**4.14.25**

**Topics for Further Consideration**

**A Call for Civic Engagement**
We encourage residents, community boards, and local officials to remain actively engaged in the upcoming zoning discussions. Responsible change requires transparency, broad consensus, and respect for the values that have long defined Harbor Springs.

**District-Level Engagement**
Before making any changes to well-established districts, it is essential to consult directly with the property owners who will be affected. The Master Plan should honor the unique characteristics of the city’s neighborhoods—residential lakefront, uptown, school area, and the central business district—by offering tailored strategies for each.

**Zoning Simplification and Unintended Consequences**
Any effort to simplify zoning rules must be carefully examined to avoid promoting developments that do not suit the city’s scale and character. For example, proposals for an Agricultural District west of Bluff Gardens raise questions about their fit with traditional zoning goals.

**Gaps in Historic Preservation**
The current zoning code lacks provisions to safeguard the historical character of Harbor Springs, within the Central Business District and residential neighborhoods. A new local group, Preservation 49740, intends to propose formation of and participation in a Historical Commission for protective measures. For more information or to express interested participation, you are invited to contact: [Preservation49740@gmail.com](http://Preservation49740@gmail.com/)

**Architectural Design Standards**
The 2005 zoning ordinance lacks clear guidelines for architectural styles. Harbor Springs needs to decide if new developments should embrace traditional, residential, cottage, or modern commercial styles. Input from the community is crucial in forming this vision and preventing mismatched construction.

**Affordable Housing Considerations**
There are presently no formal plans for affordable housing to serve singles, retirees, or working families. The City could initiate partnerships with developers and neighboring townships. Establishing architectural and design standards in advance will help ensure that new housing blends with the existing community fabric.

**Rejecting Generic Models**
Harbor Springs must rely on locally tailored planning, rather than adopting generalized state or national planning templates. Demographic data from broader regions—such as Michigan’s median age—should inform but not dictate Harbor Springs’ policies. Local identity must remain the driving force behind development decisions.

**Avoiding “By-Right” Zoning and Administrative Review**
These approaches were previously proposed and decisively rejected by the community during the review of Zoning Code #439. While discussions may continue, the community’s position should be respected. In a town of this size, a detailed, neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach is preferred over the faster administrative review model.

**Preserving the Role of the Planning Commission**
The Planning Commission plays the critical role in maintaining building standards. This oversight has been a success for decades. Providing clear and timely notifications to property owners and neighbors before any proposals are submitted can greatly enhance early community engagement.

**Our Request to the City Council**

The City Council should prioritize protecting property owners by:

* Asking detailed questions and slowing down confusing, rushed, or costly processes.
* Requesting better explanations of new policies from city staff.
* Enhancing transparency around agenda content, agenda writing, and bond approvals.
* Ensuring that all public speakers feel safe, welcomed, and respected.
*Note:* While the three-minute public comment period has been relaxed during Planning Commissioner meetings, reinstating it as standard practice would be beneficial. The enforcement of time limits remains at the discretion of the meeting chair.

**Enhancing Property Owner Notification**
Improve outreach and communication with property owners so they are well informed about any proposed zoning changes and projects that affect their investments and well-being before decisions are made.

**District Priorities to Protect and Preserve**

**Agricultural Zoning**
The area west of town currently zoned for agriculture should remain that way. In the region between Arbor and Ottawa, where several zoning districts coexist, future decisions should involve the property owners.

**Bay Street Overlay Consistency**
Homes along Bay Street, whether east or west, fall under different zoning districts but should be treated uniformly as part of a single residential overlay. This consistency will help preserve property values and community character.

**Overlay District Purpose**
Overlay zones should address specific, narrowly defined needs—not be used to replace or redefine entire districts. Overlay districts are important in small towns because they provide a flexible tool for implementing targeted regulations to address specific needs, such as protecting sensitive environmental areas, preserving historic buildings, or encouraging specific types of development. They allow for zoning flexibility while ensuring that certain goals are met within specific areas.

**Single Family Housing**
Changing the district zoning in single family neighborhoods will be detrimental to the culture and nature of the neighborhoods. As an example: the Glenn Drive and South Traverse Association remains very concerned that a plan to include any provision for duplexes or triplexes on either side of Glenn Drive will dramatically impact housing values. So does the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Street neighborhood. Allowing duplexes and triplexes into those neighborhoods will not preserve and protect the Harbor Springs charm.

**Multi-Unit Housing Development**
While multi-unit housing can improve affordability, its impact on property values and neighborhood character needs careful evaluation. The R-2 District, which already supports duplexes, townhomes, and apartments for working families, seasonal workers, and retirees, should be maintained as it is.

**Downtown Business District Expansion**
Instead of expanding the Central Business District, the focus should be on making better use of the current space. Promoting second-floor, service-based businesses instead of converting underutilized residential units can boost downtown vibrancy.

**Infrastructure Considerations**
Any zoning revisions must consider the city’s ability to handle increased development, including potential strains on schools, electrical systems, sewer capacity, and emergency services—especially after recent storm events.

**Traffic and Parking Management**
Growth may intensify traffic and parking challenges. Input from the community is vital to develop balanced solutions, such as designated employee parking to preserve access for visitors.

**Noise Management**
New construction should incorporate design elements that minimize noise impacts. Preferences may vary by neighborhood, making resident participation crucial in determining reasonable standards. Additionally, updating the Harbor Springs Noise Study is recommended.

**Property Maintenance and Enforcement**
Stronger enforcement is needed for zoning compliance, blight and property upkeep. A review of how similar communities manage these responsibilities may be beneficial.

**Forward Planning and Vision**
Begin development of the 2027 Master Plan now. Reliance on the 2022 plan may no longer be sufficient. Broad community involvement should inform data collection and long-term objectives.

**Preserving Natural Assets**
Both public and private green spaces are under increasing pressure. The updated Master Plan must emphasize conservation and protection of the natural beauty that defines Harbor Springs.

**Scenic Views**
Public views of Lake Michigan, the marinas, and the bluffs must be preserved. These views belong to the entire community. The gateway views entering our town should be established and protected.

**Building Height Restrictions**
Maintain and approve a two-story 30 Ft. height limit in the CBD. Rooftop structures—including HVAC units and elevator shafts—must be factored into the overall building height to preserve design harmony.

**Setbacks and Lot Widths**
Preserve traditional setbacks on key streets such as Bay, Main, and Third. Lot widths should not be reduced below 64 feet, and setbacks should remain at a minimum of 15 feet. Each neighborhood has a unique layout that deserves to be respected and each neighborhood’s unique layout should be preserved.

**Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) aka *Carriage Houses***
Retain the 2005 requirement for special land use approval for Carriage Houses (also known as ADUs). To honor Harbor Springs’ history and distinct identity, the term “Carriage Houses” should continue to be used in zoning language.