

# PENINSULA TOWNSHIP

13235 Center Road, Traverse City MI 49686

[www.peninsulatownship.com](http://www.peninsulatownship.com)

## Township Board Special Meeting

### Minutes

July 29, 2021, 10:00 a.m.

Township Hall

1. **Call to Order** by Manigold at 10:00 a.m.

2. **Pledge**

3. **Roll Call:**

Present: Sanger, Bickle, Manigold, Chown, Achorn, Wunsch (arrival 10:15 a.m.)

Absent: Wahl

4. **Brief Citizen Comments (for agenda items only):** none

5. **Approve Agenda:** Bickle moved to approve the agenda, second by Sanger

Passed Unan

6. **Conflict of Interest**

7. **Consent Agenda:**

1. Peninsula Township Federal Procurement Conflict of Interest Policy

2. Request to pay for Hessler Log Home repair

**Moved by Sanger to approve the consent agenda with a second by Bickle.**

**Roll call vote: Yes-Sanger, Bickle, Manigold, Chown, Achorn, Wunsch**

Passed Unan

8. **Business:**

1. Interview Eric Wedesky, Christina Deeren, and Derrick Rosenbach via conference call for planner position

Eric Wedesky via speaker phone

**Manigold:** please tell us why you want to be the planner here.

Wedesky: I have lived in Michigan most of my life. I graduated from Michigan State with a B.S. in urban and regional planning. I am a member of the Michigan Planning Association and will be taking the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) exam in the fall. After graduation, I began working in the Upper Peninsula for the Eastern Regional Planning and Development Commission of Michigan. I have experience working on master and recreational plans and grant writing, all of which appear important to the township. My background includes both public and private experience. Northern Michigan is where I would like to grow both my personal and professional life.

**Bickle:** it is important to have the right person in this position. You seem to have taken the time to explore our township.

Wedesky: looking at your website, the planning director appears to wear many hats. I do not shy away from taking responsibility. I currently work 60+ hours per week.

**Bickle:** tell us about your methodology for managing conflict. One gets into a planning meeting with

varying opinions, some emotionally based, some fact based. How do you handle these situations to get people back to working on the matter at hand?

Wedesky: I am a good people person. Creating good rapport with people, being respectful, and listening to them is vital. My experience in the private sector working for a developer on solar projects found me taking 50-1,000-acre solar farm proposals to planning departments. At times these were controversial projects. Having been a person who caused strife in a community helped me understand why certain parameters need to be followed to link with the master plan. I understand people can get upset when something is changing. Being an expert and well versed on an issue helps explain why a certain ordinance is in place and how it ties into the master plan.

**Manigold:** I see you have been very successful in writing economic development grants. Have any of these grants been for coastal areas, trust funds, or large park systems?

Wedesky: I have not written a coastal management grant. I have consulted on a trust fund grant. I have worked with cities wanting economic development through tourism. I did master the various grant programs and would be totally comfortable writing these grants. I had a relationship with the DNR officer in the UP. I would immediately contact the DNR grant writing officer in Traverse City. Armed with a plan and matching funds, I am confident we can secure grant monies.

**Sanger:** help us understand the Solar Provider Group. Are they a for-profit organization, where are they located, and where were you in the management structure?

Wedesky: they are a private, non-publically traded company in Canada developing solar farm projects. I started as a staff planner preparing and assembling planning applications for more than 30 1-5-megawatt solar farms. After a year, I was promoted to project manager. In managing these projects, I coordinated between internal company departments and external project stakeholders.

**Sanger:** are you still with Solar Provider Group?

Wedesky: no, I currently work remotely for ibV Energy Partners, where I have been since January, 2021. I took time off and did some travelling. My ambition is to work as a planning director for a larger city in northern Michigan.

**Achorn:** the elephant in the room is that you are currently making a six-figure salary and we are a small municipal government organization. You would be taking a large pay cut.

Wedesky: the position for me is more about fit; the salary is not my main driver. I currently live in an urban environment that is more expensive than a rural area. I would need to know the pay scale before I could give you an honest answer to this question. I would take a pay cut but need to know the actual salary.

**Bickle:** the range in this area is \$55,000 to \$65,000. We offer health benefits and an additional 13% based on salary placed into a pension plan.

**Wunsch:** residents several times each year find themselves at odds with policy decisions. I have been on the planning commission since 2014. What do you do when residents are unwilling to find a compromise? We want to act in the best interests of most of the citizens. No matter what we do, some residents are still polarized and difficult to placate.

**Chown:** I would add, what do you see as the planner's job in mediating these differences?

Wedesky: the planner's role is to mediate between groups. Having meetings one-on-one and having a more decentralized approach. The planner can understand both sides of an issue but also is the one with the knowledge of the laws who must bring people together.

**Bickle:** do you have any questions for this township board?

Wedesky: if you make me an offer, I would consider it. Having a career and living where one wants to be is

important to me.

Christina Deeren in person

**Manigold:** we all know you, Christina, so please make a presentation.

Deeren: I was hired as the zoning director for the township five years ago. I was the deputy supervisor in the Upper Peninsula assisting the supervisor, assessor, zoning, and building officer. I hold a certificate in zoning administration from Michigan State University. One of the reasons I applied for this position is a lack of communication between planning and zoning. There have been three planners in the last five years. The report in 2018 from Networks Northwest recommended the planner and zoning positions be combined. I am involved in the monitoring of the PDR program and sit on the PDR review committee. I have a certificate for storm water management and am writing \$500 permits, which up until now no one could do here. I am a member of the zoning board of appeals and on the committees for the wineries, lighthouse, zoning rewrite, and PDR, and I am also the recording secretary for the township board. The reason I take the minutes for the township board is to gain a good perspective on what the community needs. This is a farm-based community experiencing pressures from developers and the influx of people moving into this area. It is important to know the rules and be able to apply them. I can give good insight as the township planner, rather than someone who is an urban planner, which I am not. I have worked in municipal government for 25 years. Attention to detail is currently lacking in planning and some projects have been permitted that I disagree with.

**Achorn:** I am impressed with your work as the zoning administrator and your dedication to detail and to the township. You are more valuable to the township right where you are and I applaud your work.

**Bickle:** you have been able to take on the tough, confrontational moments. A new zoning administrator would keep coming to you for training and guidance. This would create a vacuum and I am not sure how to best deal with this right now.

Deeren: zoning has three bosses – taxpayers, the town board, and the state and local governing laws. When a resident comes in, I want to provide the best customer service I can. The deficiency between the planning and zoning offices cannot be split any more. Planners can come up with great plans and ordinances, but if I cannot apply them, they are no good to any of us.

**Chown:** if the two positions are kept separate, would you rather have the planner or zoning position? How would you work to create better communication between these two areas? I agree that most of the problems we face now are due to a lack of effective communication.

Deeren: many areas previously handled by the planner are now in my office, so I am acting as a planner in several areas. Planning and zoning must work for the benefit of the entire community. I put the health, safety, and welfare of this community front and center because that is my job.

**Sanger:** in reviewing the 2018 study by Networks Northwest approved by this board, their recommendation was to combine planning and zoning. What structure recommendations would you suggest?

Deeren: the ZBA position definitely would need to be filled. Here we are adopting a new zoning ordinance and there are already amendments coming in to change it. Because we do not have a planner, whose duty is it to check projects in? I have taken this on so they do not get lost during the transition.

**Manigold:** in my 30 years, I have never had a more capable person in zoning. I struggle with adding more of the work load onto you; I do not want you to fail. It is not fair for you to keep picking up portions of another person's job. Many of the complaint calls come in over a weekend, and I call Christina or Dave to

come out. The attorney meets here on Fridays and the township is open Monday through Thursday. She is on a salaried position and does not get paid for those extra hours.

Deeren: I can step into other people's positions, but no one in the township can step into mine. Yes, I do work on weekends and meet with the attorney on Fridays as needed.

**Sanger:** the township is lacking in administrative support. Christina is going to the post office with certified mail, answering phones, typing, and has interruptions throughout the day from residents coming in.

**Manigold:** Christina is going on a family vacation and there is no one here to write permits. I will ask Gordon Hayward to come in to potentially write a permit.

Deeren: what Gordon does is ultimately my responsibility. When I am gone, I check in and have the capability to work remotely.

**Chown:** agriculture on the peninsula is under constant pressure from developers and commercial interests. Please tell us how you would handle these opposing forces.

Deeren: the township needs to decide what is more valuable, developers or agriculture. We have seen agricultural land be turned into commercial businesses without even knowing it. We are seeing properties in the PDR program get divided. Consistency is critical and we have seen items fall through the cracks during these transitions periods. The goal of the township needs to be clear. The master plan needs to be updated consistently every five years.

**Chown:** should there be any interpretation of the zoning ordinances?

Deeren: no. The ordinances need to be exact and not subject to interpretation. If you want to write an ordinance that says no red houses, then there are no red houses; it needs to be as simple as that. Ordinance interpretation can cause lawsuits and more problems.

Derrick Rosenbach via speaker phone

**Manigold:** welcome, tell us a little bit about yourself for the citizens here and those watching on StreamSpot.

Rosenbach: I am a Michigan native. I am currently in Colorado working as a senior planner for WSP, where I manage complex programs for both state and federal projects. My career started in northern Michigan and I want to get home to my roots. The vision and implementation of township plans is my goal.

**Bickle:** what research have you done on Peninsula Township?

Rosenbach: I have read through the working document for the master plan and the current status of the zoning ordinance update. The short-term rental issue, PDR program, lawsuit with the wineries, special land use permits, and an aging population are critical issues to address in implementing the vision of the township. These issues will require effort to resolve.

**Bickle:** how do you manage conflict within the community? As you may have experienced, there are going to be camps of strong opinions, whether fact or emotion based. In a planning meeting, how do you work to refocus the group and get them back to working on the initiative at hand?

Rosenbach: consensus building and great communication with the stakeholders and being cognizant of the various assumptions within the community. When in a public planning meeting with emotionally charged content, it is important to hear what is said and not become emotional yourself. I think asking follow-up questions and diving deep into the issue is critical. One land use project had 126,000 public comments. You need to respond to them and incorporate them into the planning process.

**Bickle:** could you share with us your timeline of positions held? There are a series of earlier jobs held for 24 months. You have held your present position since 2014. How long have you been at any one location?

Rosenbach: I have been in my current position for 7 years. I worked for the National Forest Service in Livonia, Michigan, for two years. That was the first position I held after obtaining my master's degree. While attending the University of Michigan, I worked with International Forestry Resources. Prior to that I spent two years volunteering and teaching in East Africa through the University of Norte Dame. This was a transitional period for me.

**Bickle:** how did the transitional period take you to Colorado?

Rosenbach: While I was in the forest service in Mio, Michigan, I wanted to stay there, but there was not much opportunity for growth. In looking at positions around the country, there were a plethora of jobs in environmental and resource work in Colorado. The transition was easy because I was managing projects for the National Park Service. At this time, I am ready to get back home.

**Bickle:** are you expecting the township to pay for relocation expenses?

Rosenbach: no.

**Achorn:** you are making over six figures and a small municipal government cannot afford this level of compensation. What is your feeling of taking a substantial pay cut?

Rosenbach: The average current home in this area is \$600,000 where in Michigan the average is \$400,000. I anticipate a pay cut.

**Bickle:** the salary for a planner in this area is \$55,000 to \$65,000. We add 13% of your salary into a defined compensation pension plan and offer health benefits.

**Sanger:** could you help us understand your progression at WSP? How would this help a transition into a community of 6,000 people?

Rosenbach: I was hired quickly, within three days. WSP needed someone who had the technical expertise with the federal land management program. Within a year, I was working on a six-year stalled project at Muir Woods out of San Francisco, and I completed the project within the two-year parameter.

**Sanger:** were you involved in any financial aspects or directly working with sub-contractors? What does a project manager do at WSP?

Rosenbach: Muir Woods National Monument experiences heavy visitation in the summer months and the parking capacity was exceeded. People were parking and walking on the side of the road. The project included redesigned parking lots. We had multiple rounds of public input. I was responsible for the pre-planning phase, maintaining the project budget, coordinating with technical staff, and completing the project on time.

**Chown:** having answered the 17 questions for us, you probably saw the conflict between the wineries, residents, and our zoning laws. A member of the planning commission asked this question: "The rural and agricultural nature of Peninsula Township, which a recent survey of the residences showed a strong desire to preserve, is under constant pressure from developers and commercial interests. If you were selected as planner, how would you handle these conflicting positions and what are your thoughts on the planner's role?"

Rosenbach: this is definitely a contentious issue and one that requires plenty of effort on my part. I have similar experience dealing with ranchers who were using public lands. The zoning permits were antiquated and not updated for years. I analyzed the actions of ranchers and agriculture to build in flexibility and collaboration. Two distinct zoning districts were created. This is a similar approach we could take in Peninsula Township.

**Manigold:** do you have any questions for us?

Rosenbach: given the issues of the wineries and the master plan, what do you see as the critical task for the planning position?

**Manigold:** the purchase of development rights (PDR) program is going to be a major focus in the next two years. We have 18,000 acres and 9,200 are in agriculture preservation, and we want to get 7,000 more under easement by renewing the millage. We seem to be penalized for wanting to do the right thing, such as keeping our scenic views. Many people move here, buy a wooded lot, cut down all the trees, and build a large home. We want to keep the ambiance of the agriculture and rural community, which is our biggest asset. Consider us like a family arguing amongst ourselves. In the long run, we all enjoy living here.

**Wunsch:** this is less about the issues and more about the structure. We possess no depth in terms of staff and you will need to be comfortable owning the role.

Board finishes the interview process.

**Sanger:** I want to wait to make a decision. I have not yet seen the perfect solution today.

**Bickle:** I too do not want to rush into just filling the position. We have seen this before and it did not work out well. Gourdie- Fraser does offer a planning feature and is helping with grant writing now and we have Mielnik on contract finishing the master plan.

**Manigold:** I agree that we are not in a dire situation, but we need to make a decision soon.

**Bickle:** I am wondering why we did not have more candidates for this position.

**Chown:** our process has taken too long and has been cumbersome. Various people have taken other positions or simply dropped out. I agree upon waiting until the township has decided on a structure, but I do not want to give the appearance of stringing along candidates. Do we have a sense of our time frame in arriving at a decision?

**Bickle:** my concern is with the last candidate we interviewed. Is he going to take a pay cut, come back here for several years, and then take another position?

**Sanger:** we need a work session to decide on our working structure. We have had four planners in the last 10 years. Does the planner work for the planning commission or does the commission work for the planner?

**Achorn:** yes, it is hard to fit the solutions into a box when you do not know the size of the box. The planner was a supervisory position and zoning was a lesser position and now the jobs have become equal. We need planning and zoning to work as a team.

**Wunsch:** it seems the planner makes the rules and zoning implements them. The planner stays in a silo and does not feel the pain of implementing code enforcement or the permitting procedure.

**The board agreed to eliminate the third candidate Rosenbach and for Chown to notify him today.**

## 9. Citizen Comments

Julie Alexander, 4866 Forest Ave.

The planning commission needs to be breaking into sub-committees. We are working on projects that need to keep moving forward such as the master plan. Coming to meetings and listening is only part of what we should be doing. We need more work behind the scenes. I really appreciate the checklist that needs to be completed for residents to see in advance before projects come before the planning commission. This information needs to be digitized for residents to access online and not just consist of the paper copy in the

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office.

**Wunsch:** One resident can come in and wipe out our annual legal budget for the year. Projects need to have legal and staff review before coming to the planning commission and not after something has been approved. I would say 70% of the special use permits that have been approved by the planning commission have issues that are only discovered when they've gone before the town board. We need a structure that prevents this from happening. Developers are gaming the system by providing information right before the planning meeting.

**The board set a date of Tuesday, August 3, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. to have a study session on the structure of the planning and zoning departments and their job functions.**

**10. Board Comments:** none

**11. Adjournment:** Wunsch moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Chown.

**Passed Unan**

Adjourned at 12:05 p.m.