

Village of Bear Lake Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: July 10, 2025

Time: 6:31 pm – 7:40 pm

Location: Village Hall, 12016 Russell Street, Bear Lake, MI 49614

1. Planning Commission Members

- **Chairperson:** John Virga
 - **Vice Chairperson:** Meg Kieskowski
 - **PC Members:** Ian Myers, Jason Care
 - **Acting Secretary:** Michelle Swanson (absent for this meeting, will attend future meetings)
 - **Ex officio members:**
 - Village President: Shelly Lynnes
 - President - Pro Tem: Janene Gee
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2. Call to Order

- **Time Called to Order:** 6:31 pm by Chairperson John Virga
- **Pledge of Allegiance** conducted.
- **Roll Call:**
 - Present: John Virga, Jason Care, Meg Kieskowski, Shelly Lynnes, Ian Myers
 - Excused/Absent: Michelle Swanson, Janene Gee
- **Attendance Record:** Need to establish official attendance sheet; Becky to send attendance sheet/template.

- **Approval of Previous Minutes:**
 - Minutes from June 12, 2025, were reviewed and approved by individual roll call vote.
 - Motion made by Meg, seconded by Ian. Approved by John, Meg, Ian, and Jason (Shelly abstained as not present at previous meeting).
 - Need to obtain a motion/voting sheet from Becky for future documentation.
 - **Commission Officer Roles:**
 - Discussion of officer roles; Meg Kieskowski nominated and unanimously approved as Vice Chairperson.
 - Secretary position to be filled at next meeting when Michelle Swanson is present.
 - Need further discussion of distinction between reporting secretary (minutes) and secretary (agenda, distribution, approvals).
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3. Public Comment Regarding the Agenda

- No public comment.
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4. New Business

a. Planning Commission Vacancy

- Need one more commission member (must be a village resident or taxpayer).
- Suggestions and informal discussion about possible candidates, including recent property buyers and current residents.
- Consideration of forming an “executive team” of experienced former members for consultation/advisory roles.

b. Master Plan Update

- **Status:** Significant discussion on need to update the Village of Bear Lake Master Plan, last updated in 2015.
- **Requirement:** State law requires update every 5 years; Plan is critical for grants and outlining vision for the Village.
- **Distribution:** Master Plan is 208 pages, available online (Village or Lakes to Land website); link emailed to members, but can be found with a quick Google search.
- **Process:**
 - All commission members to review plan before next meeting, with focus on objectives and priorities (from approximately page 140 onward).
 - Noted that Master Plan contains demographic data, stats, and objectives.
 - Several current/recent village improvements (Hopkins Park upgrades, new roads, sidewalks, playgrounds) are within current Master Plan.
 - Need to revisit or reword objectives related to sewer/water infrastructure (e.g., possibly update references to sewer system).
- **Action:** John to email link to Master Plan and follow up with members in two weeks for questions ahead of next meeting.
- **Timeline:** Ideas or suggested updates to be developed and prepared for council discussion by October 2025.

c. Zoning Ordinance Updates

- **Current Status:** Distribution of zoning update suggestions (with marked changes) from Manistee County.
- **Discussion:** Not all members had reviewed suggestions in detail; advised all to familiarize themselves with the entire zoning ordinance and the edits.
- **Process:**
 - Planning Commission reviews ordinances, debates/corrects content, and provides recommendation to the Village Council.
 - Council must vote on changes; approved changes are sent to Manistee County and published in newspaper (required by law).
- **Key Points:**
 - Remove or adapt language in zoning code that is not suited for a small village (e.g., provisions better for larger towns).
 - Discussion on proposed "Short Term Rental" language: Village holds the STR ordinance as a standalone outside of the zoning code for

flexibility. Zoning ordinance should reference, not duplicate, the standalone STR rules.

- Need language to reference the STR ordinance rather than repeat its content.
- Clarification of district use (business/residential) due to recent confusion with building permits and land-use applications.

- **Action:**

- All members to review zoning document and marked edits prior to further discussion.
- Shelly to clarify recent questions regarding residential use of existing business-zoned buildings with county official.
- Further discussion and recommendations to be scheduled for a future meeting.

d. Historic Bank Building Development Plans

- **Progress:**

- John met with building owner (Jim) to develop a draft rehabilitation plan; no substantial changes needed.
- Awaiting feedback from Hannah Yurk (MEDC) on available/appropriate grants.
- Next step is meeting with Jim, John, and Mike, the Zoning Enforcer.
- Note: Development plans are mindful of downtown improvements (e.g., pending US-31 streetscape and vibration testing), and must be coordinated with future sidewalk and infrastructure work.

e. Ice Cream Shop Access Proposal

- **Proposal:**

- Owner of ice cream shop (Kelly Smith) seeks permission and approval to build a stairway from her property down to Hopkins Park for improved access.
- She proposes to fund all landscaping and construction.

- **Concerns:**

- The Village needs to treat all property owners the same - we cannot set a precedent for all property owners to seek similar access, potentially creating management, liability, and other issues.

- Potential impact on existing campsites and other properties.
- ADA accessibility requirements for new constructions.
- Discussion around three existing public stairways to the park and the value of improving those rather than permitting new private-access stairs.
- **Conclusion:**
 - General consensus to approach cautiously, evaluate additional options, potential precedents, and consider alternatives such as repairing or upgrading existing stairways.
 - No decision made; further discussion needed.
 - Site walk suggestion to review options.

f. Irrigation Project Update

- **Proposal:** Meg updated on behalf of Tammy.
 - Installation of irrigation at Bear Lake's main entry and flower boxes (including cost estimate around \$900; increased due to including extra parts for maintenance).
 - Proposal includes tapping into village electricity and possibly engaging DPW for seasonal installation/removal.
 - Solar power considered but deemed too expensive.
- **Status:**
 - Awaiting further details from Tammy.
 - Anticipated to seek funding from local promoters and organizations such as the Trigana Club and BL Promoters.
 - Village Council likely to discuss after Bear Lake Days event.
 - Ongoing consideration of long-term maintenance and costs for all projects.

g. Sidewalk Safety Audit

- **Technology Solution:** Investigation of using the iClick Fix app for sidewalk condition reporting. Can allow volunteers/citizens to log defects with locations and photos.
- **Collaboration:**
 - Need to coordinate with Daniel from Council, who maintains a current list of sidewalk issues.

- Prior sidewalk audits were done, but need for updated and photographic documentation.
 - Data could help in prioritizing repairs, possibly with future AI-based solutions.
 - **Funding:**
 - Village pays 50% of sidewalk replacement if conditions are met (other 50% by homeowner) – pending subject to budget availability.
 - Discussion regarding lack of future funding for sidewalk repair in current fiscal year due to recent emergencies.
 - **Tree Planting Program:** Not formally in place; council recognizes need for planned reforestation with appropriate species to avoid future problems and for beautification.
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5. Old Business

- Michelle Swanson (incoming Secretary) was planned to be absent but will attend August meeting; introduction and secretary role responsibilities to be reviewed next month.
 - On-going need for one more Planning Commission member identified.
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6. Public Comment

- No formal public comments recorded outside of discussions integrated during agenda topics.
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7. Adjournment

- **Time Adjourned:** 7:40 pm
- **Motion to Adjourn:** Made and properly seconded; meeting closed.

Action Items

1. **Attendance Sheet:**

- Becky to provide official template for meeting attendance.
- Becky to also provide motion/voting sheets for documentation.

2. **Master Plan Review:**

- All commissioners to review, focusing on objectives (around page 140+).
- John to follow up in two weeks for feedback/questions; plan for preliminary recommendations in October.

3. **Zoning Updates:**

- All to review full zoning ordinance and marked suggestions; especially reference to short-term rental language.
- Shelly to clarify building use/zoning with county for open permit applications.
- Further discussion and recommendation tabled for future meeting.

4. **Secretary Role:**

- Evaluate division of reporting secretary (minutes) and secretary (agenda/distribution); finalize when Michelle is present in August.

5. **Historic Bank Building:**

- Await feedback from Hannah (MEDC) on grant options.
- Schedule meeting with stakeholders (Jim, John, David, Mike).

6. **Ice Cream Shop Proposal:**

- Conduct walk-through of proposed area with Shelly to consider implications.
- Gather input on village property, ADA, and legal considerations before next steps.

7. **Irrigation Project:**

- Await Tammy's follow-up after Bear Lake Days.
- Investigate funding support from Trigana Club and BL Promoters.

8. **Sidewalk Audit:**

- John and Jason to coordinate with Daniel; compare past reports with new survey using app/technology.
- Prepare for possible presentation to council and residents regarding sidewalk condition and cost-share program.

Follow-Up Items & Meetings

- August 2025: Next regular Planning Commission meeting; Secretary role to be confirmed.
 - Two-week follow-up: Members to send any Master Plan questions/feedback to John.
 - Additional meetings to be scheduled with Hannah (MEDC), Jim (bank building owner), and others regarding development projects.
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Notable Discussions & Themes

- Emphasis on process transparency and equal treatment for all residents and property owners.
 - Need for clear documentation and compliance with legal requirements (e.g., public notices, ADA).
 - Ongoing effort to streamline roles, distribute workload, and improve record-keeping at the committee level.
 - Recognition of the importance of long-term maintenance and sustainability for infrastructure and beautification projects.
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Minutes prepared by Acting Secretary; pending official approval at next meeting.