

WEST TRAVERSE TOWNSHIP
REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION
June 11, 2025

Chair Hollerith called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Roll Call: Hollerith, Forster, Remus, Dohan, Osetek, Green, Thompson

Absent: none

Visitors: David Berryman, Garon Gopigian, Jimmy Spencer, Kristi Hollingsworth, Lisa Morris

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all.

Approve Agenda as presented or with additions: Hollerith asked to amend the agenda to have “New Business” placed first before “Unfinished Business.” **Remus made the motion to approve the agenda as amended. Thompson seconded. Seven (7) ayes.**

Public Comment – none

Approval of May 14, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes: Dohan requested modification to the recognition of Bill Mulder as “*Planning Commissioner*”. Hollerith requested to have the discussion section restructured to make a second paragraph. **Forster made the motion to approve the minutes of May 14, 2025, as amended. Green seconded. Seven (7) ayes.**

New Business –

- a. Public Hearing – Hollerith requested a motion to open the Public Hearing portion of the meeting. **Thompson made the motion to open the Public Hearing at 5:35 p.m. Remus seconded. All aye.** Hollerith presented the case, 02-2025, a request to amend the Approved Special Use Permit for Pond Hill Farm to allow for an increase in the permitted number of parking spaces and parked vehicles from 375 to 500 on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. annually during the last two weeks in September and during the month of October, at 5699 S. Lake Shore Dr, Harbor Springs, MI 49740. The property is more particularly described in tax parcel’s #24-16-12-33-100-001, 24-16-12-32-200-002 and 24-16-12-32-200-004. Hollerith reviewed the procedures for the public hearing and the process that will be followed. “*Lane will present a summary of the application, then Pond Hill Farm representatives will be given time to present the main points of their application. Public comment will follow where it will be broken into two groups; those that are in support and those against with each having three minutes to speak. All comments regarding the application should be directed towards the Chair and related to the special use permit. The Planning Commission has three options; approve the request with or without conditions, deny the request or postpone the request.*” Lane presented the analysis memo detailing Pond Hill Farms request to increase permitted number of parking spaces from 375-500 on the Fall Festival weekends. As noted in the memo, requests cannot be processed as a minor amendment due to the request to change a condition of current Special Use Permit. Tonight’s Public Hearing notice was published in the Harbor Light Newspaper on 5-21-25 and property owners within three hundred feet were

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mailed a notice on 5-19-25. No written comments were received within the deadline. An email was received after the deadline, which is in the board packets and will be included in the minutes as correspondence. Lane provided further background information on the initial SUP that was issued in March of 2023, amended in December of 2023, and included discussion of the Townships Mass Gathering Ordinance. Since then, the Township Board has amended the Mass Gathering Ordinance to make it not applicable for events conducted under an SUP. Lane continued with Pond Hill Farms current SUP permit limits of 185 parking spaces during regular business days, increasing to 375 on specified weekends. They are now seeking to increase parking spaces to five hundred on Fall Festival Weekends, which are the last two weekends in September along with the weekends in October, weekends being Friday through Saturday. Lane stated that he has received zero complaints regarding Pond Hill Farm since December 2023. Lane noted with the increase of cars/parking, the attendance will likely increase to above the permitted 999 attendees which will also require an increase in restroom facilities, parking attendants, etc. Pond Hill Farms recognized the need for increased restroom facilities and approval from the Health Department in their application materials. The Planning Commission can make an approval contingent upon those approvals. Lane referred to the analysis memo, Agritourism with commercial event use is allowed by SUP in the A-1 and A-1A districts. In terms of the dimensional requirements all requirements are satisfied, as noted on page four of the memo. Pond Hill Farms is not proposing any changes to the site so the previous site plan submitted is sufficient. Lane stated that in terms of his findings relating to the graphic requirements for the site plans section 504.1, he found them to be satisfied. Elevation drawings were not included but not required. In terms of Section 504.2 the site plan impact statement responses were provided by the applicant, more or less not proposing any changes other than the additional 125 spaces during those specified days. Section 506, Site Plan review standards, and included where applicable, the conditions of the current SUP. Lane highlighted Subsection A which relates to location, design and driveways, entrance features for vehicles and pedestrians, as noted on the site plan and in the memo, it is currently a one way in, one way out. Subsection B, vehicle and pedestrian sites are depicted on the site plan. Lane addressed the safety of pedestrians walking to event facilities crossing the ingress and egress. Lane found all other criteria to be satisfied. Section 8, Capacity, currently they are allowed to have 500 attendees during the regular season, 999 on the Fall Festival weekends. If the number of cars is increased, visitors will increase and that might be something the Planning Commission wants to discuss. Lane pointed out to the Planning Commission because it is being re-visited, they have the ability to look at any of these items, reopen them if necessary and have the authority to grant deviations as Planning Commissions have done in the past. Actions such as using the authority to condition its approval on an option to come back and revisit a year or so later just to make sure there are not any issues. Lane provided sample motions with conditions. Lane also noted the Planning Commission makes a recommendation to the Township Board on the amendment to the SUP. If a recommendation to approve or deny tonight is made, it will go to the Township Board to ultimately approve or deny. Hollerith asked if there were any questions for Lane from the Board members. Hollerith opened the floor to the applicants, Pond Hill Farm. Jimmy Spencer explained the need for increased parking spaces to manage traffic during the peak weekends during the Fall Festival. It was emphasized that they can manage large crowds and provided examples of successful management along with their commitment to providing a positive experience for the visitors. They are aware of the need for additional staffing and restroom

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facilities and are willing to provide any documentation from the Health Dept and MDOT. Osetek questioned what kind of activities are provided and are they able to entertain a considerable number of visitors. Spencer gave examples of numerous farm activities such as hayrides, mazes, pumpkin smashing, etc. that are available. Remus asked about adding staffing accommodations. Spencer stated additional staffing will be provided to help with the traffic flow. Green inquired about any instances where police or the Fire Department may have been called out. Berryman noted there have been a few incidents where the EMT's had been called out. Heat exhaustion, a diabetic issue and one heart problem. Berryman pointed out that incident reports reflected positively on the ease of getting to the individuals and how well-prepared Pond Hill Farm was. Green questioned further if there were any problems from the farm itself, animal bites or rowdiness that required attention from Police. Berryman stated there were none. Hollerith asked if they anticipate keeping normal operation hours. They stated they will keep the normal hours of operation. Hollerith also questioned as they are increasing the number of attendees, will insurance/liability coverage will reflect the increase. They stated it will. Dohan wondered if there is an increase of five hundred parking spaces, does the planning commission need to look at the existing SUP that provides the maximum attendees of 999. Berryman gave a brief explanation of how they came to that number and how it complies with existing ordinances. Green suggested deleting the number of people requirement because it is difficult to monitor. Hollerith asked Lane if it would be appropriate to adjust the numbers. Lane suggested increasing the attendee limit if the Planning Commission adjusts the number of parking spaces. Hollerith opened the Public Comment phase at 6:12 p.m. Garon Gopigian stated his appreciation to Jimmy, Marcy, and Dave for all they do to assist the Tunnel of Trees noting that they are the only spot that can accommodate the traffic. Gopigian asked if the SUP is attached to the deed and would it follow future owners of the property. Lane replied that it is not attached to the deed, but the SUP runs with the land. No opposition was noted; no other questions or concerns were raised so Hollerith asked for a motion to close the Public Hearing. **Forster made the motion to close the Public Hearing at 6:16 p.m. Thompson seconded. All ayes.**

The Planning Commission board members began deliberations on increasing number of attendees over the 4th of July weekend along with Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends. Concerns were noted about additional personal, sanitation, emergency access, how many days the "4th of July weekend" covers, etc. Discussion also centered around allowing Pond Hill Farm to amend the SUP to five hundred parking spaces year-round. Hollerith stated Pond Hills application is strictly for the Fall Festival weekends and the 4th of July weekend and that is what should be considered tonight and if needed, Pond Hill Farm could request another review. It was determined that there was insufficient time to include the 4th of July weekend. Lane recapped the conditions for the Planning Commission; parking would increase from 375-500 on Fall Festival weekends. Pond Hill Farm would be responsible to keep count the amount of vehicles, and to increase the number of attendees to 1,350 due to the increased parking spaces, revisit after a year to see how it went and lastly, to include that the existing SUP is being amended in accordance with this motion.

Thompson made the following motion; I move to recommend approval to the Township Board of Trustees, Case #2-2025, a request for amendment to an approved special use permit, as submitted by Dave Berryman on behalf of Pond Hill Farm, located at 5699 S. Lake Shore Dr, tax parcel's 24-16-12-33-100-0010, 24-16-12-32-200-002, 24-16-12-352-200-004, to allow for an increase in the permitted number of parking spaces and parked

vehicles from 375-500 on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays annually during the last two weeks in September and during the month of October, because the applicable standards of the West Traverse Township Zoning Ordinance have been met, subject to the following:

- Parking areas shall be delineated by berm, fence or some other method so that the total number of parking spaces can be identified, and the number of parked vehicles shall not exceed 185 during the regular season of business for Pond Hill Farm and 500 on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays annually during the last two weeks in September and during the month of October.
- Parking attendants provided by Pond Hill Farm shall be onsite during business hours to direct vehicle and pedestrian traffic and to ensure the number of parked vehicles do not exceed the number of approved parking spaces and that all vehicles are parked in approved parking spaces.
- There shall be an event attendee limit of five hundred people at any one time during the regular season of business for Pond Hill Farm. There shall be an event attendee limit of 1,350 people at any one-time during Pond Hill Farm's Fall Festival weekends, held annually on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays during the last two weeks in September and during the month of October.
- All required permits and approvals from all applicable regulatory agencies, including District Health Department #3, MDOT and the Emmet County Building Department, shall be obtained and kept current by the applicants or Pond Hill Farm and a copy shall be provided to the Township and kept on file with the West Traverse Township Clerk.
- A copy of Pond Hill Farm's insurance liability coverage shall be provided to the Zoning Administrator.
- This amendment shall be permitted for one year from the issuance of the zoning permit. The Planning Commission shall reevaluate this amendment no later than January 30, 2026, and determine if any negative effects have occurred. If no negative effects have occurred, the Planning Commission may extend this amendment to a future date or indefinitely. No public hearing or further amendment of the Special Land Use Permit is required for this one-year review.

Except as expressly amended by this motion, all conditions of the previously approved Special Use Permit and corresponding Special Use Permit agreements, as executed between Pond Hill Farm and West Traverse Township and finalized on March 23, 2023, and on December 21, 2023, shall remain in full force and effect. Motion seconded by Dohan. Roll Call Vote: Thompson – yes, Dohan – yes, Hollerith – yes, Green – yes, Osetek – yes, Forster – yes, Remus – yes. Seven (7) ayes. Motion approved.

Unfinished Business –

a. **Master Plan Review –**

- i. Review Chapter 7 – Future Land Use Recommendations: Lane presents the Future Land Use map recommendations, revised version, highlighting changes and suggestions in the Conservation Parkland Category and the Farm and Forest Category. Lane discussed the Cook Property on the Township property. Lane noted

that the Planning Commission had discussed an expansion of the R-2 district to include higher density residential. Hollerith discussed the inclusion of ADU's in the single-family residential category.

- ii. Review revised Chapter 6 – Community Goals & Objectives: Chapter Six was reviewed in March, re-visit after Public Hearing Meeting input is received. Hollerith suggested adding a statement that Township Planning is guided by the Michigan Zoning and Enabling Act along with an additional statement about the importance of Natural Resources, water quality protection and environmental protection in land use decisions. Hollerith mentioned the minimum housing size and potential for adjusting it based on construction costs, etc. The Planning Commission discussed mixed use developments in commercial and industrial areas along with the possibility of temporary housing in commercial buildings. The Planning Commission decided to leave the current housing and commercial development language as is and change if needed after the Public Hearing Meeting.
- iii. Draft Public Hearing Notice
Lane discussed the draft press release for the Public Hearing Meeting. Lane and Hollerith talk about sending the press release to the newspaper as advertising for the public.

Other:

- a. Zoning Administrator Report – provided in packet. Lane informed the commissioners that he has a meeting with Bosker regarding phase two of the storage building project on State Rd.
- b. Township Board Representative Report – Green reported that a representative from Housing North spoke at last night's Board meeting regarding the Zoning Atlas Project which is a “global mapping” of Emmet County that is condensed into one website for ease of use for all entities. They are asking \$5000 to buy into the project. The Township Board voted not to participate. Dohan questioned from reading the West Traverse Township Board minutes that there will be an inspection of the sewer system and wondered if the users were expected to cover the cost of the inspection. Green informed him that the Township has a fund to cover expenses such as that.
- c. Correspondence – An email as received from Eve Lauer against PHF parking expansion.

Planning Commissioner Comments (open discussion) – none

Public Comment – Lisa Morris commented on the escalating Alge bloom along the lake shore suggesting it may be coming from the sewer system. Morris suggested using the “nextdoor” app as an option to promote the Master Plan public meetings.

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Next Meeting: Planning Commission next regular meeting will be held July 9, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. with a Master Plan Open House Public Meeting held 4:30 to 5:30 with Chair Hollerith and ZA Lane in attendance to answer any questions. A press release with the dates will be advertised in the newspapers, and on the Townships website along with utilizing the Townships' textmygov system.

Adjournment: **Thompson made the motion to adjourn at 7:51 p.m. Osetek seconded. Seven (7) ayes.**

Respectfully Submitted by:
Jim Osetek, Secretary

Transcribed by:
Amy Peters

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