

Portage Township Meeting Minutes

March 23, 2023
Portage Township Office

Planning Commission Members Present: Ted Soldan, Peggy Anderson, Connie Sherry, Adam Griffis, Melissa Boerman

Zoning Administrator John Ollila

Project Presenter Don Mclean

Public in Attendance: Sue Schwenk, Jeff Ratcliffe, Steve Rowe, Mark Daavettila, Joyleen Pietala

Chair Ted Soldan called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Soldan announced several changes to the agenda and suggested a different order of business.

John Ollila asked to be put on the agenda to make a recommendation on the determination of the Special Use Permit on the agenda that evening.

Changes to the agenda were approved in a motion by Soldan seconded by Anderson.

Next Soldan asked for approval of the minutes from the March 9, 2023

Planning Commission Meeting. (referred to as PC below)

Sherry suggested eliminating one line that was not complete and correcting a typo.

Griffis moved that the changes be made and the minutes approved, seconded by Anderson.

Don Mclean of the River Trails project next noted that his proposed project is named River Trails not Pilgrim River Trails as appears on some communications.

Mclean explained that his deep interest in the Keweenaw began yeas ago. He was born in Laurium and moved back here to take care of an ailing parent.

He notes that the Master Plan for Portage Township has many references to the natural beauty of this area and how best to keep people's connection to the land.

Mclean sees his proposed development as being in keeping with the rural environment. His lots would be 1.85 acres on the average. The property that he has is 126 acres with 34 ½ acres put aside for non- motorized trails. His vision is to eventually have a foot bridge crossing the Pilgrim River and continuing the trails to join the ones already across Paradise Road.

Mclean walked the PC through the list of requirements listed for the Site Plan Check List including maps and information on existing wetlands, and a copy of Agate Engineering's report on storm water runoff and detention areas done by Melanie Kueber Watkins.

UPPCO will provide an underground electrical system.

Two 1000 gallon water tanks at either end of the development will provide back up water for the Hurontown Fire Department.

Lot lines have been established to leave apple trees and natural plantings between lots.

Mclean described the permits that are necessary for the housing development and the agencies that have been to the site including Hunter King of EGLE (approved the roads) and John Cima of the Houghton County Road Commission OKed a different access road to the site just south of where it is now to improve the grade. It will also give the neighbor to the north a more private driveway.

A list of rules of the Homeowner's Association were provided and discussed. A Homeowner's Association may have rules more restrictive than the Zoning Ordinance but not less restrictive.

Boerman of the PC wondered about short term rentals noting that they could change the nature of the neighborhood. Mclean suggested that the guest

house on the lots be used for short term rentals and that a time limit on them be established. The primary residence on the lots would have restrictions on short term rentals also.

McClean was asking for a Special Use Permit for the whole project. He was applying under Act 59 of 1978 which is the Condominium Act. This Special Use Permit can only be applied in areas zoned Rural Residential.

There will be a wetland delineation on the east side of the project (Phase 2) followed by a storm water plan which must be in compliance with the Storm Water Ordinance.

This work is complete on the west side (Phase 1) where homes would be constructed first.

John Ollila, as the Zoning Administrator and a property owner on the Pilgrim River, spoke in favor of the River Trails Development. He is highly in favor of a protected river corridor and this project is highly sustainable and ethically done.

Input from the public present included Jeff Ratcliffe, Executive Director of the Keweenaw Economic Development Alliance who spoke in favor of the project.

Steve Rowe, a local real estate agent with State Wide also thought the project would be a good fit with the area.

Mark Daavettila, whose parents own acreage in that area, had been hunting on that property for several years and would be disappointed to see the area developed.

Joyleen Pietala owns acreage across the river. Her family hunts on their property and she was concerned about possible stray bullets. She was also not in favor of the development.

A vote was finally taken. Boerman made a motion to approve the Special Use Permit contingent upon completion of the storm water permit on the east

end. The motion was seconded by Griffis and passed unanimously by the PC.

An appointment of a secretary for the PC was discussed. A motion was made to appoint Will Cronin as secretary by Anderson and seconded by Griffis, motion passed unanimously.

Chair Soldan sent a copy of the Township Master Plan via Google Documents to the PC that can be edited by the PC. The PC will be working on this document in upcoming months. Soldan suggested that the PC meet more than the minimum required four times a year to complete the five year review of the Master Plan as well as the usual ongoing business of the P.C.

John Ollila had presented the PC with a list of changes needed for the Zoning Ordinance and Ollila and Soldan had been working on these changes. Some of the Zoning Ordinance was written when Portage Township had it's own Building Inspector and Houghton County does this now, as a result some of the language must be changed.

Ollila had submitted some changes in section 12.2 of the Zoning Ordinance at the last PC meeting. He pointed out a few more changes in the language of that section and with those changes this part of the document is now ready to be presented to the public at a public hearing.

The next meeting of the PC had been scheduled for June 8. There is now an additional meeting scheduled for May 11.

Respectfully submitted,
Constance Sherry
Temporary Secretary

