

Houghton County Planning Commission

Meeting Minutes

Commissioners Hall, 5th Floor, County Courthouse

Tuesday March 19th, 2024 4:00 PM

1. Call to Order at 4:03
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll call: Present: John Larson-chair, Timothy Sears – secretary, Ben Larson – county controller, Joel Keranen – county commissioner, Steve Aho, Mike Erickson, Allan Aho, Erik Killunen, Mark Larson
Absent: none
4. Approval of minutes meeting January 16th. Motion by B Larson, second by S. Aho. All approved
5. Agenda: No additions or changes. Motion B Larson, second – by E. Killunen. All approved.
6. Public Comments: Ted Sohlden from Portage Planning Commission spoke regarding the HR5120 law and implications regarding potential loss of local control with regard to decisions about “clean” and “renewable” energy. Ted was suggesting a review of CREOs, and how we may work as municipalities to address this if Public Act 233 becomes the law on November 29th. B Larson commented the Michigan Association of Counties and many if not all 83 Michigan Counties are opposed to this, and that this would be addressed in item 15.
7. Correspondence – Letter from Kristen Swenson about the Cell Phone Tower behind the Calumet State Police Post. Administrator Larson has replied to her and said that the proposed work to update the Tower is fine as we have no ordinance against that, and the County sold the property to the ATC company a few years ago. Additional correspondence was from the Visit Keweenaw group to who has invited anyone interested to join them for a March 26th at noon event “Enhancing Accessible Tourism” being held at the Keweenaw Community Foundation in Hancock.
8. Working Groups
 - a. Commissioners meeting report: J. Keranen - see discussions later in the agenda.
 - b. Materials Management: No new updates.
 - c. Torch Lake: M. Erickson drafting a letter see item in later agenda
 - d. Public Health: Nothing pertaining to planning
 - e. Recreation and Tourism: Reopening of Hancock to LL trail by the DNR.
9. Old Business: None
10. New Business
11. Election of Officers: S Aho elected chair, M Erickson elected vice chair. Sears will remain as secretary or possibly pass the secretary’s torch to Ben Larson.
12. EPA Letter Regarding Torch Lake – Discussion about a recent visit with the EPA for Commissioner Erickson and Administrator Larson was shared. That meeting was canceled in the middle of the meeting by EPA, and the Commission and Mike and Ben were told to put our concerns and questions in writing. A letter was drafted asking about the current efforts and some things that remain as concerns. Motion for approval J Larson, second by B Larson. Approved.
13. Keweenaw Snowmobile Club Maintenance Facility in Calumet – in process that’s to donated labor, have some items to still complete but doors are on and they are making progress. They have asked for help in seeking funding, and the County is supporting those efforts to find funds for them.

14. Recreation Plan Update: rejected by Merrie Carlock of the DNR on March 11, Jerry from WUPPRDR will be looking at this matter and State Representative Greg Markkanen too. Merrie's many reasons will all be addressed, and the hope will be to get an approval from the DNR so that it is on file for the next 5 years.
15. Public Act 233 and House Bill 5120 Solar and Wind, MAC Update and Opposition, Citizens for Choice: Continued discussion related to the above public comments, and the CFC group looking for a local "Captain" to facilitate and gather signatures for a Petition to get this on the November ballot. If enough signatures can be gathered, an opportunity to repeal this law could be possible for the public. A Houghton County Captain will be identified, and for those who wish to sign the Petition an option made available to share their frustration and put it to a vote instead of a mandate that is against our will to have local control. The Houghton County Board of Commission voted unanimously to adopt and pass a Resolution that was sent in, as most if not all of the 83 Counties are doing the same and asking to keep decisions like this on the local level. HB 5120 gives them unprecedented power and that becomes final on November 29 of this year.
16. Boundary Surveying of Parcels: info given on a tough matter. Old plats and agreements between neighbors on lot lines is an issue in Ripley now. Having a proper survey of any parcel owned is a good idea, and as parcels are bought many times boundary surveys are completed by the new owner. Age old agreed upon lines are being discovered to be incorrect, so any citizen or parcel owner may want to consider a current survey and not rely on the past. Driveways, storage sheds and others have been found to not be on the parcel owner's property when this happens, and is happening now.
17. River Trails, LLC Development – Don McClean wants help to develop apartment complex units in Portage Township. He is planning to develop a large parcel, and make apartments/condominiums that would serve the Michigan Tech Professors and other groups who are looking for non-existent housing now. EGLE and the Marquette Office has not been cooperative, and Don is working with Traverse Engineering and the local Health Department. A request for variance has been submitted, and the Houghton County Board of Commission has asked for the same and has supported River Trails. Rob Wolfe from EGLE was supposed to send a written response to the BOC on March 11th, but no response has come as of this meeting. If possible, the County will make contact with Director Roos as Housing has been an important part of Governor Whitmer's State Growth Planning, and the need for local housing is at an all-time high as folks keep moving here to Houghton County.
18. Marina Development, State Grant Opportunities – Administrator Larson shared that a great opportunity is at hand. For a long time now, the County Owned Marina has had bathrooms that are in need of updating for ADA compliance. Curt Wemple from the DNR has identified grant funds, and he said that fixing these up and getting them to a 2024 standard would be a great use of the Waterways Grant-in-Aid funds. Sadly, with the recent rejection of the Rec Plan, that is now not possible. We hope to work with Merrie and the DNR, but if that is not possible then this will wait another year. The submission date for Grants to the DNR for this matter is April 1, 2024.
19. Next Meeting: May 21st, 2024.
20. Commissioner Kiilunen shared an idea to conduct a study of our local Covid Response in the near future.
21. Adjournment: Motion by S. Aho, second E Kiilunen. All Approved

Respectfully submitted: Timothy T Sears -Secretary