

CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

1. Introduction

The City of Houghton Planning Commission fulfills a requirement of the Planning Enabling Act. Duties of the commission include:

- Prepare and approve a master plan that is reviewed annually and updated every five years
- Prepare a capital improvement program to submit to the council for adoption every year
- Review and update the zoning ordinance periodically to make sure it complies with the master plan
- Review and update the zoning map periodically to make sure it complies with the master plan
- Hold public hearings and recommend or deny requests from citizens in accordance with the zoning ordinance
- Perform site plan reviews of new developments

2. Purpose of Report

This annual report is required in the Planning Enabling Act. This report increases information-sharing between the commission, staff, boards, the public, and the governing body.

3. Membership

Segment Represented

a. Tom Merz, Chairperson	Educational
b. Bill Leder, Vice Chairperson	Transportation/Utility/Communication
c. Michele Jarvie-Eggart, Secretary	Industrial/Economic
d. Eric Waara, City Manager	
e. Robert Backon, Mayor	
f. Mike Needham, Councilor	Governmental/Municipal/Housing
g. Kristine Bradof	Environmental
h. Dan Liebau	At-Large
i. Jennifer Julien	Recreational/Tourism

4. Meetings

The commission met eleven times throughout 2020.

A joint meeting with the council and DDA was held on December 15th to receive a proposal from Veridea Group for a development project downtown on the site of the present big parking deck. Over 100 people took part in the meeting held on zoom.

Most meetings were held electronically in accordance with executive orders from the State of Michigan because the Covid-19 pandemic restricted the amount of people allowed to gather indoors.

5. Master Plan and Economic Development Strategy Review

The revised master plan including the economic development strategy was adopted in the fall of 2019. Little progress was made during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic that locked down residents and temporarily closed many businesses, especially restaurants and bars. During 2020, the City took an active role in helping local businesses stay afloat. Because indoor gathering was prohibited or limited, the City created comfortable outdoor spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy food and beverages from local restaurants along the waterfront and downtown. This was very successful during the spring, summer, and early fall; however, during winter months it is very difficult to create an outdoor atmosphere fit for dining.

The pandemic also limited the ability of the City to hold public meetings as groups were not able to gather indoors. Council and commission meetings were held electronically creating difficulty moving forward with projects that require public input. This limited the ability for the City to communicate with the public on a proposed development for the big parking deck downtown. At the end of the year, Veridea Group withdrew their proposal. The City is now starting the process over.

In the spring of 2020, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation realigned their budget to cover Covid-19 expenses and withdrew their funding for the downtown Pier Placemaking Project just as the project was ready for bidding. Late in 2020, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation reached out to the City to reinstate the funding. This project is now expected to be funded and constructed in 2021 which will assist the City in reaching many of the goals in the master plan including economic development, creation of a town square, downtown parking enhancement, increased downtown green space, and waterfront trail improvements.

6. Other Plans

- a. The commission approved the Capital Improvement Plan and recommended it for adoption by the council. This plan was adopted by the council on June 10, 2020.

7. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

- a. Ordinance 2019-302 (Section 98-427) - Sets zoning rules for adult-use marijuana retailers in the city. Public hearing held on January 28, 2020. Ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption following the public hearing. Ordinance 2020-310 (Section 98-427) amended this ordinance for clarification. Public hearing held on June 23rd and the ordinance was recommended to council for adoption.
- b. Ordinance 2019-303 (Section 98-422) – Revises present medical marijuana ordinance allowing for adult-use marijuana retailers and medical marijuana facilities to be located near each other. Ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption following a public hearing on January 28, 2020. Ordinance 2020-312 (Section 98-422) amended this ordinance for clarification. Public hearing held on June 23rd and the ordinance was recommended to council for adoption.
- c. Ordinance 2020-311 (Sections 98-143-145) – Creates a Central Business District Overlay. A public hearing was held on July 28, 2020. Public comments received were not in favor of the proposed height restriction. No action was taken on the ordinance at the July 28th meeting. The commission then removed the height restriction from the proposed ordinance. Another public hearing was held on September 22, 2020.

Following the public hearing, the ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption.

- d. Ordinance 2020-314 – conditionally rezones a parcel of property on Houghton Canal Road that is located in the city because of PA-425 Agreements with Adams Township and Stanton Township. The owner of the parcel is requesting a conditional rezoning from R-1 to B-2 with conditions. The conditions allow all uses allowed in the residential districts as well as hotels, motels, restaurants, taverns, or other places serving food or beverages. A public hearing was held on November 17, 2020. John Fodermaier, a resident of Stanton Township, lives adjacent to the property. He is not in favor of the rezoning. He mentioned a portion of the site is a wetland and the site is also an EPA Superfund site. Following the public hearing, the ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption.
- e. Ordinance 2020-315 – conditionally rezones a parcel of property on Houghton Canal Road next to the parcel mentioned in Ordinance 2020-314 from R-1 to B-2 with conditions. The conditions allow all uses listed in Ordinance 2020-314 with the addition of a seaplane passenger service. A public hearing was held on November 17, 2020. Liz Gerson, resident of the Springwood subdivision, said she feels the seaplane is a noise nuisance. John Fodermaier said he is in favor of the rezoning. The clerk read a letter from John and Jen Norkol of Hancock stating they are not in favor of the rezoning. Jon Rector is the owner of the property. He would like to relocate the seaplane business to this property which held the business previously. He feels this relocation will decrease seaplane noise as the planes will leave the area quickly. The planes presently fly over the canal from Ripley causing more noise for the cities. Following the public hearing, the ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption.

The commission created a zoning ordinance subcommittee to review and update the entire zoning ordinance following adoption of the master plan. Members of this subcommittee are Kristine Bradof, Bill Leder, Mike Needham, and Eric Waara. The subcommittee met throughout 2020 and will continue to meet into 2021 to finalize the revision and bring it to the entire commission to review.

8. Development Reviews

- a. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for a renovation of the Magnuson Inn to a Hampton Inn at 820 Sheldon Avenue in January.
- b. The commission held a public hearing and recommended the council approve a special land use permit for a marihuana retailer establishment at 902 Razorback Drive, Unit 10 in June. The council approved this permit.
- c. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for a new elevator addition at the Bluffs, 1000 Bluff View Drive in June.
- d. The commission held a public hearing and recommended the council approve a special land use permit for a marihuana retailer establishment at 910 Razorback Drive in July. The council approved this permit.
- e. The commission held a public hearing and recommended the council approve a special land use permit for a marihuana retailer establishment at 906 Razorback Drive in September. The council approved this permit.
- f. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for The Fire Station marihuana retailer at 906 Razorback Drive in November.
- g. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for Lume to operate a marihuana retailer at 910 Razorback Drive in November.

9. Zoning Map Changes

- a. September 22, 2020 – the commission held a public hearing regarding proposed Ordinance 2020-311 (Section 98-143 to 98-145) creating a Central Business Overlay District downtown specifying the uses and setting zoning conditions. This was the second public hearing held on the proposed ordinance. Following public comment made at the first public hearing, the commission removed a height restriction from the proposed ordinance. The ordinance was recommended to the council for adoption and was adopted by the council after their public hearing.

10. Zoning Department Annual Development Review

The City received and approved 19 zoning applications during 2020.

There were seven commercial zoning applications completed for a total of \$5,050,000 in value and 12 residential zoning applications completed for a total of \$602,000 in value.

Following site plan reviews, the developer and/or owner is provided a survey allowing the City to receive feedback of the process. All feedback received regarding the site plan review process for 2020 was positive.

11. Actions taken per Planning Commission Recommendations

- a. The council adopted the Capital Improvement Plan.
- b. The council granted a special land use permit for Northern Specialty marihuana retailer.
- c. The council granted a special land use permit for The Fire Station marihuana retailer.
- d. The council granted a special land use permit for Lume marihuana retailer.
- e. The council adopted Ordinance 2020-302
- f. The council adopted Ordinance 2020-303
- g. The council adopted Ordinance 2020-310
- h. The council adopted Ordinance 2020-312

12. Variances granted by Zoning Board of Appeals

- a. The zoning board of appeals approved a rear and side-yard setback to build a garage at 711 W. Calverley. The property is narrow with elevation changes.

13. Trainings Attended

City Manager Waara attended the MML Annual Conference.

Bill Leder attended *Parking Reform for 21st Century Communities* by the Form Based Code Institute and *Parking Maximums and Conflict Resolution* by Walker Consultants.

Kristine Bradof attended *Parking Reform for 21st Century Communities* by the Form Based Code Institute, *Parking Maximums* by Walker Consultants, Citizen Planner Advanced Academy, and MEDC Redevelopment Ready training.

Potential training in the upcoming year based on goals and priorities:

- a. MSU Extension training for Zoning Ordinance revision.
- b. Downtown Development and Redevelopment training offered by MEDC
- c. Winter Cities training offered by the Michigan Association of Planners

14. Other Business

- a. The commission was presented with the results of a Michigan Tech Senior Design Project. The students created designs to replace the Ambassador and Vault parking decks.

15. Looking Ahead to 2021

- a. The commission was asked by the council to recommend a process for redevelopment of the big parking deck.
- b. Master Plan.
 - i. The commission will revise Chapter 10- Downtown of the Master Plan as well as Chapter 13- Zoning and Future Land Use this year with focus on the big downtown parking deck.
 - ii. The commission will also separate all chapters of the master plan into five groups with the intent of revising one group of chapters each year.
- c. Zoning Ordinance. The zoning ordinance subcommittee will continue its work on revisions to the zoning ordinance. Some possible amendments to the ordinance include:
 - i. Revising the amount of minimum automobile and bike parking spaces required for large commercial development.
 - ii. Short-term rentals.
 - iii. Changes to site plan review process.
 - iv. Creation of a Planned Use Development process.