

A Guide to the Planning Commission Meetings WLHS Newsletter on Substack March 1, 2025

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HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE FORMAT OF NEW ZONING CODE

Jeff Grimm, Harbor Springs assessor, explained that one of the goals of the new Zoning Code format was to reorganize content in a more meaningful way for a reader. Article 6: Site Development Standards is a good example of this. A property owner looking to improve their property must keep in mind the standards and regulations required in the Zoning Code. Within the 2005 zoning code a property owner, or applicant, might find themselves looking in several different sections of the code to find all of the information needed regarding site development standards. In the redraft of the Zoning Code. Article 6 was created to merge most of this information into one location for ease of use.

Zoning is for those of you that have an interest in stewardship of Harbor Springs. Zoning is for those of you that have an interest in protecting the rights to YOUR properties. Taking part in these zoning meetings are for those of you that like details. Zoning meetings are happening now. Our job is to make attending the meetings easy, less intimidating and helpful.

CONTEXT

In May of 2023, Beckett & Raeder, Inc. (BRi) was hired by City of Harbor Springs. Together, the former Planning Commission and BRi built the planning change known as Ordinance #439. 439 was repealed in the fall of 2024. City Planners use similar zoning templates for every community. When Harbor Springs decided to disengage with the RRC/MEDC certification process, we did not discard the zoning template - the redrafted zoning template is modern, searchable, and easy to read. The “text heavy” 2005-2022 Zoning Code is difficult to navigate; many important requirements were listed under “general provisions”, and words and sections are not searchable. The bottom line is that the 2005-2022 Zoning Code is hard to read.

RRC requirements will not be part of the conversations going forward.

The next Planning Commission meeting will address Article 6. Article 6 addresses the standards for site development, including guidelines for parking and loading zones, bicycle facilities, landscaping, exterior lighting, stormwater management, and rooftop decks. It outlines specific requirements and design standards intended to ensure functionality, safety, aesthetic harmony, and environmental sustainability for developments within the jurisdiction. **Here is the LINK for Article 6** [Please review the draft.](#)

TECHNOLOGY

Zoom has added a live transcription feature that provides real-time, voice-activated closed captioning in your Zoom meetings. If they are not enabled at the beginning of the meeting use public comment, or call a friend in the City Hall audience to ask that the captions are enabled.

How To Turn On Captions in YouTube Video:

1. Open YouTube video.
2. Look for the CC button at the bottom right-hand corner for the video and click on it.
3. Click again to turn CC off. You Tube is not interactive

How to Turn On Captions in Zoom:

1. Sign in to Zoom.
2. Join a meeting or webinar.
3. In the meeting controls toolbar, click the **Show Captions** icon

How to Raise Your Hand in Zoom:

1. Click on the link, and open Zoom to [join a meeting](#).
2. Review the entire screen. Become familiar with what each icon does, or hover your cursor over a small image to discover what the action is. You can't do much that will interfere or harm the proceedings.
3. Click **Participants**. It's an icon at the bottom of the Zoom screen that looks like two people centered at the bottom of your screen.
4. Click **Raise Hand**. (You may see this on the right side of the pop-up window.) Click **Lower Hand** to remove when you are finished talking.

How To Mute and Unmute Yourself in Zoom:

1. **Click or tap the microphone icon.** You'll see this in the bottom left corner of your screen—if you don't see it, click or tap the screen to bring up the icon row. When the icon is red and has a line through it, your microphone is muted. That means silent - no one can hear you.
2. **Click or tap the microphone icon again.** If the previous action muted your microphone, this action unmutes it.

Optional:

How To Test Your Speaker and Microphone in Zoom Before A Meeting:

1. Sign in to the Zoom desktop client.
2. In the top-right corner, click your profile picture, then click **Settings**.
3. Click the **Audio** tab.
4. In the **Speaker** section, click **Test Speaker** to play a test tone.
5. If you cannot hear it, select a different speaker from the drop-down menu or adjust the **Volume**.
6. In the **Microphone** section, click **Test Mic** to test your microphone.
Your audio will start recording and you will see the **Input Level** bar move when Zoom is picking up audio. The audio will play back. You can select another microphone from the menu or adjust the input level as needed.

FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FROM EVERYONE

Let's Start Talking about "How to Put All of This Together!"

At the previous city council meetings, the Harbor Springs City Council discussed the creation of a fundraising committee to raise money for various city projects, such as parks, tree plantings, waterfront improvements, and more. A sizable list. On the surface, this proposal may seem like a practical solution.

Councilwoman Jamie Melke commented, "I think there are a lot of really talented people in our community, and I think there are a lot of very generous people in our community; it's just getting the idea of how to put all of this together."

Because the City Council enacted a rule that only voters can serve on city committees, part-time residents—who are being asked to contribute financially to the town's future—are often left out of the governance process, with limited influence on crucial decisions like zoning and city planning.

In a letter to the Planning Commission, this disconnect is emphasized by a long-time resident.

LETTER FROM A CONTRIBUTING RESORTER

To members of the Harbor Springs City Council,

I am writing to express my concerns about the current practices of the zoning commission, particularly their disregard for seasonal homeowners like myself.

It seems that only full-time residents that live within the city limits are being included in planning for the future of Harbor Springs, while second home property owners and the voices of surrounding neighborhoods such as Wequetonsing, Harbor Point, Little Traverse Township, West Traverse Township and Roaring Brook are being overlooked.

I also want to highlight a matter discussed during the January 6th meeting regarding fundraising for the east boardwalk within the city limits. It is concerning that the city plans to reach out for funding from the seasonal residents and second homeowners in the city of Harbor Springs as well as the outlying communities that they do not wish to involve in the zoning planning!

If these communities are not given a voice in zoning matters, as well as the seasonal homeowners within the city, and tax payers at that, which I am one of, in the city limits,(taxation without representation,) it seems only fair that fundraising efforts should solely be directed towards full time residents within the city limits.

I urge the city council and the zoning commission to consider the perspectives of all homeowners including those who are seasonal residents, to ensure an inclusive approach to community planning.

Sincerely, Debby Gargaro Pirrung

STATE OF OUR COMMUNITY, by We Love Harbor Springs.org

In 2024, Harbor Springs experienced its largest voter turnout in 15 years - 75% of our 1,240 registered voters participated in the November election. It's a sure sign that our community is engaged in our City's local governance as well as State and National issues.

Key issues addressed in 2024 included:

Zoning Board of Appeals: Identified gaps in the Zoning Code regarding wetland protection, impacting decisions like allowing a boardwalk extension over wetlands.

Tree Board: Contributed to the Bluff Stability committee and continued efforts on tree canopy awareness and maintenance.

Planning Commission: Aligning the zoning code with the 2022 Master Plan. The first attempt to update the zoning code was repealed however new attempts are being made by Planning Commission and the Community through better exchange of needs, ideas and solutions for a zoning code that is easier to follow, that reduces undesirable risks to our neighborhoods and a code that protects preserves and stewards our environment for generations to come.

Parks and Recreation: Opened new park amenities, including the Sk8park and Beach Playground, funded by generous donations, with Kiwanis Park receiving \$500,000 for upgrades. (Our donors have big hearts - Thank-you!!)

Harbor Commission: Had a busy season bringing in \$170,000. Both Ford Park and the Harbor Master buildings will be needing upgrades and renovations to ease usage for the boaters and the general public facilities alike.

Downtown Development Authority: Moved forward with infrastructure projects, including the Merchant Walkway and Third Street fabulous lighting, with TIF payments from Emmet County. The DDA can move along with the new Director Goodman at the helm.

Ongoing discussions included board representation for non-voter property owners and taxpayers, the feasibility of a bike path in the ravine, and the potential boardwalk extension through the woods. Additionally, aligning the zoning code with the 2022 Master Plan remains a focus.

Guided by a brand-new Mayor and brand-new City Council Member along 14 new board, commission, and authority members, our **41-member community** advisory group will assist our **5-member City Council** as we forge ahead to make our big-hearted community even better in 2025- together!

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

As the community looks for new ways to work together, suggestions abound:

How to expand the pool of participants on boards and commissions to all those with addresses in Harbor Springs rather exclusively voters!

How to combine talents of like-minded organizations to create well attended and funded events throughout the City among The Harbor Chamber of Commerce, the DDA, the Historical Society and the Parks and Recreation schedules.

Working together to coordinate the calendar of events throughout the year and by working together aligning donors and volunteers who are often the same folks, efforts by the Parks and Recreation Director, the Harbor Chamber Director, the Historic Society and the Downtown Development Authority could be shared. The focus that we are all sharing could not have been done without the dialogues from two sides and City Hall. Let's find common grounds. Thank you for reaching out, we are grateful.

LETTERS TO CITY COUNCIL

In response to our last Newsletter on February 22, 2025:

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.

Dear City Council and City Hall,

To observe the impact of all manner of codes, you might drive Florida's A1A from Palm Beach to Miami. You pass through villages with preserved architectural heritages. Then through cities with multi-story glass boxes, one after another. A1A changes every few minutes, seemingly. The sun is blocked and wind changes direction from one city sign to another.

One might argue all this is driven by money. Cities with larger lots, more green space, lower density are wealthier, right? Not necessarily. Are intelligent local codes responsible for structural scale? Not necessarily. Generally, zoning codes are written to protect the public from each other in an adversarial manner. (A Code of No) Building codes have nothing to do with taste, tradition, preservation, or aesthetics. Why is that?

How did the little village of Harbor Springs evolve and become so unique and charming? And how can those of us who love the town work together to preserve its character? Perhaps we need to stop talking about development and start talking about preservation. Explore ways to preserve the unique, and still openly encourage creativity.

The fact that the RRC program has been unanimously voted down by the City Council is a good start... Well done! Sincerely, Fred & Pam Ball, Harbor Springs Resident

Dear Community and City Council,

Thank you for getting us here! I would have 3 priorities for our city as a full-time resident above the bluff.

Our city is one of the few not addressing deer over-population. It has become a huge problem and now requires fencing of much of residents landscaping. It will take time, but it needs to go into the budget.

While our city holds health, safety, and welfare as a top priority, many of our streets have become racetracks. Our police are well paid, yet do not CONSISTENTLY work on speed control. Purchase of more of the flashing speed signs would be a start.

Revisit the short-term rental issue. If our city genuinely wishes to entice families to our community, living next to mini hotels is not a selling point. Most sit empty much of winter, and some of summer. A full-time resident, and their visitors spend money in town year-round. Many towns are realizing the negatives and re-thinking their policies. Cutting the number in half in residential zoning would be a good start.

Sincerely, Sue Winter, Harbor Springs Resident

Dear Editor and members of the Planning Commission and City Council,

Thank-you for the opportunity to share my suggestions and experience that the effects of even moderate to small changes in the zoning code have on the density of cars, traffic, in my neighborhood - the residential district near downtown. **We live on Third Street.**

My personal suggestions for the new zoning code:

Requested variances - should be communicated to all property owners within 300 ft. of the project.

Lot Sizes - Keep all lot widths and setbacks as they are. Part of the charm of a small historic town is the uniqueness of the architecture which has evolved carefully over time. This cookie-cutter, multi-family housing mentality is not forward thinking, it is grounded in nothing more than creating more revenue for the city. It will result in a town just like our visitors and second homeowners are trying to get away from.

Historic Preservation - I am concerned that historic homes like mine can be torn down and something architecturally unattractive and not in keeping with the character of the city can be erected. The architectural charm of the historic buildings in Harbor Springs are truly attractive to outsiders (visitors and renters) and part of our aura of times past.

Parking - Living downtown, we have to deal with parking all the time. In June, July and August you cannot find a parking place around our home on many days. I totally understand that, and we go with the flow. BUT if multi-family housing goes in anywhere around us and there are multiple vehicles for each duplex/triplex/ADUs we have a parking problem that will affect the whole city. We will be left with undesirable results.... like residents and visitors being deterred from coming to town because of parking frustration.

Commercial Business District (CBD) - Don't expand the CBD.... the businesses we have find it hard to stay open year-round (yet it is getting better) and, especially, to find people to work for the summer. Why make it harder on the existing stores/restaurants by adding more locations for stores? Let the store owners and economy decide.

Thank you all for working with us!

Nan Mautz, Harbor Springs Third Street resident