

Our Community's Unique Voice Leads Our Efforts WLHS Newsletter on Substack February 22, 2025

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CITY COUNCIL VOTES UNANIMOUSLY TO DISENGAGE FROM RRC

We have very good news.

On February 17, 2025, the City Council voted unanimously to disengage from the RRC, and the certification process. It was taking too long. Started with good intentions 5 years ago, the RRC bureaucracy weighed down city government, committee agendas, and our city. This is a major victory for Harbor Springs, reflecting our collective desire to refocus on what truly matters to our unique community.

City Council member Kathy Motschall: Mr. Mayor, I would like to move that Council directs the City Manager to discontinue Harbor Springs pursuit of RRC certification.

City Clerk Nick Whitaker: "Roll call" : Tom Graham: Yes Kathy Motschall: Yes Jamie Melke: Yes Michael Behrmann: Yes Wendy Reeve; Yes

The decision to exit the RRC program marks a significant turning point in the ongoing conversation about the future of our town. It also reflects a broader movement to push for transparency and accountability in our local government. For too long, the voices of property owners, taxpayers, and full-time/part-time residents were on the sidelines stewing in ambiguity as the previous City Council and Planning Commission met in sub-committees, closed sessions, and with consultants, toiling with checklists to build the perfect plan. That's the problem we've been working together to fix.

Common sense has prevailed. Thank you to the City Council for your vote to terminate the pursuit of RRC certification. At last Thursday's Planning Commission meeting, we have already seen how focusing on the people in our community has returned our attention to improving the zoning code and other authentic city needs. We are seeing a future where our community's unique voices lead our efforts. Preserving what is important and adapting where needed to a changing world.

Thank you to the community of letter writers who engaged with our Call to Action. Your voices made the difference. With more than 150 families sending in letters, it gave the City Council the guidance to act.

WAS DECISION TO EXIT RRC A MISPERCEPTION? WE THINK NOT.

Let's set the record straight

"I just want to add that if we allow misperceptions to guide what we do, then I don't know it will bode well in the long run for other things we do in the city." Victor Sinadinovski, Harbor Springs City Manager, February 17, 2025, City Council meeting

Misperception: A belief or opinion about something that is wrong or not accurate.

The City Council exited because their belief, their perception, was that we couldn't move forward with the RRC in place. This is not a misperception.

We have spent 5 years working on the RRC, but little on engaging the community. We have discussed housing affordability but have seen no results. We discussed how the RRC would bring good government but have more angry citizens. Our misperception is that a checklist for good government will bring good government.

For generations, Harbor Springs' residents didn't need to pay close attention to local politics because things ran smoothly. Free of major controversies. When there was, they were resolved amicably through mutual respect and discussion.

Over the past five years, that changed. Bureaucracy weighed us down. Agendas grew longer. And longer. Council meetings took forever. COVID did not help. People disengaged. As more and more issues began to surface—particularly around zoning and development—people started asking, *What's going on here?*

A small group of concerned locals formed a 501(c)(4) nonprofit and turned to the community for support. By then, more and more people had started to notice the growing disconnect between the city government and the residents. They recognized a breakdown in communication and felt compelled to get involved.

Hundreds of residents donated money. Every donor was individually linked to an intent to preserve the best of Harbor Springs. WLHS represented them at meetings and said, "No, we're watching now. This stops here." To get back on track, we had to get everyone's attention fast. This required money to hire a public relations firm to send splashy cards and scheduled texts. For the election, we hired a local Traverse City based grassroots political action firm to help us with signs and door knockers.

Since November's election win for Vote YES, we have had no hired professionals as staff, as some in the community believe. Through volunteer work, our outreach now far exceeds the local newspaper and the City email distribution. Our first on-line Change Petition reached 1200 people in the very first month. These results are not accidental. At the first meeting February 8, 2024 several on-lookers spoke together and said there was a "communication problem" happening in Harbor Springs. We are trying hard to fix that problem and work on the zoning.

Over the past year:

1. We have attended every City Council, Planning Commission, DDA, RRC meeting.
2. We read in entirety the Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) certified-status criteria for Harbor Springs called the Baseline Report.
3. We read the agreement between City Council and the Michigan Economic Development Corporations (MEDC) reaffirming the city's agreement to annually develop and market city properties once certified.
4. We read the grant contract between the City of Harbor Springs, the MEDC, and Beckett & Raeder.
5. We read about zoning requirements for 'by-right' infill housing options.
6. We read in the Baseline Report how our 50-year-old tradition of notifying our neighbors of changes was threatened.
7. We read and watched as the MEDC and the outside City Planner directed and reviewed our process for a \$25,000 grant.
8. We read that a Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan are state requirements, not RRC requirements, as are Open Meetings Acts.
9. We are aware that the RRC is a step-by-step management process that requires public participation, which is a good thing, but only offered access to further Michigan Strategic Fund (MSF) grants, with no guarantees.
10. We have spoken to our neighbors.
11. We networked with other Northern Michigan communities and leaders.
12. We have put in the work and are informed.

THE PATH FORWARD: MOVING ON AND TAKING ACTION

Your ideas will help.

Subject: We are asking for your input on what are the most crucial issues facing Harbor Springs?

Now that we are out from under the RRC program, it's time to refocus on the issues that truly matter. As we move forward, we will be prioritizing issues - not just the zoning - in a way that is both transparent and inclusive. We're committed to ensuring that future changes are made with full community participation, respecting the traditions and character that make Harbor Springs so unique.

What should the City Council be focused on? What can we do to preserve those qualities while addressing the challenges we face? Send your thoughts and ideas to us at WeLoveHarborSprings@gmail.com. Your feedback is crucial as we continue to advocate for the best interests of our community.

Fill in here:

Community engagement is the fabric of American society.

[Send Email](#)

LETTERS

Dear We Love Harbor Springs,

"We must remove any/all terms/word/ goals of DEVELOPMENT". The antonym of development is conservation, protection, preservation. Should the 'development' term that is present in the zoning describe a positive (a park/greenspace in a spot that was not yet a park/greenspace) or mandatory (state has required this)...OK then, Let us refer to it/development as another term than - healthy growth, upgrowth, maintenance, the act or process of becoming more mature, or advanced, progress of the human town, evolution, enlargement, maturation, evolution, addition, or transformation.

Development is part of the name, goal and drive of ReDevelopment Ready Communities & now other documents/tools that were birthed from the RRC.

There will be attempts to turn an eye away under the stupid excuse of "Change is Inevitable" "...can't stop change". Organic and not artificial. Or do we - Harbor Springs become Petoskey, and Petoskey becomes Traverse City and so on.

At the meetings, in your conversations, hone into the word Development. Abolish the term, and use a synonym that better describes what the goal for this town is for you.

Thank you, A Harbor Springs Voter

From: Anne Askew

Date: February 12, 2025

To: Tom Graham <tom@grahamre.com>, wendy@reeve4hscouncil.com, mhbehrmann@gmail.com, kathy.motschall@yahoo.com, Jamielynnmelke@gmail.com

Cc: citymgr@cityofharborsprings.com

Subject: Please Disengage from the RRC

City Manager - please include in the City Council packet

Dear Mayor Graham and Members of the City Council,

I am writing to express my concern regarding Harbor Springs' continued involvement with the Redevelopment Ready Community (RRC) engagement process. After careful consideration, I have identified five key reasons why disengaging from the RRC is in the best interest of our community:

1. Incompatibility with Local Priorities:

The RRC framework was primarily designed for larger municipalities with different economic and demographic challenges. Its standardized approach does not account for the unique history, culture, and specific needs of Harbor Springs, potentially sidelining locally driven priorities.

2. Financial and Administrative Strain:

Compliance with the RRC process requires significant time, financial resources, and administrative effort. These resources could be better allocated to initiatives that directly address local issues, rather than being consumed by a process that may not deliver proportional benefits to our community.

3. Erosion of Local Control:

The RRC model tends to impose external guidelines that could limit the flexibility of our local governance. By disengaging, Harbor Springs can maintain greater control over its redevelopment decisions, ensuring that community voices remain central to shaping our future.

4. Risk of Unintended Consequences:

The rigid structure of the RRC process may inadvertently introduce regulatory hurdles and delays that could slow down progress on important local projects. This inflexibility risks stifling innovative solutions tailored to our community's specific challenges.

5. Compromised Authentic Community Engagement:

Genuine community involvement is best achieved through open, grassroots dialogue rather than by following a predetermined checklist. The RRC's compliance-driven approach may prioritize bureaucratic procedures over meaningful interactions, ultimately weakening trust and participation among residents.

In light of these concerns, I urge the City Council to disengage from the RRC. Instead, I encourage the development of a more flexible, locally oriented engagement strategy that truly reflects the values and needs of Harbor Springs.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. I look forward to seeing a future where our community's unique voice leads our efforts.

Sincerely,
Anne Askew