

PENINSULA TOWNSHIP

13235 Center Road, Traverse City MI
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Planning Commission Regular Meeting September 2, 2025, 7:00 p.m. Township Hall Minutes

1. Call to Order by Beard at 7:00 p.m.
2. Pledge
3. Roll Call – Present: Alexander, Beard, Dloski, Hall, Hornberger, Shanafelt, Shipman; Elise Loud: Planner of Record
4. Election of Officers

Motions to re-appoint Kevin Beard as Chair of the Planning Commission made by Hall, seconded by Hornberger; to re-appoint Susie Shipman as Vice-Chair of the Planning Commission made by Hall, seconded by Alexander; to re-appoint Larry Dloski as Secretary of the Planning Commission made by Hall, seconded by Shipman. Motion Passes

5. Approve Agenda

Motion to approve agenda as amended by Shipman (removing the Parks Committee update language from Item 12b) made by Dloski, seconded by Beard. Motion Passes

6. Brief Citizen Comments

Chris Hackbarth, 6572 Center Road: states he is primarily attending to learn more about the proposed Walnut Grove development. Notes that his driveway is next to Port Mission Road, an already very busy area. Expresses concern about how increased traffic from the development could impact his ability to enter and exit his home.
Curt Peterson, 1356 Buchan Drive: comments on item 11B: zoning rewrite. Disputes McKenna’s interpretation that rentals can be treated as accessory uses, arguing they are principal uses. Cites Amendment 182, adopted in 2009 as a clarifying measure for residential zones, and references the lighthouse lightkeeper rental program as consistent with that ordinance. Recalls a 2015 study that listed short-term rental properties but provided no impact data. Notes that a 2019 draft briefly allowed short-term rentals in the agricultural district before being changed without public discussion. Urges forming a citizen group to gather data and input before altering regulations.

Hall requests that presentations of this sort be submitted as a memo to the Planner and shared in packet material for clarity.

Sally Erickson, 2228 Kaukauna Court: speaks on behalf of the East Beach Association regarding item 11b. States their concern about potential shoreline changes and the impact on their area. Emphasizes that the association is following the issue closely and wishes to remain involved and helpful as the process continues.

7. Communications

8. Conflict of Interest: none

9. Approve Meeting Minutes

- a. Approval of Meeting Minutes: Planning Commission Regular Meeting: August 5, 2025

Motion to approve minutes as written made by Hornberger, seconded by Dloski. Motion Passes

10. Planner Report

Loud: reports that work continues on digitizing the zoning map and permitting platform, with firm timelines to come. Notes the township is hiring a full-time administrative assistant for the Assessing, Planning, & Zoning departments at \$45–48,000 with benefits, requiring a high school diploma or equivalent. Commissioners discuss qualifications, confidentiality, and training. Loud responds that cross-training and supervisor oversight will support the role. Adds that the Walnut Grove special use permit is reintroduced with revisions, the first batch of zoning rewrite language—signage, shoreline, and short-term rentals—is ready for review, and the Seven Hills permit will come forward for public hearing in October.

11. Business

a. Walnut Grove Special Use Permit Introduction

Loud: reintroduces the Walnut Grove special use permit application for a 33-unit planned unit development/site condo. Notes updates since June, including reducing road entrances to one, which conflicts with fire code, and highlights discrepancies between the site’s rural residential designation on the future land use map and its current R1A/R1C zoning. Commissioners discuss density, traffic impacts, signage, and compliance with fire standards. Loud adds that the township attorney has reviewed the use of easements for open space and advised caution, with follow-up required from the developer. Current zoning calculations are accurate despite inconsistency with the future land use map.

Jesse Mitchell, 3356 Jackson Road: reiterates the Walnut Grove plan as a 33-unit development under existing zoning density and reviews updates since June. Notes the single access point conflicts with fire code, but suggests design alternatives such as a three-lane entry road. Emphasizes that roads will be privately built and maintained but could allow public use. Reports ongoing discussions with MDOT about stormwater and access, and with the township engineer and fire chief on utilities, hydrants, and fire safety, while stating the applicant opposes mandatory sprinklers. Highlights expanded open space and proposes trail connections to mirror nearby developments, inviting Commission input on how best to make the space desirable and usable.

Discussion: over the applicant’s proposed open space, focusing on whether it can meet the 10% public requirement and provide trail connections. Shipman outlines how the plan could fit into the township’s broader non-motorized network, with potential links to nearby neighborhoods and natural areas, though concerns remain about reliance on Consumers Energy easements. Debate over whether the project qualifies as a PUD, with some questioning creativity and compliance with ordinance standards. Emphasis on the potential benefits of tree and slope preservation and neighborhood connections. Developer, Michael Orden, defends their approach, noting adjustments made to address township feedback and stressing they are not exceeding allowable density. PC agrees more detail is needed on grading, tree cover, slope impacts, and the feasibility of open space use before a site visit is scheduled. Final decisions must be grounded in ordinance compliance, even as opinions diverge on how the project aligns with township goals.

Jennifer Graham (with Travis Munn), Gourdie-Fraser: outlines considerations for the Walnut Grove review. Emphasize that PUDs allow collaboration and concessions between the township and developer, unlike use-by-right projects. Recommends obtaining written feedback from MDOT on the road entrance and traffic needs, cautioning that MDOT may require on-site 100-year stormwater management rather than emergency overflow. Encourages tree preservation, potentially with an arborist, and suggests that stormwater and soil erosion for individual homes be reviewed at the time of building permits, while site-level infrastructure is reviewed in advance. Express willingness to join a site visit if needed.

Discussion: follow-up steps, noting that stormwater and soil erosion reviews for individual lots could be required as conditions of approval, as with Peninsula Shores. Loud confirms this is workable and adds MDOT review and detailed grading and tree preservation plans to the to-do list. Commissioners stress the importance of clear visuals before a site visit. The project will return once the applicant provides the required materials, with timelines coordinated to allow adequate staff review.

b. Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Ad-Hoc Committee – Shoreline, short-term rental, and signage draft

ordinance language discussion

Discussion: Commission reviews draft zoning language on shoreline regulations, signage, and short-term rentals, with shoreline as the main focus. McKenna proposes dock placement by centering within lot frontage and requiring 50-foot setbacks from neighboring docks, but commissioners express concern this reduces flexibility, favors whoever builds first, and ignores deep-water access needs. Prefers using side setbacks extended into the water, supported by simple sketches for clarity, and agree dock lighting should be shielded, used only when occupied, and not left on overnight. Also flag wording issues and question hoist size limits as unnecessarily restrictive. Recommends adding rules for anchored swim platforms and rafts, including safety reflectors, and reconsidering how to address large dock patios. Loud agrees to forward these revisions to McKenna.

Motion to schedule a public hearing to introduce draft language from Zoning Rewrite Ad Hoc at the regular meeting of the Planning Commission in October made by Dloski, seconded by Hall.

Motion Passes

12. Reports and Updates – Verbal

a. Agricultural Advisory Committee (Beard)

Discussion of signage, where most agricultural advisory committee feedback is incorporated, but questions remain. Commissioners note concerns about parcel size thresholds for off-premise signs, content-neutrality issues, and unintended consequences such as signs for churches or historic sites. Requests attorney review and McKenna’s clarification. Debate over sign size, with proposals to raise the limit from 9 to 20 square feet, but some suggest a smaller increase to balance visibility with rural character. Seasonal signage rules also raise enforcement concerns. Agrees further revision is needed before a hearing. Short-term rental language is deferred for later discussion. Asserts the ad hoc rewrite committee will next turn to land use districts, and the agricultural committee has recommended setting a uniform 40-acre minimum for processing facilities, consistent with pre-2011 standards.

b. Non-Motorized Plan (Shipman)

Reports that McKenna has prepared a rough draft plan, still in early stages and not ready for public release. Next steps include adding a public engagement workshop with a clear, graphical presentation and digital feedback options to capture input from seasonal residents. This may occur in early November or else after the new year.

c. Township Board (Alexander)

Notes that the community survey has been submitted to Epic-MRA for review, with recommendations expected soon. Updates also confirm that both the Township and the wineries have filed appeals in the ongoing litigation, with further guidance expected from attorneys.

13. Brief Citizen Comments

Katherine Pike, 6095 Red Fox Run: thanks the PC and explains she and her husband chose Traverse City for its health, safety, and natural beauty. Values access to natural areas like Pelizzari Preserve, quiet away from road noise, and community connections. Voices concern about docks and boats obstructing lake views and safe swimming, urging continued protection of the natural environment.

Sally Erickson, 2228 Kaukauna Court: builder and developer of Port of Old Mission, notes she sold the Walnut Grove parcel. She stresses the importance of protecting beach frontage and enforcing existing rules, citing conflicts with Hidden Ridge over dock use and boat density. Warns of a “wild west” mentality on the water, urges balance between housing and stewardship of natural resources. Cautions that increasing dock density from one to three would significantly impact sightlines and overuse.

Steven Brown, 336 Knollwood Drive: speaks as a former planning commissioner and township supervisor. Contrasts Walnut Grove with Vineyard Ridge, which he says was damaged despite having fewer natural resources. Expresses concern that Peninsula Township still lacks tree and steep slope ordinances in 2025, stressing the need for enforceable standards to support township engineers in stormwater and erosion review.

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Urges skepticism toward developers while acknowledging the desire to give them a chance to do right. Adds that neighborhood efforts to preserve trees feel threatened by increasing density and development pressures. Hall: invites Brown to share sample ordinances with Loud and PC, noting change is inevitable but must be managed thoughtfully. Brown agrees, offering to provide relevant and current examples.

14. Other Matters or Comments by Planning Commission Members: none

15. Adjournment

Motion by Shipman to adjourn this regular meeting of the Township Board, seconded by Dloski.

Motion Passes

Meeting Adjourned at 9:45 p.m.