

**KEWEENAW COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
August 24, 2026**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Don Simila called the Special Meeting of the Keweenaw County Planning Commission to order at **4:00 p.m.** at the Keweenaw County Courthouse, Eagle River, Michigan.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present

- Don Simila, Chair
- Bob Pokorski, Vice Chair
- Margaret Kirby, Secretary
- Harvey Desnick, ZBA Liaison
- John Parsons
- Steven Siira
- Bob DeMarois, BOC Liaison (Ex-Officio)

Staff Present: Susan M. Hockings, Zoning Administrator and Recording Secretary

A quorum was declared present and meeting was properly posted.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Planning Commission and those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Motion to amend the agenda was made by Kirby, seconded by Pokorski, and unanimously approved. The amended portion of the agenda is as follows:

Addition to New Business:

2. Schedule a Public Hearing for text amendment to KCZO for Short Term Rentals

Motion to approve the amended agenda was made by Pokorski, seconded by Kirby, and unanimously approved.

New Business: Chair introduced Eric Hermanson, Treasurer, as guest to assist with discussion of county budget as it pertains to zoning.

Discussion centered on fiscal challenges, revenue from STRs and the feasibility of maintaining county-level zoning. Key points of discussion included:

- A draft resolution to the Board of Commissioners was presented by the chair (see attached) to support the continuation of county wide zoning
- the annual cost of the zoning department as covered in the County general fund is approximately \$99,000.00.
- the potential of merging Building Codes department with Zoning, which would cut annual cost to \$55,000.00.
- the potential for annual permitting of STRs by the zoning department which would further generate funding for a combined zoning/building department.
- a draft STR ordinance from the planning commission had been approved by legal review and was now ready for a public hearing
- the need to produce an accurate cost analysis for zoning department fees

Motion to approve the draft resolution from the Planning Commission to the Board of Commissioners was made by Kirby and seconded by Parsons. Yays 6/ Nays 1, Motion carried.

Motion to approve a Public Hearing scheduled for Oct 5, 2026 at 4:00pm concerning the proposed STR text amendment to the KCZO was made by Pokorski, seconded by Kirby, unanimously approved.

Public Comments were heard from Elizabeth Whelan, Eric Campbell, Kathy McEvers, Mary Long, and Mark Aho.

Next regular meeting will be August 31, 2026 at 4:00pm

Motion to adjourn at 5:11pm made by Pokorski, seconded by Siira, unanimously carried.

KEWEENAW COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

RESOLUTION NO. PC26-001

A RESOLUTION URGING THE KEWEENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS TO RETAIN AND SUPPORT LOCAL ZONING TO PROTECT PUBLIC INTEREST, PRESERVE COMMUNITY CHARACTER, AND ENSURE ORDERED FUTURE LAND USE

WHEREAS, the Keweenaw County Planning Commission is empowered under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (P.A. 33 of 2008, as amended) and the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (P.A. 110 of 2006, as amended) to prepare, review, and maintain a master plan and zoning ordinances to guide the orderly, balanced, and sustainable development of the County; and

WHEREAS, recent budgetary discussions initiated by the County Treasurer and County Board of Commissioners have raised concerns regarding the fiscal sustainability and administrative costs of operating the County's Zoning Department; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission deeply acknowledges the fiscal realities and financial constraints facing Keweenaw County, yet firmly believes that eliminating or entirely defunding zoning is a counterproductive measure that will introduce severe long-term financial, environmental, and social costs far exceeding any short-term budgetary savings; and

WHEREAS, historical land-use patterns in Michigan's northernmost county demonstrate that unguided development leaves fragile ecosystems, unique shoreline areas (such as Bete Gris and our irreplaceable Lake Superior coasts), and local infrastructure vulnerable to incompatible uses and unchecked commercial pressures, notably the rapid expansion of short-term rentals and uncoordinated construction; and

WHEREAS, the complete abandonment of zoning would leave Keweenaw County entirely without legal mechanisms to prevent nuisance activities, protect property values, or ensure that growth aligns with the community's shared vision as articulated in the County Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plans;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Keweenaw County Planning Commission hereby formally urges the County Board of Commissioners to RETAIN the County's zoning framework rather than eliminate it; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission highlights the following critical Pitfalls of Abandoning Zoning and principles of Future Land Use for the Board's consideration:

- **Unregulated Growth and Nuisances:** Without zoning, the County loses its legal authority to separate incompatible land uses, potentially allowing heavy commercial, industrial, or high-density operations to establish themselves immediately adjacent to residential neighborhoods or pristine natural resources.
- **Destruction of Property Values:** Predictability in land use protects real estate investments. Removing zoning strips away property value protections, creating market uncertainty for long-term residents and prospective homeowners alike.

- Strain on Public Infrastructure: Uncoordinated development increases the burden on rural roads, emergency services, waste management, and natural drainage systems without a mechanism to require developers or intensive land-use operations to mitigate impacts.
- Compromising Future Economic Vision: A zoning ordinance is the legal tool that enforces a Master Plan. Discarding zoning renders long-range planning meaningless, severing the link between the community’s vision for tourism, recreation, forestry, and residential life and its actual implementation.
- Loss of Local Control: Complete reliance on ad-hoc state oversight or court-adjudicated common law nuisances strips local citizens and elected officials of their direct voice in shaping the immediate future of the Keweenaw Peninsula.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Planning Commission pledges its active cooperation with the County Board of Commissioners, the Treasurer, and county stakeholders to explore sustainable administrative solutions—such as streamlined permit fee schedules, adjusted administrative frameworks, or modernized, simplified ordinance structures—to make zoning fiscally manageable without sacrificing the public safety, health, and welfare of Keweenaw County.

Moved by Commissioner: Kirby

Supported by Commissioner: Parsons

ROLL CALL VOTE:

- Ayes: 6
- Nays: 1
- Absent: 0

STATE OF MICHIGAN COUNTY OF KEWEENAW

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and complete copy of a resolution adopted by the Keweenaw County Planning Commission at a regular meeting held on August 24, 2026.

Chair / Secretary, Keweenaw County Planning Commission _____

Don Simila, Chair: _____

Margaret Kirby, Secretary: _____

TO: Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Keweenaw County Planning Commission (Chair)

DATE: August 31, 2026

SUBJECT: Financial Sustainability, Land-Use Management, and Retention of County Zoning

1. Purpose

This memorandum serves as a companion to the Planning Commission's formal resolution urging the retention of zoning in Keweenaw County. We fully recognize the acute financial challenges facing our county budget, as outlined by the County Treasurer. However, we caution that eliminating or defunding zoning is a false economy—one that will generate hidden long-term liabilities, degrade local property values, and strip the county of its ability to manage growth along our irreplaceable Lake Superior shorelines and fragile ecosystems.

2. Addressing the Budget Realities: Moving Past "All-or-Nothing"

The discussion to eliminate or drastically alter zoning stems from valid administrative constraints regarding staffing a full-time department. The Planning Commission agrees that the current structural model requires evaluation, but we advocate for a sustainable middle ground rather than total abandonment:

- **Refining and Paring Down Regulations:** Instead of a complete repeal, the County can focus on simplifying burdensome procedural requirements to reduce administrative lag and overhead, maintaining core protections without requiring an oversized bureaucracy.
- **Cost Recovery via Fee Schedules:** Ensuring that zoning administration, permit reviews, and related services adequately cover their operational costs through appropriate, updated fee structures will reduce the burden on the general fund.
- **Preventing the "Wild West":** As noted in prior board discussions, reverting entirely to an unmanaged landscape invites chaotic development. Without local ground rules, the county loses predictability.

3. Pitfalls of Abandoning Zoning in Keweenaw County

Abandoning land-use regulation entirely exposes Keweenaw County to unique vulnerabilities given our geography and economy:

- **Unmitigated Nuisances and Commercial Incompatibility:** Without zoning districts, heavy commercial or intensive industrial operations can establish themselves immediately adjacent to quiet residential areas or vital tourism corridors, legally leaving the county without a preventative remedy.

- **Infrastructure Strain:** Uncoordinated development increases the strain on rural county roads, emergency services, and storm drainage without any legal mechanism to require developers to address or mitigate those impacts.
- **Erosion of Property Values:** Real estate investment relies heavily on land-use stability. Homeowners and camp owners invest in Keweenaw expecting baseline protections against incompatible neighboring uses. Removing those protections creates market uncertainty.
- **Loss of Local Say over Tourism Pressures:** Managing complex modern pressures—such as short-term rentals and seasonal development spikes—requires a clear local framework. Without zoning, the county forfeits its seat at the table, leaving complex disputes to expensive civil litigation or state-level intervention.

4. Collaborative Next Steps

The Planning Commission does not view this issue as an adversarial debate between fiscal responsibility and planning; rather, both goals are essential to the survival of our community.

We propose a joint working session between members of the County Board, the Treasurer, and the Planning Commission to explore scalable, low-cost administrative options that keep zoning functional without breaking the county budget.

We respectfully request that the County Board table any motions to eliminate zoning and instead partner with us to achieve a streamlined, fiscally sound framework.