

CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION 2021 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 not recommend 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. Michelle 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. Committees

The following committees have been created with the members assigned:

Zoning Ordinance – Eric Waara, Kristine Bradof, Bill Leder, Mike Needham

Master Plan Survey – Eric Waara, Mike Needham, Michelle Jarvie-Eggart, Jen Julien

By-laws – Tom Merz, Kristine Bradof, Dan Liebau, Bill Leder

5. Meetings

January 5, 2021 – Special Meeting to discuss revised Ordinance 2020-314 and set a public hearing
January 26, 2021 – Regular Meeting

February 9, 2021 – Special Meeting to discuss Downtown Development
February 23, 2021- Regular Meeting
March 23, 2021 – Regular Meeting
April 27, 2021- Regular Meeting
May 25, 2021 – Regular Meeting
June 22, 2021 – Regular Meeting
July 20, 2021 – Special Meeting to receive a report from the Charrette-Ready Workshop
July 27, 2021 – Regular Meeting
August 24, 2021 – Regular Meeting
September 28, 2021 – Regular Meeting
October 26, 2021 – Regular Meeting
There was no meeting of the commission in November
December 14, 2021 – Regular Meeting

6. Master Plan and Economic Development Strategy Review

Creation of the Master Plan Committee

The Master Plan Committee (herein referred to as Committee) was established by the Planning Commission during the Commission’s special meeting on March 2, 2021. Planning Commission members Michelle Jarvie-Eggart, Jennifer Julien, Kristine Bradof, and Bill Leder were appointed to the Committee. The Commission specified that all meetings be open to the public.

While Chapters 10 (Downtown) and 13 (Zoning and Future Land Use) were assigned as the primary focus, the Committee also explored other topics included in this summary.

Summaries of meetings from March 9 through September 20 are provided below. More detailed information is available in the meeting minutes found on the City Website in the Document Center.

March 9, 2021 Meeting

Bill Leder, Michelle Jarvie-Eggart, and Kristine Bradof were appointed Committee chair, vice-chair, and secretary, respectively.

The Committee discussed the proposal for a Charrette-Ready Workshop focused on Downtown and the Big Parking Deck as submitted to the city by the National Charrette Institute, Michigan State University.

May 3, 2021 - The Committee reviewed Chapter 13 of the Master Plan. Topics of discussion were:

- Changing incentives and expanding the R-4 Redevelopment Ready District.
- Diversifying housing types, including increased density and use of vacant land.
- Considering changes that might result in elderly residents staying in their single-family homes.
- Adding Houghton Housing Commission apartments for low-income residents.
- Exploring urban farming.
- Adding height restrictions to the Downtown Overlay District.
- Identifying legacy mining sites within the city.
- Further promoting the history of Houghton and its historic buildings including homes.

The Committee also reviewed Chapter 10 of the Master Plan. Topics of discussion were:

- Finding better ways to accomplish trash and recycling collection and deliveries to businesses along Sheldon Avenue.
- Parking and traffic flow.
- Placemaking.
- Diversity.
- Enhancing the art scene.
- Strengthening connections between Downtown and the Waterfront.
- Enhancing the connection between Montezuma Avenue and Downtown.
- Parking on the south side of Sheldon Avenue that would enable more walking through downtown to the Waterfront.
- Designate Huron Street as a pedestrian mall.
- Improved pedestrian crossing of Montezuma Avenue.

July 19, 2021 - The Committee discussed:

- A possible sub-area plan for Downtown. This was envisioned as a stand-alone document separate and apart from the Master Plan. The sub-area plan and the Master Plan would complement each other. The sub-area-plan could support enhancements to the existing Downtown Overlay District that might include form-based zoning.
- Housing possibilities that would meet the needs of current and future residents, including aging-in-place for seniors.
- Expansion of the R-4 Redevelopment Ready District in areas close to the Michigan Tech campus. Included was a discussion of densification in general and student parking. Members of the public participated in the conversation.
- A meeting that Michelle Jarvie-Eggart had with Carol MacLennan concerning identifying locations of legacy mining and mining residual materials sites.

August 23, 2021 - The Committee engaged public participants in a general discussion of densification near the Michigan Tech campus, multiple family housing including students, and missing middle housing stock.

- The intent statements in the Zoning Ordinance for the R-2, R-3, and R-4 Districts were read as an introduction to the conversation.
- According to the 2020 census, the city gained 682 residents since 2010.
- Michigan Tech student enrollment and parking by students living off-campus were given considerable attention, including much dialogue with members of the public in attendance.
- A map of vacant land within the city was reviewed.

September 20, 2021 - This meeting focused exclusively on missing middle housing stock and how it applies to Houghton.

- The term “missing middle housing” was explained and examples were given.
- Possible opportunities for diversification of housing, including introducing new housing types such as duplexes and ancillary dwelling units, was discussed.
- The impact of short-term vacation rentals in residential neighborhoods was part of the conversation.
- A developer in the audience gave his perspective.

7. 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 9, 2021.

8. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

The commission held a public hearing on February 23, 2021 regarding Ordinance 2021-318 making changes to the planned unit development section of the zoning ordinance. Following the public hearing, the commission passed a motion recommending the ordinance to the council. The council held a public hearing on April 14, 2021. Following the public hearing, the council adopted Ordinance 2021-318.

The zoning ordinance committee reviewed and updated the zoning ordinance following adoption of the master plan. Members of the committee are Kristine Bradof, Bill Leder, Mike Needham, and Eric Waara. The committee met throughout 2021 and presented their proposed revisions to the planning commission. The planning commission held a public hearing on July 27, 2021 to discuss Ordinance 2021-322. Following the public hearing, the commission passed a motion to recommend the ordinance to the city council. The city council held a public hearing regarding Ordinance 2021-322 on August 25, 2021. Following the public hearing, the council passed a motion adopting Ordinance 2021-322.

9. Development Reviews

- a. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for an additional 22' X 90' greenhouse at Sleeman's Greenhouse.
- b. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for Houghton Spirits to open a tasting and tap room at 318 Shelden Avenue as this represents a change of use.
- c. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for St. Peter and Paul Lutheran Church to erect a storage garage on their property.
- d. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for an extended stay hotel at 913 Razorback Drive.
- e. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for a Kentucky Fried Chicken on an out lot in the Community Baptist Church parking lot on Sharon Avenue.
- f. The commission held a public hearing and recommended the council approve a special land use permit for Nirvana to open a recreational marijuana business at 1301 Ridge Road.
- g. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for the Houghton Baptist Church at 2801 Sharon Avenue to construct an accessory garage.
- h. The commission reviewed and approved a grading site plan for the Canal Road Campground (aka Keweenaw Waters Resort).
- i. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for an apartment complex at 100 Pearl Street.
- j. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for at the Bluffs Senior Community
- k. The commission reviewed and approved a site plan for a campground at Keweenaw Waters Resort on the Houghton Canal Road.

10. Zoning Map Changes

- a. On January 26, 2021, the commission held a public hearing regarding Ordinance 2020-314 to conditionally rezone an approximately 15.5-acre parcel of property on Houghton Canal Road from R-1 to B-2 with conditions. Following the public hearing, the commission

recommended this ordinance to the council. The council held a public hearing and adopted Ordinance 2021-314 on February 24, 2021.

- b. The commission held a public hearing on June 22, 2021 regarding Ordinance 2021-321 to rezone a portion of the 15.5-acre parcel of property on Houghton Canal Road from B-2 with conditions to Reserve for the development of a campground with amenities. Following the public hearing, the commission passed a motion recommending Ordinance 2021-321 to the council. The council held a public hearing on July 14, 2021. Following the public hearing, the council adopted Ordinance 2021-321.
- c. The commission held a public hearing on July 27, 2021 regarding Ordinance 2021-323 rezoning lots 12-18 of Block 8 of the Supervisor's Plat of East Houghton from R-3 to R-4. Following the public hearing, the commission passed a motion recommending the ordinance to the council. The council held a public hearing on August 25, 2021. Following the public hearing, the council adopted Ordinance 2021-323.

11. Zoning Department Annual Development Review

The city received and approved 25 Zoning Permits in 2021.

There were 6 commercial Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$5,250,000 in value and 19 residential Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$1,154,000 of which \$830,000 is the construction of two new houses.

There was a total of ten site plan reviews completed in 2021. Following site plan reviews, the developer/owner is provided a survey allowing the city to receive feedback of the process. All feedback received regarding the process for 2021 was positive.

12. Variances granted by Zoning Board of Appeals

- a. There were no appeals to the Zoning Board of Appeals in 2021.

13. Trainings Attended and Training Plan for 2022:

City Manager Waara attended the MML Annual Conference.

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

Kristine Bradof attended *Parking Reform for 21st Century Communities* by the Form Based Code Institute, *Parking Maximums* by Walker Consultants, Citizen Planner Advanced Academy, Michigan Association of Planning Winter Cities, and *Impact of Form Based Codes* by Form Based Codes Institute.

Training Plan for 2022:

- a. Schedule training with MSU Extension for Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance revision.
- b. Downtown Development and Redevelopment training as offered.
- c. Members that attend training are asked to briefly describe the training they attended and update other members on what was learned at training during the Reports section of the agenda at the next commission meeting.

14. Other Business

The commission formed a committee to work on the issue of replacement/redevelopment of the big parking deck downtown. Committee members were Tom Merz, Eric Waara, Mike Needham, and Dan Liebau.

The committee held six meetings soliciting public input. Following public input, they created a matrix of options for the future of the deck and property. The committee recommended the planning commission recommend to the city council to begin planning to remove the parking deck and begin a public engagement process to plan what to do with the site. Following this recommendation, the council voted to accept the recommendation from the planning commission to remove the big parking deck and in parallel begin the process of determining what comes next for that spot. The council hired Pat Coleman of North of 45 to hold up to three public engagement events and provide a report when completed. Two of these events took place in September and November of 2021.

15. Public Participation Report

On January 9, 2021, the City of Houghton adopted a Public Participation Plan to guide and outline policies, procedures and methods to effectively and equitably engage public input during planning, zoning, and development processes. In addition to all required State measures for public participation, the plan identifies methods of proactive public involvement, acts as a tool for accountability and transparency, and illustrates ways to share feedback and results to the public in a timely manner.

In addition to required public hearings, the city held two public participation events in 2021 related to the big parking deck issue.

- a. Life After the Parking Deck held on Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at the Bonfire at the Continental Fire Company from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. This event was facilitated by Pat Coleman of North of 45 LLC.
 - i. Attendees: 66 people attended the event. Not all attendees completed an evaluation. Of those that did, the ages of attendees were:
 1. 80 and over – 1
 2. 70-79 - 18
 3. 60-69 – 9
 4. 50-59 – 3
 5. 40-49 – 2
 6. 30-39 – 2
 7. 19-29 – 2
 8. 18 and under - 2
 - ii. How people found out about the event.
 1. E-mail – 15
 2. Newspaper – 19
 3. Website – 1
 4. Word of mouth – 12
 5. Radio - 11
 - iii. Comments: (in order based on how many comments)
 1. More facilitation and less individual discussion

2. Poor lighting and could not hear people at same table
 3. Provide the power point in writing too
 4. Have an equal amount of people at the tables
 5. Less focus on parking
 6. Do a survey
- b. Life After the Parking Deck .2 was held on November 10, 2021 at the Bonfire. This event was facilitated by Pat Coleman of North of 45 LLC.
- i. Attendees: 42 people attended the event. Not all attendees completed an evaluation. Of those that did, the ages of attendees were:
 1. 70-79 - 6
 2. 60-69 – 3
 3. 50-59 –1
 4. 40-49 – 2
 5. 30-39 – 1
 6. 18 and under - 1
 - ii. How people found out about the event.
 7. E-mail – 3
 8. Newspaper – 5
 9. Website – 2
 10. Word of mouth – 5
 11. Radio - 4
 - iii. Comments: (in order based on how many comments)
 12. More discussion
 13. OK as is
 14. Directions for session were not clear
 15. Next level of detail needs to be generated
 16. Do not use outdated data

In July a Charrette-Ready Workshop presented by MSU Extension was held following a request by the commission and funding approval by the council. Member of the commission attending were Eric Waara, Bill Leder and Kristine Bradof. Members of the council also attended as did members of the public.

16.Looking Ahead to 2022

- a. The commission created a survey committee to work with the Michigan Tech College of Business on the survey for the next master plan revision. The committee plans to work on the questions in the spring of 2022 with the survey to be sent to residents in early October of 2022. Results can be received in early November to give the intern from the College of Business time to report to the commission in the winter of 2022-23.
- b. The commission created a by-laws committee to work on updating the commission’s by-laws.
- c. Hold joint meeting with council and DDA.
- d. Annual capital improvement plan review and recommendation to council.
- e. Annual master plan progress review including Economic Development Strategy.
- f. Update Redevelopment Ready Community priority development sites.
- g. Zoning Ordinance Committee should review the zoning ordinance to update it to meet the new Redevelopment Ready Community best practices regarding housing diversity.