduct additional research on this matter.

Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) (ideas of how to proceed):

There was discussion on the CIP and the need to identify projects and funding options. A draft RFQ for architectural support was previously prepared. The CIP process was discussed from research and development to public input. Secretary Peltonen shared online resources with the PC for research on municipal CIP planning.

Ms. Stratton will coordinate with members of the ROWG to begin research on the Capital Improvement Plan.

Noise Ordinance (ideas of how to proceed):

Mr. Trumbull will conduct continued research on this matter.

NEW BUSINESS: None.

Ms. Peltonen stated 2026 goals include:

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|--|------------------------|--------------------|
| -Review Parcels on M-72 for Overlay District | -Storm Water Ordinance | -Noise Ordinance |
| -Public Hearings | -Winery Ordinance | -Short-term Rental |
| -Developing a CIP | -Outdoor Venue | |

NEXT MEETING(S):

-Planning Commission Regular Meeting:
Wednesday, March 4, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., Township Hall

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

PC DISCUSSION / COMMENTS:

Action Items for PC Members Reviewed (Discussion):

- Mr. Sherman research: Condominium Development (for Zoning Ordinance)
- Mr. Trumbull research: Outdoor Venue, Noise Ordinance, Storm Water
- Ms. Peltonen/Ms. Stratton: 2025 Annual Report and 2026-27 Budget Planning
- Ms. Peltonen: 2026 Goals – Review parcels on M-72 for Overlay District
- Ms. Stratton: CIP with the ROWG

CONTINUING EDUCATION: Materials in the meeting packet.

- Citizen Planner Training (Antrim County through MSUE)
- MAPs (Michigan Association of Planners) Officials Training 2026 – Stand By Your Plan

ADJOURNMENT:

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

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Submitted by: Kay Z. Held, Recording Secretary