

CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION 2023 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

2023:

a. Tom Merz, Chairperson	Educational
b. Bill Leder, Vice Chairperson	Transportation/Utility/Communication
c. Dan Liebau, Secretary	At-large
d. Norma Veurink	Industrial/Economic
e. Eric Waara, City Manager	
f. Brian Irizarry, Mayor	
g. Joan Suits, Mayor Pro Tem	Government/Municipal/Housing
h. Kristine Bradof	Environmental
i. Ben Ciavola	Recreational/Tourism

4. Committees

The following committees worked on specific chapters of the master plan during the revision process:

Recreation – Liebau, Ciavola, Irizarry, Veurink

Neighborhoods and Housing – Bradof, Waara, Leder

Mobility – Leder, Liebau, Merz

Downtown and M-26 – Bradof, Waara, Irizarry, Suits

Economic Development and Zoning – Waara, Merz, Veurink

Sustainability and Resilience – Bradof, Liebau, Ciavola

Other committees:

Zoning Ordinance – Waara, Suits, Leder, Bradof

Food Truck Ordinance – Waara, Liebau, Leder

Recreation (Trail Town Advisory) – Waara, Merz, Liebau

Redevelopment Sites – Waara, Suits, Ciavola, Veurink

Huron Creek Watershed Advisory – Waara, Merz, Bradof, Leder

5. Meetings

The Michigan Planning Enabling Act requires that local Planning Commissions meet at least four times a year. The City of Houghton Planning Commission meets the fourth Tuesday of each month and held 15 meetings during the year on the following dates:

January 24, 2023

February 21, 2023 – Special Meeting for 2022 Quality of Life Survey Results

February 28, 2023

March 28, 2023

April 25, 2023

May 23, 2023

May 31, 2023 – Joint Meeting with Council and DDA

June 27, 2023

July 25, 2023

August 22, 2023

September 19, 2023 – Special Meeting Regarding the Recreation Plan

September 26, 2023

October 24, 2023

November 28, 2023

December 19, 2023.

6. Master Plan and Economic Development Strategy Review

Throughout the year master plan committees met to draft the master plan chapters. The chapters were brought to the commission when they were ready for review by the entire commission.

The economic development strategy was reviewed by the committee working on the economic development chapter as part of their work revising the master plan.

On September 19, 2023, the commission approved a draft of the Recreation Plan (Chapter 4 of the Master Plan) to be placed for a 30-day public comment period. On October 24, 2023, the commission held a public hearing regarding the Recreation Plan. No comments were made at the public hearing. Following the public hearing, the commission voted to recommend the Recreation Plan to the Council.

On November 8, 2023, the council received requests from the public to add further language regarding pickleball courts to the Recreation Plan. The council sent the Recreation Plan back to the commission for further review. On November 28, 2023, the commission reviewed the Recreation

Plan and voted to add additional language to the plan regarding pickleball courts and recommended the revised Recreation Plan to the council.

On November 29, 2023, the council approved the Recreation Plan so that it can be filed with the Department of Energy, Great Lakes, and Environment by the end of the year.

At the end of 2023, the commission continues to review the remaining chapters of the master plan with the goal to have a draft plan ready for public review by March 1, 2024.

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 14, 2023.

8. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

No amendments were made to the zoning ordinance in 2023.

9. Development Reviews

Project Type	Location	Description	Status
Special Land Use Permit	1301 Ridge Road	Public Hearing for Nu Group, LLC – marihuana retailer.	Recommended by PC February 28. Approved by Council March 8, 2023.
Site Plan Review	1201 Memorial Road	Sleeman’s Greenhouse to construct a cold storage garage.	Approved by PC February 28.
Site Plan Review	1550 Brickyard Lane	Houghton Building Supply to build a lean-to.	Approved by PC February 28.
Site Plan Review	501 Memorial Road	Dunkin Donuts/Baskin Robbins to construct a new building.	Approved by PC February 28.
Site Plan Review	408 Shelden Avenue	Keweenaw Brewing to construct a new deck.	Approved by PC March 28.
Site Plan Review	17800 Canal Road	Modify site plan to construct 2, 6-unit buildings instead of 12 separate buildings	Approved by PC April 25.
Site Plan Review	1114 College Avenue	Modify site plan and grant for request for reduction of parking requirement.	Approved by PC April 25.
Site Plan Review	408 Fairview	Modify site plan to allow the developer to construct less parking on the site as they have a parking agreement with Michigan Tech to provide parking on Michigan Tech property.	Approved by PC June 27.

Site Plan Review	100 Pearl Street	TL Rentals, Inc. to construct an apartment complex. (Revised from 2021 plan)	Approved by PC August 2023.
Site Plan Review	1550 Brickyard Lane	Houghton Building Supply to build a storage building.	Approved by PC August 2023.
Special Land Use Permit	7023 Sandpiper Drive	Gregg Nominelli to construct an accessory dwelling unit.	Recommended by PC October 24. Approved by Council November 8.
Special Land Use Permit	18260 Canal Road	John Sanregret for an accessory dwelling unit.	Approved by PC December 19. Approved by Council December 20.

10.Zoning Map Changes and Requests for Changes

a. The commission held a public hearing on May 23, 2023, on a request to conditionally rezone 18882 Canal Road from R-1 to -3 to allow non-owner-occupied short-term rentals. The commission recommended the council deny the rezoning request. This request was denied by the council. The property owner filed a lawsuit against the city following the denial claiming the commission did not follow its bylaws and zoning ordinance. The parties stipulated to a dismissal of the lawsuit following an agreement between the parties:

- The Plaintiff shall refile the application with the planning commission for a new hearing and recommendation.
- Jeff Jepsen, City of Houghton Code Enforcement Officer, shall make a new recommendation on behalf of the City’s administrator’s office.
- The recommendation shall consider the seventeen factors, including the property’s location, size, and use.
- Eric Waara shall not participate in the review of the application in any capacity, to include participation in his role as Planning Commission member and/or his role as City Manager/City board member.

As of the end of 2023, the plaintiff has not filed another application.

b. The commission held a public hearing on October 24, 2023, on a request to conditionally rezone 902, 908 and 912 College Avenue to B-3 with the condition that no building will be taller than 50’ from College Avenue. The commission voted to table the proposed rezoning to allow for further discussions with the developer.

A new request was submitted by the developer with a public hearing held on November 28, 2023, to conditionally rezone the property to B-2 with conditions: The buildings to be no more than 50 (fifty) feet in height from College Avenue, consistent with nearby commercial buildings, and further upon the condition of approval of a development plan which includes:

- Two standalone structures
 - Structure one: approximately up to 6,000 square feet or more single- or two-story business use facility, intended use as a professional building, financial institution,

medical office, or commercial retail. Prohibited uses include: “adult” store, oil change facility, vehicle repair shop, parts store, marijuana facility, laundromat, motel, hotel, motor-inn, or gas station. The intent is to bring additional professional service or retail to the downtown area.

- Structure two: new residential structure equal to or exceeding the square footage of structure one, with intended use to be apartments or condos. It’s understood that the desire is condos, but the business decision would fall on TBD Developer. It may also make sense that structure two is a mixed-use building, with the same acceptable uses as structure one and with a majority of the square footage of structure two utilized for residential purposes, likely maximizing the proposed height restriction. The existing house will need to be removed to accommodate structure two.

Following the public hearing the commission voted to recommend Proposed Ordinance 2023-338 to the council. The council approved the rezoning on December 20, 2023.

11.Zoning Department Annual Development Review

The city received 43 Zoning Permit applications in 2023. 42 were approved and 1 was denied.

There were 13 commercial Zoning Permits completed with a total of \$5,694,000 in value and 29 residential Zoning Permits completed with a total of \$12,724,775 in value of which \$1,070,000 is the construction of 3 new residential houses. 1 Zoning Permit was issued to a non-taxable property with a total value of \$30,000.

12.Variances granted by Zoning Board of Appeals

On February 22, 2023, the Zoning Board of Appeals granted a rear-yard and side-yard variance at 501 Memorial Road to construct a drive-thru lane 14.67 feet from the rear yard and 18 feet from the side yard.

13.Trainings Attended and Training Plan for 2024:

City Manager Waara attended the MML Annual Conference, MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, RRC Summit.

Tom Merz attended the MML Annual Conference, MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, RRC Summit, Catalyst Communities Series – How to Incorporate Non-Motorized Transportation/Complete Streets into Planning, Keweenaw Sustainable Tourism Series – Keweenaw Dark Skies, Michigan Green Communities New Sustainability Plan Resource Kit.

Norma Veurink attended the RRC Summit, Citizen Planner, MSU Short-Term Rentals Webinar, Michigan Green Communities New Sustainability Plan Resource Kit Tutorial and Program Updates.

Bill Leder attended MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, Form Based Code by Smart Growth America, RRC Summit, Catalyst Communities Series – How to Incorporate Non-Motorized

Transportation/Complete Streets into Planning, EGLE Catalyst Communities – Michigan Green Sanctuaries Program, Michigan Citizen Planner Showcase Presenter.

Kristine Bradof attended MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, Citizen Planner Regional Quarterly Meeting – surveys for master plans, MSU Extension 2022-2023 Selective Legislative and Case Law Update, Michigan Green Communities New Sustainability Plan, EGLE & MAP-sponsored Coastal Leadership Academy Scenario-based Planning and Zoning workshop, Michigan Citizen Planner Showcase Presenter.

Ben Ciavola attended MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, RRC Summit.

Dan Liebaw attended MAP – Housing in 4 Parts, RRC Summit, Michigan Green Communities New Sustainability Plan.

Joan Suits attended Citizen Planner, RRC Summit, Catalyst Communities Series - How to Incorporate Non-Motorized Transportation/Complete Streets into Planning.

Training Plan for 2024:

- a. Members will be encouraged to attend training to better familiarize themselves with the role of the planning commission in local government.
- b. Since the commission will work on updating the zoning ordinance once the master plan is updated, the city will reach out to MSU Extension for training regarding zoning ordinances.
- 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

- a. The food truck ordinance committee drafted a proposed ordinance. At the May meeting, the commission recommended this ordinance to the council. The council adopted the ordinance on June 14, 2023.
- b. The commission formed a committee to review redevelopment sites. The first redevelopment site they reviewed was the city-owned property at 902 College Avenue which is next to properties owned by Gregg Nominelli at 908 and 912 College Avenue. A fire destroyed the apartment building at 908 College Avenue in 2022 and there is one old house on 912 College Avenue. Mr. Nominelli approached the commission about possible redevelopment of his properties along with the city's property.

The redevelopment sites committee met and presented conditions for redevelopment of the site to the commission. On September 26, 2023, the commission agreed on conditions they would like to recommend to the council for the development of this property:

- Rezoning of the R-3 city property would be appropriate.
- A future development agreement (or deed restriction, if appropriate) preventing short-term rentals.
- A 50' height limit

See Section 10 of this document regarding proposed conditional rezoning of this redevelopment site.

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.

The commission held public hearings as required throughout the year.

16. Looking Ahead to 2024

- a. The commission will complete work on the master plan with the document ready for the 42-day draft comment period by March 1, 2024.
- b. Following completion of the master plan, the commission will begin a review of the zoning ordinance so that it conforms to the new master plan.
- c. Review the zoning map for possible revision.
- d. Hold a joint meeting with council and DDA.
- e. Invite the City of Hancock and Portage Township planning commissions to a joint meeting.
- f. Annual capital improvement plan review and recommendation to council.
- g. Review Master Plan Economic Development Strategy (requirement of Redevelopment Ready Community - must be done annually).
- h. City Branding (requirement of Redevelopment Ready Community).
- i. Update Redevelopment Ready Community priority development sites.
- j. Downtown Building Heights.