

CITY OF HOUGHTON PLANNING COMMISSION

2025 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 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. 2025 Membership

Segment Represented:

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. Bob Backon, Mayor	
g. Craig Waddell, Council Representative	Government/Municipal/Housing
h. Kristine Bradof	Environmental
i. Ben Ciavola	Recreational/Tourism

4. Committees

The following committees are in place:

- Zoning Ordinance – Waara, Veurink, Leder, Bradof
- Food Truck Ordinance – Waara, Liebau, Leder
- Recreation (Trail Town Advisory) – Waara, Merz, Liebau
- Redevelopment Sites – Waara, Ciavola, Veurink, Waddell
- Huron Creek Watershed Advisory – Waara, Merz, Bradof, Leder
- Branding and Marketing – Waara, Merz, Liebau, Ciavola
- Housing – Waara, Merz, Leder, Waddell
- Sustainability and Resilience – Waara, Liebeau, Ciavola, Bradof
- Mobility – Waara, Waddell, Backon, Veurink, Donnelly

Most active in 2025 were the Zoning Ordinance committee working on Site Plan Review, Stormwater, and signs; and the Branding and Marketing committee.

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 on the fourth Tuesday of each month. They held 9 meetings during the year on these dates:

January 28, 2025

February 25, 2025

~~March 5, 2025: Joint Meeting with Council and DDA, *canceled due to weather*~~

April 29, 2025

July 22, 2025

August 18, 2025

August 26, 2025

September 23, 2025

October 28, 2025

December 2, 2025

6. Master Plan and Economic Development Strategy Review

The City of Houghton Master Plan 2024-2028 was recommended by the commission in April 2024 and adopted by the council in May 2024. The Planning Commission will continue to monitor activity relating to the Master Plan and economic development projects for alignment with the current strategies and will update as needed.

7. Other Plans

The commission approved the Capital Improvement Plan and recommended it for adoption by the council. This plan was adopted by the council on May 28, 2025.

8. Zoning Ordinance Amendments

No amendments were made to the zoning ordinance in 2025.

9. Development Reviews

Project Type	Location	Description	Status
Site Plan Review	109 Sheldon Avenue	Sky Sushi – Mixed-Use	Approved by PC January 21, 2025
Site Plan Review	401 Memorial Drive	Acciaccia - Apartments	Approved by PC April 24, 2025

Site Plan Review	902 College Avenue	UP State Bank/Gateway	Approved by PC May 27, 2025
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10. Zoning Map Changes and Requests for Changes

A conditional rezoning from R1 to R3 with conditions for two parcels owned by the Houghton Housing Authority along Waterworks Drive was recommended by the Planning Commission and approved by the City Council.

The commission held multiple meetings and public hearings regarding a proposed rezoning of City-owned property along East Lakeshore Drive from RSV to R3 for a future sale of the property for housing development. The rezoning was not recommended.

11. Zoning Department Annual Development Review

The city received **32** Zoning Permit applications in 2025. All 32 were approved.

There were **6** commercial Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$11,215,000 in value and **26** residential Zoning Permits completed for a total of \$6,625,350 in value of which \$2,063,350 were for the construction of 9 new residential houses. All zoning permits and ongoing new construction equal \$17,840,350.

12. Variances granted by Zoning Board of Appeals

The Zoning Board of Appeals granted variances:

304 Sibley Avenue- front yard variance and side yard variance

306 Sibley Avenue- side yard variance

405 West Edwards – front yard variance

902 College Avenue- front yard and rear yard variance

13. Training Attended in 2025 and Training Plan for 2026:

City Manager Waara attended the Michigan Municipal League Annual Conference where he presented the Community Excellence Award's Cup to the 2025 winners: the City of Negaunee. He also attended specific sessions on legislative updates, thriving communities, and local economies.

Craig Waddell attended MSU Extension 4th Annual Master Citizen Planner Showcase; Planetizen's "Walkable City Part 1 (of 7): Why Walkability?" with Urban Planner Jeff Speck; "Talent Attraction and Retention: Overview of Regional Trends, Key Activities, and Resources," presentation by MTEC Vice President of Business Development Jason Mack, sponsored by the Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce; "Advanced Training Wheels Biking Safety Course," MDOT; "Western U.P. Housing Summit,"

sponsored by WUPPDR; “Community Engagement for Housing: Changing Hearts and Minds,” Michigan Association of Planning; “Back to Basics: OMA Compliance Made Simple,” Anne Seurnyck, Foster Swift; “Ethics, Civility, & Public Leadership,” Michigan Municipal League; “Use by Right and Administrative Approvals,” Michigan Association of Planning (MAP); “Back to Basics: How to Handle FOIA Requests,” Anne Seurnyck, Foster Swift; “Live with the [Michigan Municipal] League,” including discussion of the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund; “The Housing Element of a Master Plan,” Michigan Association of Planning.

Bill Leder attended the Housing Element of a Master Plan, Missing Middle Housing, and Transforming Your Corridors with Housing.

Kristine Bradoff attended the MSU Extension Healthy Shoreline Planning Workshop in Iron River, Master Citizen Planner Training on Hazard Mitigation and Risk, MSU Extension Master Showcase and the UP and Northeast Cohort for Master Citizen Planners.

Training Plan for 2026:

- a. Members will be encouraged to attend training to better familiarize themselves with the role of the planning commission in local government.
- b. Members that attend training sessions are asked to briefly describe the training they attended and update other members on what was learned during the Reports section of the agenda at the next commission meeting.

14. Other Business

- a. The commission had a joint meeting with the Houghton City Council, Downtown Development Authority and Local Development Finance Authority scheduled for March 5, 2025. Extreme weather forced the City to cancel the meeting, and it could not be rescheduled. Instead, the presentation was made by the City Manager at individual meetings and was made available on the City of Houghton website and published on social media channels.
- b. The zoning ordinance committee worked on updating and simplifying divisions of the ordinance dealing with stormwater management and site plan review to make the process more straightforward. The goal was to have these revisions in place for the 2025 construction season, however due to the complexity and interconnectedness of the sections work will continue into 2026. They will work on other portions of the ordinance, including signs, concurrently with stormwater and site plans.
- c. The branding and marketing committee continues to work as a part of the Redevelopment Ready process. The committee created a survey in the fall of 2024. Over 600 people responded to the survey. The committee opened an application process to have City residents join the committee. In May of 2025, 4 City residents joined the efforts. In the Fall of 2025, the committee held two open houses to gather community input and feedback on the committee’s work to date. In January of 2026, the committee will begin meeting again to further refine the City’s brand with the expectation of presenting

15. Public Participation Report

On January 9, 2021, the City of Houghton Council 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 City held two open house events on November 5 and 11, 2025, to solicit resident input on the City's ongoing efforts in defining Houghton's brand. The committee took the comments received and prepared a list of topics for the committee to further investigate once they begin meeting again in January of 2026.

16. Looking Ahead to 2026

- a. The zoning ordinance committee will continue their work updating the ordinance.
- b. The branding and marketing committee will review the results of the open houses held in November and continue to move forward.
- c. Review the zoning map for possible revision.
- d. Hold a joint meeting with the 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 - done annually).
- h. Update Redevelopment Ready Community priority development sites.
- i. The completion of the UP State Bank/Gateway and 109 Sheldon Avenue redevelopment projects.