

KEWEENAW COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting Minutes

August 25, 2025

Roll Call:	John Parsons, present	Steven Siira, present
	Bob Pokorski, present	Harvey Desnick, present
	Don Simila, present	Bob DeMarois, ex officio BOC, present
	Margaret Kirby, present	Susan Hockings, ZA, present

Quorum Present: (7) Yes

Meeting Posted: Yes

Pledge of Allegiance recited

Approve Agenda: Correction noted for the following: Change “~~June~~ to July 28th, 2025” under Approve Minutes and “Review final draft of the recommendation to the Board of Commissioner’s concerning ~~rezoning request~~ to Black Bear Inc.’s rezoning request” under New Business. Motion to approve as amended.

M/Pokorski S/DeMarois Motion unanimously approved

Chair Parsons opened Public Hearing for Russ Bjorn rezoning request.

Eric Bjorn (representing his son Russ Bjorn) described the request:

- 40-acre parcel (3696 US 41 Mohawk, parcel #42-101-27-201-010)
- Current zoning: manufacturing/business; requested change to agriculture.
- Purpose: Russ plans to build a family home and hobby farm after relocating from Idaho to Houghton for a new job.
- Parcel is vacant; agricultural zoning would allow for desired residential and hobby farming use.

Staff Report: See attached

Public Comments: Ray Rinne (Copper City) supports rezoning and expresses desire to similarly rezone his property. No opposition was voiced, and non-received from neighboring property holders or the public.

Closed Public Hearing portion of the meeting. Begin findings of fact and deliberations.

Planning Commission Deliberations and Findings of Fact: Discussion and questions centered around current and historical uses of this property and how the uses fit in with the Master Plan and the community. The request matches the county’s plan for orderly growth and diverse housing opportunities. The manufacturing district has seen no recent development and the historical use has ended without plans to resume.

The findings of fact are as follows:

1.Changed conditions: The property changed hands, and there has been no recent business or industrial activity.

2. No errors in original zoning: There were no errors in judgment, procedure, or administration in the original ordinance. The zoning was based on speculation that business/manufacturing may expand around the old sawmill.

3. Precedent set for similar neighbor requests: Approving the request could set a precedent for similar requests from neighbors as the area transitions, with anticipation of future requests to rezone other parcels for Agriculture and single family use.

4. No negative impact on public services: There is no negative impact on the ability of the county and other governmental agencies to provide adequate public services and facilities; it may reduce the infrastructure burden compared with manufacturing and business needs.

5. Environmental considerations: There is no adverse effect on the environmental conditions or value of the surrounding property. The applicant intends to protect wetlands.

6. No significant negative environmental impacts expected: No significant negative environmental impacts are expected if the petition zoning changes and resulting allowed structures are built.

7. Compliance with county plan: The petition zoning change generally complies with the policies and uses proposed for the area in the adopted comprehensive plan of Keweenaw County.

8. Compatible with neighboring land uses: The uses allowed under the proposed rezoning would be compatible with other zones and uses in the surrounding area.

9. More suitable for agriculture: The use allowed under the proposed rezoning would be equally or better suited to the area than uses allowed under the current zoning of the land.

10. Historically, the parcel has not been economically used for current purposes: The property in question cannot be put to reasonable economic use in the zoning district in which it is presently located.

11. No alternative procedures deemed more appropriate than rezoning: No other procedure, such as a variance, special land use, or planned unit development procedure, is a more appropriate alternative than rezoning. Noted was the timeline in the KCZO which states if development as an agricultural use does not begin within 12 months, the change in zoning could revert to manufacturing and business.

Vote and Decision: Motion to approve a recommendation from the Planning Commission, based on the Planning Commission's findings of fact and deliberations, to the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners, for final action on an amendment request to the Keweenaw County Zoning Ordinance Map for the parcel 42-101-27-201-010 from Manufacturing and Business to Agriculture. The proposed use is consistent with the comprehensive plan and future land use map. The application meets the standard set forth in the zoning ordinance and will not negatively affect public health, safety, or welfare. The proposed change is compatible with surrounding land uses and it will not cause undue adverse impact on neighboring properties. There is access to adequate public services, and infrastructure has been demonstrated with that property. This motion directs staff to forward the Planning Commission's recommendation and findings of fact to the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners for their final action.

M/Don Simila S/Pokorski

A roll call vote was taken, and all members present voted to approve. Motion passed unanimously. Recommendation with findings of fact to be signed by Chair and forwarded to the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners once the minutes of this meeting have been approved.

ZA report (Hockings): Busy with ZBA submissions and preparations for hearings, including upcoming public hearing September 4th.

ZBA (Desnick): Next meeting scheduled for September 4th.

BOC update (DeMarois): Materials management plan and recycling discussed; state funding for three years, need for facility, costs anticipated. Recycling programs and logistics (sorting, trucking, agreements) reviewed with reference to other local examples.

New business: The Planning Commission's recommendation to the KC Board of commissioners concerning Black Bear Inc.'s rezoning request was reviewed. Motion to approve the recommendation as written and signed by the Chair of the Planning Commission. (See attached)

M/Pokorski S/Desnick Roll call vote was taken, unanimously approved.

Old Business:

Master Plan Update: Community survey open until September 21st; 295 responses so far. Discrepancy noted in posted end dates for the survey (September 2st vs 25th on some posters). Public input open houses held/ scheduled: Recent open houses: Eagle Harbor Township (attendance ~35), Sherman Township, Allouez Township. Upcoming: Grant Township (Sept. 11), Houghton Township (Sept. 16). Residents may attend any session; locations selected for county-wide convenience. Stakeholder meetings will be held at the courthouse Sept. 22–24, one-hour slots with community organizations; two commission members per session encouraged.

STR and Bylaws Subcommittee updates and reviews discussed and scheduled for next regular meeting.

Public comments: Public comments were heard from AJ Kern, Eric Bjorn, Greg Dudek, and Debra Shelonzek.

Next regular meeting: September 29, 2025 at 4:00 pm

Motion to adjourn at 5:19 M/Simila S/Kirby Motion approved

Recording Secretary: Susan Hockings _____

Planning Commission Secretary: Don Simila _____



Keweenaw County Planning & Zoning

Public Hearing: August 25, 2025

County Board of Commissioners September 17, 2025

STAFF PLANNING REPORT

Rezoning

Case 001-25 A request to rezone from M (Manufacturing) and B (Business) to AG (Agriculture)

Location 3696 US41, Mohawk, MI 49950
Parcel 42-101-27-201-010

Applicant Russ Bjorn represented by Eric Bjorn

Existing Conditions

Zoning	Land Use	Property Size
M & B	Vacant	40acres

Site Context

	North	East	Southeast	South	Southwest	West
Existing Zoning	M & B	M & B	M & AG	M & AG	M & B & AG	RRB
Land Use	Vacant	Storage Building & Mine Rock Pile	Residential	Residential & AG	Residential, Commercial Storage, Business	Residential

Future Land Use

Keweenaw County's Future Land Use Map shows this property is currently zoned Manufacturing and Business which is inconsistent within the immediate area and with the request.

Transportation

Streets with access	Classification	Right-of-way width
US 41 & M26	State & Federal Highway	100 feet

STAFF ANALYSIS

CONSISTENT WITH POLICIES OF THE KEWEENAW COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The request is consistent with the comprehensive plan, “Blue Print For Tomorrow”, adopted February 2017, specifically in the area of future growth and development which lists 5 policies to “Retain the character of Keweenaw County by ensuring orderly future growth and development consistent with local community values.”

Policy 1-1. Through land use regulation ensure new developments function as extensions of existing development patterns including: Copper Harbor, Lac La Belle, Gay, and Eagle River as extended vacation, seasonal, and permanent residential communities; Allouez, Ahmeek, Mohawk, Fulton, each as a focus for permanent residential/business development; and Copper Harbor and Lac La Belle as tourist-oriented business/residential communities.

Policy 1-2. Continue levels of residential use based on compatibility, parcel size, maximum density, and availability of existing and proposed sewer and water systems, and provide areas in the County for large lot residential development and varied housing opportunities.

Policy 1-3. Encourage industrial, commercial and business development that is appropriate to the area based on compatibility with surrounding uses, and availability of high speed internet, energy, sewer and water systems, and accessibility.

Policy 1-4. Allow home-based businesses as a viable component of the local economy, but carefully review proposals for impacts on adjoining properties (i.e. traffic, parking, lighting), as well as the overall character of the areas in which they would locate. Place strict controls on conversion of properties to permanent commercial uses.

Policy 1-5. Minimize removal or disruption of historical structures, whether or not listed on the state and federal register of historic places, and preserve architectural character of communities through design regulations with strict controls in historical and sensitive areas of the County.

The Future Land Use Plan for Agricultural zoning states:

“AGRICULTURAL (AG) The AG use is designed to provide for continuation of the limited agricultural activities in the County. These areas are designed to protect those areas suitable for agricultural pursuits and to encourage “hobby” farms within the County. Open space development options are encouraged in order to protect the character of the County. Agricultural lands have been identified primarily on inland properties of Allouez Township where they are compatible with the surrounding uses.”

THE SUITABILITY OF THE PROPERTY FOR USES TO WHICH IT HAS BEEN RESTRICTED

The current zoning is:

BUSINESS (B1) The B-1 use is established to provide areas for commercial establishments that offer a wide range of goods and services. Uses such as retail and wholesale activities; consumer

services; professional, business and government offices; and other compatible uses should be directed to these areas. The business category encourages a mix of uses primarily focused along US 41 from Allouez to Mohawk.

LIGHT MANUFACTURING (M1) The M-1 use is established to provide areas for light, industrial, office and administrative uses having few, if any, adverse effects on neighboring properties. The M-1 use has been identified for areas along US 41 and in Mohawk where compatible with the surrounding property. Because of the close proximity to residential homes, high standards of protection of the human environment are expected in these areas.

GENERAL MANUFACTURING (M2) The M-2 use is established to provide areas in which manufacturing and related commercial operations are the principal use of the land. Such uses have some adverse effects on surrounding properties and are not compatible with residential and retail uses. The former Louisiana Pacific Sawmill site has been identified for this use due to its accessible location along US 41 and its compatibility with surrounding uses of agriculture and timber resources. Delaware should also be considered for light or general manufacturing.

However, the properties surrounding this parcel are being used for residential and recreational use as well as extraction. The nearest commercial use (commercial storage units) is to the southwest as you come into Mohawk proper. To the north, the old sawmill mentioned above is no longer in use, and there haven't been any new manufacturing or businesses heading north out of town. The land use remains primarily timber resources and agricultural.

A manufacturing district does not allow for family homes or agriculture/horticulture, but the land and the area are well suited for those purposes. Even though the area is zoned manufacturing, there has not been any growth in manufacturing or business north of Mohawk, when what is being requested (and needed) in the area is more families and housing.

THE EXTENT THAT THE ZONING CHANGE WILL DETRIMENTALLY AFFECT NEARBY PROPERTY

The proposed zoning change will have minimal impact on nearby properties. This is vacant property where no development has occurred, and the proposed land use of a single family dwelling with a hobby farm is compatible with the surrounding uses and nearby AG zoning. Section 27 is currently divided into five zones which include Manufacturing, Business, Residential, Agriculture, and a small section of Conservation Environmental Protection. Despite current zoning, the adjoining properties with this parcel are used for residential, recreational, and extraction purposes.

DISCUSSION

A change in zoning to AG would allow Russ Bjorn and his family those uses and activities already offered in the area.

The AG (agricultural district) allows for the following uses by right: Single family homes, animal hospitals, animal shelters, commercial kennels, veterinary services, educational institutions, forest management (not sawmills), and commercial agriculture or horticulture (by right in all districts).

Currently this is vacant property, and the only development proposed with this request is a single family dwelling with the possibility of a hobby farm, and a future split of the 40 acre parcel to allow for another single family residence.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This request ensures the needs of the landowner are met. It is consistent with the land use already in the area, and a family home with hobby farm on 40 acres has little impact on the neighboring properties. The current manufacturing district does not allow single family residency. Staff did not received any objections to the proposed zoning change from neighboring property owners (one adjoining property owner inquired if his property could be changed to AG as well) or from Allouez Township. Therefore, once the Planning Commission completes the findings of fact at the upcoming Public Hearing, staff would support this rezoning change from M & B to AG.

ATTACHMENTS

Application

Published, Posted, and Mailed Notices

Maps



ZONING AMENDMENT APPLICATION

Application fee \$500.00

ALL INFORMATION IS REQUIRED

Date: 06/09/2025	Parcel ID: 42-101-27-201-010
Applicant Name: Russ Bjorn	Owner Name: Russ & Leah Bjorn
Address: 1282 Highland Dr Apt 4	Address: 1282 Highland Dr Apt 4
City/State/Zip: Blackfoot, Idaho 83221	City/State/Zip: Blackfoot, Idaho 83221
Phone: (906)369-5041	Phone: (906)369-5041
Email: russbjorn@gmail.com	Email: russbjorn@gmail.com
Parcel Address if different than above: 3696 US-41, Mohawk, Michigan 49950	

ZONING ORDINANCE AMMENDMENT IS REQUESTED FOR THE FOLLOWING

(choose one and site the specific ordinance text or map change requested)

<input type="radio"/> *Text Ammendment with following conditions:	<input type="radio"/> Text Ammendment without conditions
<input type="radio"/> *Map Ammendment with following conditions:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Map Ammendment without conditions B CEP&M To AG <i>Ejrs</i>

**See Section 20.10 Conditional Rezoning for further information concerning conditions*

Required findings of fact to be submitted with this application:

1. What, if any, identifiable conditions related to the petition have changed which justify the petitioned change in zoning?
2. What, if any, error in judgment, procedure, or administration was made in the original Ordinance which justifies the petitioned change in zoning?
3. What are the precedents and the possible effects of precedence which might result from the approval or denial of the petition?
4. What is the impact of the amendment on the ability of the County and other governmental agencies to provide adequate public services and facilities and/or programs that might reasonably be required in the future if the petition is approved?
5. Does the petitioned zoning change adversely affect the environmental conditions or value of the surrounding property?
6. Are there any significant negative environmental impacts which would reasonably occur if the petitioned zoning change and resulting allowed structures were built such as:
 - a. Surface water drainage problems
 - b. Wastewater disposal problems
 - c. Adverse effect on surface or subsurface water quality
 - d. The loss of valuable natural resources such as forest, wetland, historic or scenic sites, wildlife, mineral deposits, or valuable agricultural land?
7. Does the petitioned zoning change generally comply with the policies and uses proposed for the area in the adopted Comprehensive Plan of Keweenaw County? If not, and if the proposed zoning change is reasonable, considering all other relevant factors, then the Plan should be amended before the requested zoning amendment is approved.
8. Whether all the uses allowed under the proposed rezoning would be compatible with other zones and uses in the surrounding area.
9. Whether the uses allowed under the proposed rezoning would be equally or better suited to the area than uses allowed under the current zoning of the land.
10. If a specific property is involved, can the property in question be put to reasonable economic use in the zoning district in which it is presently located?

Please attach or write below any additional information you deem necessary to explain the rezoning request.

I've been looking to buy land as close to home as I could for the last 3 years, it seems that everyone is looking to buy land nowadays, so the demand is sky high, and the supply is super low. When I got a positive lead on this 40 acre parcel that is only a short four-wheeler ride through the woods from my parents house, I was super excited. I have big plans to build a homestead, live off that land as much as we can, and quietly raise a family on the outskirts of a small town, like myself and my siblings were fortunate enough to experience growing up. The plan is to split off a 14 acre piece for my older brother who will eventually build a house on and use the land in a similar manner as I plan. I had only known the property to be zoned Agricultural because thats what the County GIS has it listed as, so I was surprised to learn during the appraisal process of the bank loan that it is actually zone CEP & Manufacturing.

I hereby grant permission for members of the Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator to enter the above-described property for the purpose of gathering information related to this application

Owners Signature:

Eric Zorn ^{4jB} 8/7/25 Date: 6/17/25

Applicants Signature:

Eric Zorn ^{4jB} 8/7/25 Date: 6/17/25

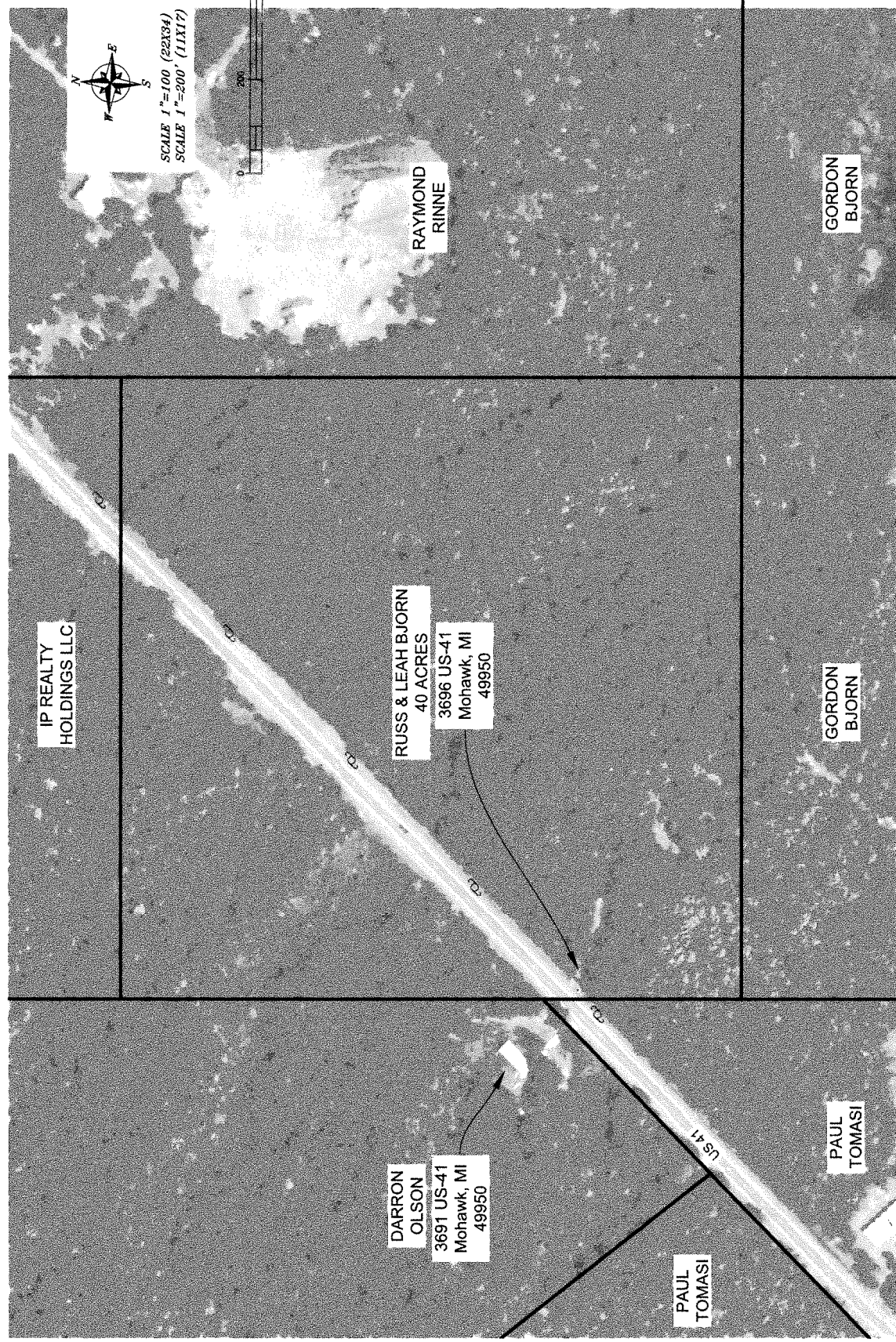
COMPLETED APPLICATION WITH SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS AND FEE MUST BE RETURNED TO:

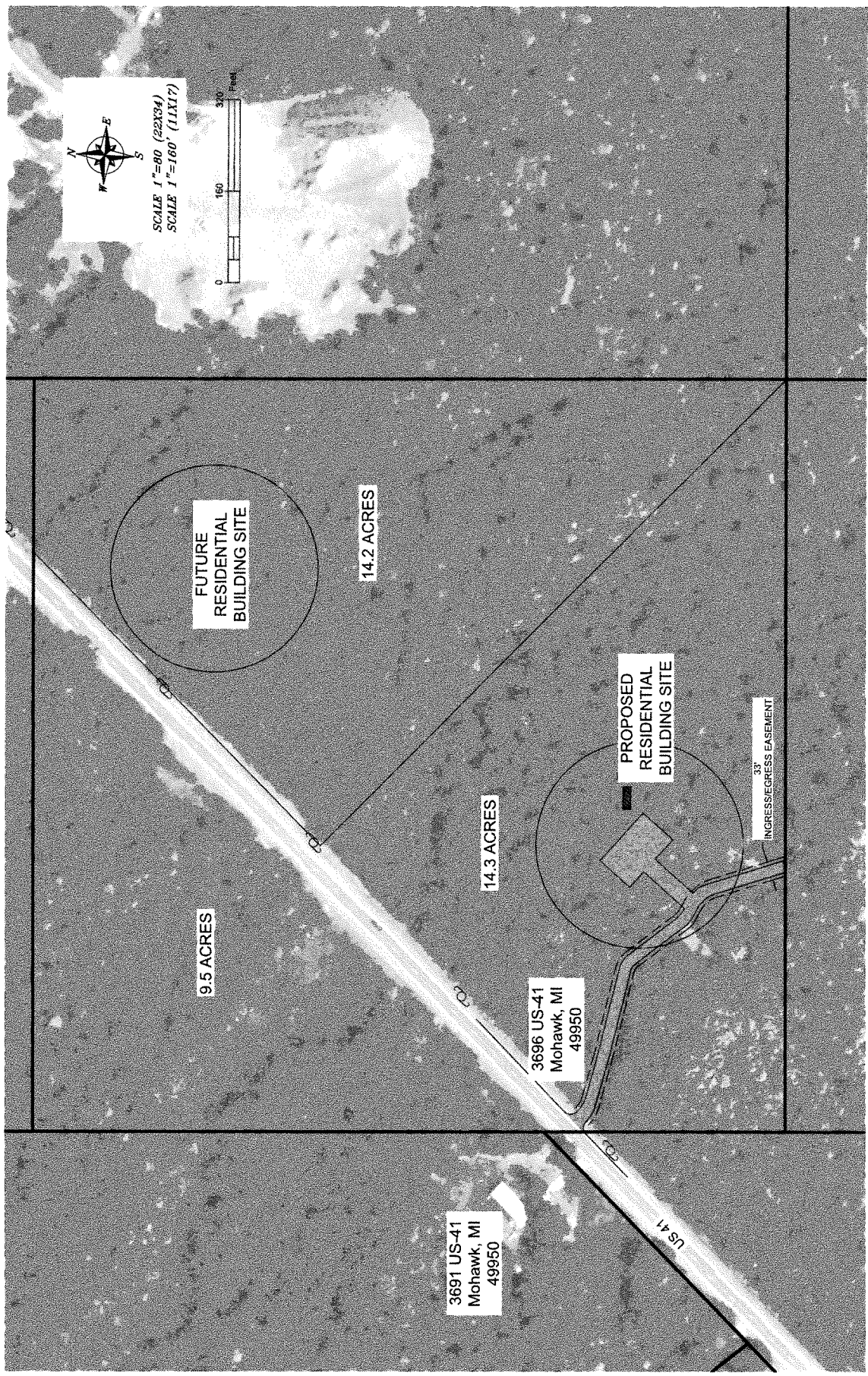
**Keweenaw County Zoning Administrator
Keweenaw County Courthouse
5095 Fourth Street
Eagle River, MI 49950
Email: planning@keweenawcountyonline.org
Phone: 906-337-3471 ext 5**

Make checks payable to: **Keweenaw County**

Credit Card Payments may be made at: Equalization Online - Keweenaw County

1. Property ownership changed from Verdant Timber, Michigan LLC to a young family looking to build a home.
2. In my opinion, with the site having a fair number of wetlands, it may be hard for a business or manufacturing operation to build and expand without interrupting said wetlands. Thinking about how equipment and material storage yards always seemed to get pushed further and further to their limits, no matter the business or the place. It seems to be better suited for a "smaller" scaled zone, such as agricultural.
3. A successful rezone will either continue to allow local families like ourselves to purchase land and raise a family locally, or an unsuccessful rezone will make it unobtainable for us and people alike to raise the next generation in the small town we always called home.
4. I don't foresee the impact of 2 additional residences outside of Mohawk having significant impact on the County or other agencies.
5. No, not much will change besides a small clearing for a building site about 400 feet through the trees off of US-41. SEMCO Energy may run a gas line further up US-41 to service more houses in the future, which would increase the existing house values and save money on their energy bills as well.
6. There are some super obvious changes in elevation and vegetation on this 40 acre parcel, the creek and swampy areas will not need to be manipulated because there is enough build-able acreage elsewhere for a small homestead.
7. The zoning change would compliment the Comprehensive Plan of Keweenaw County in the following ways: Goal 1, Future Growth and Development. A small town growing with business also needs to grow with housing. If my brother and I can build forever homes in the same small town that we grew up in, that's two more additional taxable estates, also the home he would sell in Mohawk when he builds a new house. Goal 2, Open Space. I've already got ideas as to where I would build my house in the future (see attached pdf), it's approximately 400 feet off US-41 through the trees and it will be relatively hard to notice a house most times and especially during full foliage. I plan to utilize the already existing driveway, this helps maintain the natural vegetation buffer, scenic views and historical timber in the area. In talks with my brother about where he would like to build when I eventually split off a piece for him to build on, he has the same plans as myself, maintain a good barrier of trees between the house and highway and build the house in a spot that is not so noticeable from the road. Goal 3, Ecosystem Protection. As I've previously mentioned, the good number of wetlands on the property may not be best suited for a business or manufacturing operation to be installed. With the rapid expansion and growing footprint that most businesses see from year 1 to year 10, it may be hard to avoid such wetland areas on this property. Whether it's the small creek along the southern border, or the bigger swampy creek that runs right through the middle of both parcels on both sides of the highway, I would think there are low odds of such wetlands being disturbed with commercial development.
8. There is also some Agricultural zoning nearby, others which seem to make more sense to be zoned agricultural. ~~(i.e. Gordon Bjorn)~~ *EJB*
9. Since Verdant Timber had the property enrolled in the Commercial Forest program, they were getting tax breaks on the property. I plan to build a house on the property someday, and also split off a 14 acre piece for a sibling to build a house and raise his family on soon too. This would not only stop those tax breaks on the whole 40 acre parcel, but also boost tax revenue with the 2 new taxable residences.
10. As the new owner, I have no interest in building a business or manufacturing operation, so under the current zoning I would not be able to utilize the property.







From: Keweenaw County Planning Commission

To: Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners

Re: Rezoning Map Amendment

Case 001-24: A request to amend the KCZO Map from Rural Residential to Resort Service

Location: Section 33, T58N R29W Parcel 307-33-150-005 and 307-33-150-002 excluding the eastern 200 feet of both parcels starting at Sand Point Road and ending at water's edge.

Applicant: Black Bear Inc represented by Tina Anderson and owner Lonie Gleiberman

Criteria Reviewed: The Planning Commission systematically reviewed the required findings of facts (including those in Section 20.7 of the KCZO), discussing all possible uses allowable in Resort Service, and considered the potential impacts of rezoning to Resort Service. Included in the discussion was an evaluation of how the change would affect the county's ability to provide public services, possible environmental impacts, and potential surrounding property values. We also looked at whether the rezoning aligned with the county's comprehensive plan "Blue Print for Tomorrow", and whether it would allow for reasonable economic use of the property.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing July 14, 2025. We had written as well as spoken comments during the hearing. Of the comments gathered, there were 20 opposed to the rezoning; raising questions of oversight, objections to the possible uses in Resort Service areas, concerns over environmental impacts, and possible effects on neighboring property values. There were 13 who supported rezoning to Resort Service citing the positive economic impact of Mount Bohemia to the area, personal enjoyment of the resort, and even those who relocated to Keweenaw County to become homeowners, taxpayers, and entrepreneurs. A staff report from the Zoning Administrator and a presentation from Trina Anderson and Lonie Gleiberman representing Black Bear was heard and considered. After deliberation, a roll call vote was taken on the motion to approve a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners for this rezoning request.

Yay's: Kirby, Desnick, Simila, DeMarois /Nay's: Parsons, Pokorski, Siira/ Motion carried.

At the next regular Planning Commission meeting held July 28, 2025, there was a motion to reconsider the recommendation to include discussion of findings of fact (Section 20.7) against all possible uses allowed in Resort Service. The motion carried, and a discussion of those findings of fact were considered. After deliberations, another motion was made to re-affirm the vote on the recommendation to approve the rezoning request from the Planning Commission to the Board of Commissioners. That motion carried, and another roll call vote was taken considering all the findings of fact in Section 20.7 of the KCZO.

Yay's: Kirby, Desnick, Simila, Pokorski / Nay's Siira, Parsons (absent) / Motion Carried

Use Class Compatibility: Planning Commission members assessed how various types of businesses and activities would fit within the proposed resort service zoning. Specifically mentioned:

- **Convenience/General Retail:** Existing establishments in the area were noted, and this use was considered compatible.
- **Food/Drink Establishments:** Assessed for compatibility and noted there are food and drink establishments in the area as well.

- **Indoor Entertainment Establishments:** Compatibility was assessed, with a note that additional state regulations may apply (especially if alcohol is served) and these activities are available in the area.
- **Outdoor Recreation & Entertainment:** The only allowable use by right is ski slopes and ski resorts. All other uses require a Special Use Permit following Site Plan Review (see attached)
- **Lodging:** Short-term rentals (commercial use of residential properties) are already present in the area as well as other commercial lodgings in Lac La Belle and at Mount Bohemia.
- **Healthcare, Personal Services, Repair Services, Utilities, Apartments, Duplexes:** Many of these uses were deemed either not applicable or would require further Site Plan Review (see attached) before being approved.
- **Marinas, Airports, & Railyards:** All development requires Federal, State, and County input and oversight.

Environmental Considerations: The commission acknowledged the presence of TNC leased wetlands within the proposed rezoning area and emphasized that any development (residential or commercial) would be subject to permissions from TNC, permitting and oversight from MI Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, as well as permitting from Western Upper Peninsula Health Department. We also reviewed the potential for environmental impact if the land were subdivided into smaller (1 acre each) residential lots and suggest that rezoning for resort use might be less environmentally impactful than a residential development project.

Economic Use: There was discussion about whether the property could be put to reasonable economic use under its current zoning. As the applicant is the owner of a ski resort, the current residential zoning does not provide reasonable economic use. The only economic value would come from selling the property. The request to rezone would expand his uses and raise the economic value of his holdings.

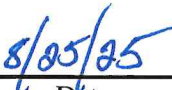
Future Land Use: The parcels in question are consistent with both residential and resort services districts.

Grant Township Input: Grant Township was notified and to date no comment in support or opposition to this rezoning has been received.

Required Legal Procedures: Public notices were properly posted in the Daily Mining Gazette, at the Keweenaw County courthouse, mailed to the neighboring property (within 300 feet), and the applicant 15 days prior to the Public Meeting (in compliance with MZEA) and notice was posted on the county website more than the required 18 hours prior to the meeting (notice requirements of OMA).

Recommendation: After consideration of all the findings of fact, the Planning Commission recommends approval of this map rezoning from Rural Residential to Resort Service to the Board of Commissioner for final legislative action.


 John Parsons, Chair, Keweenaw County Planning Commission


 Date

Attachments:
 Staff Report / PC Minutes 7/14/25 & 7/28/25 / KCZO Site Plan Review