KEWEENAW COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING AND SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
October 5, 2026 – 4:00 P.M.

Meeting called to order at 4:00 PM by chair, Meeting was properly posted and the Pledge of Allegiance recited. Roll call taken and a quorum declared.

Members Present:

Don Simila	John Parsons
Margaret Kirby	Steve Siira
Harvey Desnick	Bob Pokorski
Bob DeMarois	Staff: Susan M. Hockings, ZA

PUBLIC HEARING
Proposed Short-Term Rental Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment

A quorum being present, the public hearing on the proposed Short-Term Rental (STR) Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment was opened at 4:03 PM

The purpose of the hearing was to receive information and public comment regarding the proposed amendment before the Planning Commission considered whether to make a recommendation to the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners. Public comments were limited to three minutes per speaker.

Zoning Administrator Presentation: Zoning Administrator Hockings summarized the proposed amendment and staff report. The proposed amendment was posted for public review September 1, 2026, and the staff report was posted September 17, 2026.

Hockings explained that short-term rentals have historically been permitted by the County under several names and procedures, including tourist homes, vacation rentals, regular zoning permits, and conditional use permits. The proposed amendment was intended to establish a more consistent process moving forward, primarily through annual County permitting.

The annual permit would provide a means to maintain current ownership and contact information, maintain an accurate inventory of operating STRs, and confirm continued compliance with applicable requirements. Existing lawful STR uses would not be required to reestablish their right to operate simply because of the annual permitting process.

Hockings also explained the proposed six-month transition period for existing STRs and recommended retaining three existing operational standards that had not been expressly carried forward into proposed Article 17: restrictions on receptions/private parties involving persons other than registered guests, retail sales, and serving meals to the general public.

Public Comment

Eric Campbell expressed concern regarding the effect of the amendment on previously issued STR permits and vested or nonconforming rights. He requested that existing lawfully issued permits be grandfathered and suggested obtaining additional legal review before changing existing approvals.

AJ Kern objected to the proposed definition of "aggrieved party," stating that determination of aggrieved status is properly made by the Zoning Board of Appeals and courts. She cited Michigan statutes and case law and recommended removing the definition.

Debra Shelonzek agreed with concerns regarding the definition of "aggrieved party." She also questioned language concerning lodging accommodations and expressed concern that the proposed definition of "family" was overly broad.

Sam Raymond supported protecting previously established STRs and stated that existing lawful uses should be grandfathered. He indicated support for an annual permitting process and fee provided that revenues support zoning administration, public safety, or other services benefiting residents and the visitor economy.

John Kern raised concerns regarding existing conditional use permits, grandfathering, the County's authority to impose annual STR fees, and several definitions contained in the proposed amendment. He recommended delaying action until completion/adoption of the Master Plan and resolution of current discussions regarding County zoning.
Zach Newsberg raised concerns regarding the possibility of eliminating County zoning. The Chair clarified that the hearing was limited to the proposed STR amendment.
Kristen Turvo questioned whether STRs should be subject to annual fees when other tourism-related businesses may not be subject to comparable County fees.
Paul Campbell referenced October 10, 2024 Planning Commission minutes concerning the prior intention to update the Master Plan before undertaking significant zoning ordinance amendments. He questioned why the STR amendment was being considered immediately before completion of the Master Plan process.
Ruth Lahti explained that her STR is also her personal second home and that rental income helps make continued ownership affordable. She expressed concern regarding additional fees and restrictions on owners who occasionally rent personal or family properties.
Janine Keelan similarly stated that her STR is a family camp and rental income helps pay expenses and property taxes. She opposed additional fees and regulation.

Following public comment, Commission members asked staff additional questions regarding existing STR permits, conditional use permits, grandfathering, expiration dates, and the historical differences in the way STRs have been permitted. Staff reiterated that the proposed amendment was not intended to eliminate an existing lawful STR use.
The Chair provided one final opportunity for persons who had not spoken to comment.
The public hearing was then closed at 4:43 PM. Written and oral comments were made part of the record for consideration by the Planning Commission.

SPECIAL MEETING

The Planning Commission proceeded directly into its Special Meeting at 4:44 PM
Approval of Agenda: M/DeMarois, S/Kirby, to approve the agenda. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Proposed Short-Term Rental Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment

The Planning Commission reviewed the proposed amendment, staff report, written comments, testimony received during the public hearing, and the applicable text-amendment criteria contained in the Keweenaw County Zoning Ordinance including the Findings of Fact.
Zoning Administrator Hockings reviewed the staff findings for the amendment criteria. Discussion included:

- the County's historical use of differing STR terminology and permitting procedures;
- consistency and standardization of future STR administration;
- existing permits, conditional use permits, expiration dates, and nonconforming or vested rights;
- annual permitting and administrative fees;
- occupancy and septic capacity;
- environmental and neighborhood impacts;
- consistency with the recently adopted 2026 Keweenaw County Master Plan;
- existing enforcement provisions of the KCZO;
- preservation of existing STR operational standards; and
- whether consideration of the amendment should continue while the County determines the future of County zoning and begins the broader zoning ordinance update.

Member Desnick expressed concern about moving forward with the amendment before legal and administrative questions concerning existing STR approvals were more fully resolved and before the proposed broader zoning ordinance review, which sparked further discussion.
Motion to Table: Motion by ~~Harvey Desnick~~ Bob Pokorski, supported by ~~Bob Pokorski~~ Harvey Desnick, to table the decision on the proposed Short-Term Rental Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment until after the County makes its decision regarding County zoning and within the context of any rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance should that occur.
Roll Call Vote:
Margaret Kirby – No
John Parsons – No
Harvey Desnick – Yes
Bob DeMarois – Yes
Bob Pokorski – Yes
Steve Siira – Yes
Don Simila – No
Motion carried, 4–3. The proposed STR text amendment was tabled to a future date. No specific date was established. Discussion indicated that the matter could be revisited in conjunction with the anticipated zoning ordinance update and consultant assistance.

Public Comment:
Eric Campbell thanked the Commission for tabling the amendment and offered to participate in future discussions regarding STR regulation. He reiterated his previous comments.
Paul Campbell thanked the Commission for its consideration and asked members to consider room arrangement and communication practices that would allow the Commission to face and be heard more easily by the public.
AJ Kern reiterated her previous comments.
Philip Roberts thanked the Commission for tabling the amendment and offered input based upon his experience operating short-term rentals.
Kathy McEvers raised concerns regarding older septic systems serving waterfront STRs and how potential septic problems would be addressed. She also discussed the significant growth in STRs and expressed concern about housing availability and STR density, encouraging the County not to delay the issue indefinitely.
Deborah Shelonzek discussed the importance of tourism, the growth of STRs, the impacts of tourism on local services, possible township involvement in funding, meeting accessibility, and questioned the selection of a consultant with 40 years' experience for the upcoming zoning ordinance review instead of seeking a new university graduate.
John Kern encouraged the County to explore working with townships on an STR fee or regulatory structure rather than delaying consideration of STR issues until completion of the entire zoning ordinance rewrite.
Sam Raymond supported the Commission's decision to table the amendment, stating that additional legal questions should be researched and that it was more important to develop a workable ordinance than to act quickly.
Next Meeting: The next regular Planning Commission meeting was announced for **October 26, 2026 at 4:00 P.M.**
Adjournment: Motion was made by Pokorski and supported by DeMarois to adjourn. **Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 5:49 PM**

Recording Secretary: Susan M Hockings _____

PC Secretary: Margaret Kirby _____