

Your Voice Is Being Heard WLHS Newsletter on Substack March 9, 2025

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WHAT IS A MASTER PLAN

Our 2022 Master Plan is a comprehensive long-term strategy that outlines how land should be used, developed, and managed in a community. It sets goals for growth, infrastructure, and public services based on the vision for the future.

[Read Harbor Master Plan](#)

MANY PLANS & MANY DEFERRED DECISIONS

A challenge with the city's 2022 Implementation Plan for the Master Plan ([link](#)) may be that it is a plan to address a plan. For the past five years, since 2019 the people of Harbor Springs have participated with plan after plan after plan, all driven by data markers and checked boxes that promise good practices and process efficiency.

Has it been efficient? With all the talk about the harbor, tourists, parking, pedestrian walkways, under-highway bike paths, freight trains in the park, planting flowers under the flagpole, noisy church bells, and \$800,000 boardwalks, do we see less actual decision-making or just longer agendas?

For example, following through on a years-old deferred decision to update the restrooms at the Harbor is a decision that could have gone further to enhance a visitor's experience rather than talking about it for another year or two in city meetings. The Parks and Recreation Board are now investigating plumbing causes. Is that a Parks and Recreation decision? It's a 'paralysis by analysis' situation.

With the creation of all the 2025 new boards, commissions, by-laws, and rules of order, it will be nice to see completed projects coming in under (a reasonable) budget. Fundraising for new bathrooms sounds like a great idea, or is that a maintenance decision?

It is time to start asking why so many things are on the agenda if none are so important to make an expedient decision. A good topic to raise at the start of City Council meetings.

WHY CARE ABOUT ZONING ANYWAY?

We all have different reasons for caring about zoning in Harbor Springs.

- For many, it's wanting to preserve and protect the town's natural beauty and historic feel.
- For some, it's not wanting outsiders (or insiders, for that matter), telling us what we can and can't do with our property.
- For some, this means seeking out new programs that might stimulate economic growth and exploring what has worked in other communities.
- For others, it's business. A contract to be fulfilled. Plugging into programs delivering Master Plans, Capital Improvement Projects, Boards and Commissions, and boxes to be checked to show efficiency.

- For others, it's that they are genuinely into the zoning weeds, doubling down on the 'devil is in the details' approach to ALL THOSE WORDS, and protecting the community from any future loopholes.

In one way or another, everybody's right. That's what makes it so hard. It's hard to bring together an informed group of people, many with different opinions, on anything, much less on things that literally affect their daily lives and backyards. It's hard to listen to or honestly consider an opposing viewpoint, even if it is small. It's hard not to see things in black and white. That's why the last few weeks in the Harbor Springs zoning saga have been so important.

It took a real Harbor Springs reset to hand the code back to the locals to hash out. Over the past few weeks, through listening sessions and commission meetings, the community is now sitting down to study the zoning articles and propose changes, additions, or retractions. The Planning Commission took a big chance by using the new format from the repealed code. It tried to keep what has traditionally worked for Harbor Springs, throw out what sounds too "big City" or "RRC-like," and build in protections and preservation in ways that change with the times yet honor our history of protection.

The Planning Commission and interested community members have come together and finished reviews of:

- Article 1: Title & Purpose
- Article 11: Zoning Board of Appeals
- Article 12: Administration & Enforcement)
- Article 8: Site Plan Review
- Article 13: Amendments & Severability

The upcoming Articles are #7 and #9.

An example of "too big city" is under Article 6: 6.3 Bicycle Parking C. Design and Maintenance, Line 219-225 where a new project must provide lockable enclosed lockers, racks or equivalent structures Big city solutions for a small city non-issue. We have to participate now. Agree to show up, it is easy to do.

As we move into tackling the next set of more complex articles, we'll use the two (or maybe three) working sessions per article to review, wait, then after discussions to give back to the community for their feedback, and revisit the subjects until we have agreement to close. Hopefully finishing the process this summer with a full house of property owners in town adding their voices.

What we like is that the community is coming together. Coming together doesn't mean agreeing on what we say but agreeing to gather and hear each other out. It's agreeing to show up. At each meeting, we see people identify things that make our town special and who want to see those things protected and preserved. Complex topics are also being discussed. Parking was put off for a couple of weeks to allow for research and consideration.

Things like:

1. Views "We want to see the bluff from the lake, and the lake from the bluff."
2. "Letting our neighbors know when we are considering construction projects"
3. Keeping the downtown area vibrant and thriving doesn't involve making the downtown area larger. Let's get it working with what we have. The Third Street lighting additions are getting it right.
4. Make it known how you feel about ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Units) Can we not call them ADU's and return to 'Carriage Houses'? Let's stay historic.
5. Consider creative ways to preserve and repurpose historic homes and contents before defaulting to demolition. Have you heard of deconstruction? We added it into the zoning!

As much as the code is about square feet and setbacks, it's also about common sense and common ground. Let's keep up the good work on both.

LETTERS

Dear We Love Harbor Springs readers and friends, Our fight is against developer-driven density, not to mention individual driven increasing density...like duplexes by right etc. Some may be appropriate in a district, and some not. Let's plan on addressing specifics. Now is the time. Contact Jeff Grimm at City Hall and find out when each section of new code is going to be addressed by the planning commission.

Roll up our sleeves and address the specifics of individual articles and districts. A big concern will be Article 10, Planned Developments, which allows for dense developments, without restraint by the underlying code.

First, there may be no threshold that must be met in order authorize a planned development.

Second, the use of the term "sole". As written, it means that the primary objective of a development can be increasing density. A suggestion is to remove the term. We have discussed replacing development with stewardship and protections.

Third, in addition there are "conditions" that must be met in order for a development to be approved. Let's look carefully at those conditions. A closer look at them reveals the majority are themselves exceptions to the current code, so they are not conditions at all. Let's be super careful – word by word. The job is to get the ball rolling with specifics ... Article by article, paragraph by paragraph.

Sincerely, A concerned citizen that loves details

Dear We Love Harbor Springs,

What we are concerned about:

1. Duplexes being inserted into the Blue Zone on the lakefront on Glenn Drive
2. Triplexes being inserted on the opposite side of the Glenn Drive along its entirety.

We want to work constructively to make sure that these vestiges of Zoning Code #439 are removed. And of particular concern, of course, is the concept of changes "by right."

That is this neighborhoods concerns.

Thank you very much!