

MINUTES OF MEETING  
CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION  
MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE  
MONDAY, AUGUST 23, 2021 – 1:00 p.m.  
CITY CENTER COUNCIL CHAMBERS

PRESENT: Bill Leder, Michele Jarvie-Eggart, Kristine Bradof, and Jennifer Julien.

Also present: City Manager Eric Waara, Clerk Ann Vollrath, Code Enforcement Officer Jeff Jepsen, Sharon Levine, Derek Bradway, Craig Waddell, Garrett Neese, Teresa Coleman-Kaiser, Gregg Richards, Robert Megowen, Grant Dossetto, and Gail Sanchez.

APPROVAL OF  
PREVIOUS  
MINUTES:

A motion was made by Julien and seconded by Bradof to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2021 meeting as written

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

APPROVAL OF  
AGENDA:

Bill Leder said he would like to expand the agenda to a more general discussion of Multiple Family Housing as it relates to rental properties and Missing Middle Housing. Off-street parking is just one of several important rental housing issues. He read the intents of the R-2, R-3 and R-4 zoning districts. He said the 2020 census shows four communities in the Upper Peninsula with population increases. The City of Houghton increased by 682 people.

Teresa Coleman-Kaiser of Michigan Tech said tentative enrollment this fall is 2,300 students living on-campus and 4,450 students living off-campus. There is a need for off-campus student, faculty, and employee housing.

OPPORTUNITY  
FOR PUBLIC  
TO ADDRESS:

Gail Sanchez, a local landlord, pointed out confusing wording in the R-4 district regarding the maximum height of structures. She feels it may lead to developers challenging the city. The language regarding “higher density” will be changed to “greater density” to avoid the confusion.

Ms. Sanchez also discussed the reduction in parking requirements in the R-4 district as she feels the reduction will cause problems with inadequate parking. As a landlord, she knows that most students bring their cars when they move to Houghton.

**BUSINESS:**

Kristine Bradof said other options for providing long-term parking for students who don't use their cars everyday should be investigated. This will alleviate parking issues close to campus.

Jen Julien said the community needs more available public transit.

Bill Leder suggested a survey of Michigan Tech students about cars and transportation.

Eric Waara explained our transit system provides a shuttle bus for students that Michigan Tech subsidizes. The city is limited on what it can afford to invest in a transit system. He is planning to apply for a grant to study the feasibility of creating a local transit authority.

Teresa Coleman-Kaiser said Green Student Government prepares a survey for students each spring. Perhaps we can submit questions for this survey. Presently Michigan Tech charters three busses to transport students home and back during school breaks.

Bill Leder asked the landlords present if they charge their tenants more to bring cars. Gail Sanchez said it would create a lot of bookkeeping. At her present rental next to Michigan Tech all but one tenant has a car. She feels the present parking requirements should not be reduced. She asked why the city would reduce the parking requirements when what is in place right now is working.

She is also is concerned that if the council rezones the property on College Avenue to R-4 to allow the developer to provide less parking, the developer may further lower their parking to the R-4 level.

Michele Jarvie-Eggart shares the concerns about parking; however, there are many students, faculty, and employees at Michigan Tech that need places to live. There is presently a housing shortage so she sees a need for more dense housing.

Eric Waara said the master plan states we need to create additional denser housing close to campus to protect the other neighborhoods. The city is trying to plan for increased demand in housing.

Gail Sanchez said she is not opposed to increasing the density. She is opposed to reducing the parking requirement.

Teresa Coleman-Kaiser said enrollment is flat this year; however, the incoming freshman class is large and if that trend holds the university will increase overall enrollment.

Kristine Bradof said there are a lot of remote workers moving to the area which is also driving up the demand for housing.

Code Enforcement Officer Jeff Jepsen said many students have more than one vehicle and also bring off-road vehicles to town.

Bill Leder suggested working with Michigan Tech to solve the housing and parking problem.

The committee reviewed a map of vacant land in Houghton. Some of this land is owned by the city, some by private individuals, and some by Michigan Tech.

Jen Julien said if Michigan Tech cannot grow because of a lack of housing, they may decide to build more housing on campus.

Derek Bradway, a local landlord, said there is a need for housing, but we need to do what is best for the community. The city needs to allow development, but avoid unintended consequences. Over 90% of tenants have vehicles, even the tenants that live next to campus. He feels the city needs to increase housing, but it also needs to require adequate parking. If adequate parking is not provided, tenants will pirate-park everywhere else which will cause problems for other property owners.

A motion to adjourn was made by Julien and seconded by Bradof.

Yes: All

No: None

Motion carried

The meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

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Kristine Bradof, Secretary