

WEST TRAVERSE TOWNSHIP
REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION
February 11, 2026

Chair Forster called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

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

Absent: none

Visitors: Garon Gopigian, Israel Hernandez, Meg Lennon, Kamron Bijah, Ty Humpert, John Gibbs, Alesandra Collavero, Pat Lennon, Karin Offield, Kathryn Schmitt, Jonah Burgess, Renee McDuffee, Shane Abl, Shannon Welsh, Ed Taylor, Beth Mans, Dawson Moore, Lisa Morris

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all.

Approve Agenda as presented or with additions: Dohan motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Green seconded. All ayes.

Public Comment – none

Minutes: **Thompson made the motion to approve the minutes of January 14, 2026, as presented. Remus seconded. All ayes.**

Unfinished Business – Forster introduced the following case: Commissioner Remus excused himself at 5:33 p.m.

- a. **Postponed Decision – Case #03-2025**, consider a request for site plan review and the expansion and enlargement of a non-conforming use by Special Use Permit, pursuant to Section 410.3 of the Zoning Ordinance, to allow for renovations to the existing pool, expansion to the existing hotel building, the addition of a Wellness Center and Event Pavilion, and the addition of detached cabin units at the Otis Harbor Springs 7291 South Lakeshore Dr, and 7707 South Lakeshore Dr. Harbor Springs Mi 49740. The properties are more particularly described in tax parcels #24-16-15-09-100-031 and #24-16-15-09-100-032.

Lane provided a detailed explanation of the case including the Public Hearing held on December 10, 2025, and the request for a Special Use Permit. Lane outlined the proposed expansion, including demolition of the existing two-story building, construction of a new hotel building, construction of 5,130 square foot Wellness Center, a 4,940 square foot Event Pavilion, nine detached cabins, demolition of the existing pool, and construction of its replacement. Lane noted the applicant's response to the Planning Commissions requests for additional information, including the updated landscaping plan, details on the detached cabins dimensions, the standards for noise, parking, screening requirements have been provided. Lane stated that during the Planning Commissions discussion on whether to approve the request, they need to keep a few items in mind. Items such as number of event attendees, hours of operation, estimated vehicles, amount of

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people on site, noise and traffic, will Day Passes be available to the public and how many, the driveway ingress/egress, will landscape buffering be sufficient to shield the neighbors from noise, definition of hotel, will the detached cabins be considered hotel rooms, adequate parking, number of parking spaces, type of parking lot material, and lighting. Lane noted the correspondence received from Mary Hughes, Martha Remus, Renee McDuffee, Frank Lucido, Kate & Jay Schmitt, and Glenn Remus. Forster asked if there were any questions or comments from the PC board. Osetek commented on the need to carefully examine the proposal due to its non-conforming use in a residential area, the hours of operation, and the impact on neighbors. Osetek stated that he spoke with a local arborist and the arborist said that trees aren't the best for blocking sound and would the Otis consider a fence. Thompson discussed the recent walk through of the property and thanked the Otis for allowing them to do that. Thompson appreciated the applicant's willingness to modify the plan based on the community feedback. She noted that currently, events have been held in "tents" in the back and that by moving those events indoors into the Event Center/Pavilion, that would help to reduce noise. Thompson reflected on the times she had stayed at the Birchwood Inn and what the Otis is doing is a much-needed upgrade. She also commented on the landscaping and sound screening. Dohan asked if there would be an opportunity to comment after the applicant's presentation and was assured there would be.

Israel Hernandez, co-owner of the Otis expressed gratitude to the Planning Commission for the time tonight and back in December when they first approached the Board. He introduced the other owners, Ty Humpert, John Gibbs, and their executive team. Hernandez explained the proposals focus on improving the property's infrastructure and addressing the noise and privacy concerns through enhanced screening and landscaping. He highlighted their commitment to community events and the need for adequate facilities to accommodate the growing demands in the area. Hernandez provided information on the proposed hours of operation, capacity limits, and use of the new facilities along with addressing the concerns of increased traffic and lighting noting the lighting will be considered "Dark Sky." He also noted that the cabins, while not attached to the main building, will be considered hotel rooms. He addressed the issue of Day Passes and how they will be implemented and controlled. Pat Lennon, Attorney for the Otis, addressed the Planning Commission echoing Hernandez's statements about landscaping/screening, parking, lighting, Day Passes, traffic and how this expansion is needed to help meet the demands of the community. Dohan had questions about the pool, would it be a heated open year-round pool. He expressed concerns whether issuing Day passes could classify the use as resort. He added would traffic increase because of that. John Gibbs, co-owner of the Otis, addressed Dohans concerns about increased traffic from guests' day passes. Hollerith asked if the cabins would be prefabricated or custom built, size of the cabins, and what the hours of operation will be. Hernandez replied that 9:00 p.m. is when quiet time begins. Hollerith mentioned parking lot material and directed a question to Ken if the Wellness Center and Event Pavilion are within height requirements. Forster touched on hours of operation, 9:00 p.m. would be quiet time, 11:00 p.m. for

special occasions such as New Year's Eve, Fourth of July etc. He noted that with activities within the Event Pavilion noise after 9:00 p.m. should not be loud. Thompson wondered if removing the day pass allowance would that then be a Hotel/Motel and not a "resort" label. Lane read the definition of Hotel/Motel, *"commercial building or part of a commercial building used for transient occupancy of less than thirty days which may include any of the following services: housekeeping, front desk, complimentary breakfast, bell hop service, restaurant, drinking establishment, meeting rooms or banquet halls or similar services."* Lane stated that everything proposed fits into that definition. Thompson also mentioned that instead of curb cutting could the driveway be widened. She questioned what the construction timeline would be if the Planning Commission approved the project. Hernandez answered that demolition of the existing two story, and the pool would start in April or May when guest attendance is lower and then construction should begin in the Fall for the Wellness Center and Event Pavilion. Forster asked if there were anything other questions. Hearing none, Forster opened the meeting to Public Comment.

Garon Gopigian inquired about the property at 7707 S. Lakeshore asking if it will stay a house. He asked if the Otis could re-use the curb cut from the previous building. Garon complimented the Otis team on the use of high-end finishes, thanked them for being sensitive to the original structures and historic elements. He asked them to be conscientious of the Birchwood neighbors, noting that there would be added traffic, lighting, and noise. He questioned if they would consider elongating the plan making it parallel to the lodge. Beth Mans, a Birchwood resident, noted her concerns about road safety, traffic coming and going, and the added noise and people. Renee McDuffee addressed the noise concerns, loud music and is troubled by the density along with the added traffic to the Tunnel of Trees. Kathryn Schmitt spoke on behalf of the seasonal residents of Birchwood who cannot attend, noting that they are upset about how quickly this has progressed, that no one was aware of it and would the Otis and the Planning Commission consider pausing the project to allow for their involvement. She stated she enjoys the amenities provided by the Otis and that is an improvement from the old Birchwood Inn, however, she feels that it is not what the current use of the property should be and that it feels like an event center rather than a hotel. Dawson Moore said that all the amenities that the Otis are offering, the increased amount of traffic discussed, etc., are the same things that occur at Birchwood, that the comments from those who live in Birchwood and are opposing it are interesting. Karin Offield referenced the 100-year-old Pine tree and that nothing should happen to it. She inquired about the Townships Master Plan and if an Event Pavilion and Wellness Center is something that the community through surveys has indicated is missing. Karin commented on the letters from those that could not be in attendance and that Kathryn's idea about announcing plans such as these is a good idea so everyone can participate because she feels this will change West Traverse Township. Karin also referenced the curb cut noting it has historical significance. She also talked about the traffic on M-119, how fast people go and that she is asking MDOT to lay a double yellow line. She feels that there needs to be an ingress/egress to the Otis as well. She inquired about the location of the

HVAC systems, pool pumps, humidifiers and various other equipment and the lights from the parking lot. Ty Humpert mentioned that he did a deep dive into the history of the Birchwood Inn and how active it was in the past with the different restaurants, the heated pool, activities at the convention center etc., so what they want to do isn't anything new. Karin Offield spoke again about trees, shrubbery and how the deer would eat them and would they consider a fence and or berms for sound control. Dawson Moore wanted to point out the hypocrisy of the person that previously spoke, noting that they had a Special Use Permit granted by the Township that specifically forbids commercial activity, yet they have operated several commercial activities for years, continues to do so and that the Township hasn't required any further restrictions or screening for them. Forster addressed Moore stating that such discussion is for another time.

Forster asked for any commissioner's comments and would anyone like to address the motion provided in the packet. Hollerith suggested the commissioners cover the conditions and get a consensus. Osetek asked Lane to clarify again what resorts are and the use of the cabins. Lane noted that under the Township Ordinance, more than one rental cabin on a lot will be classified as a resort. For clarification, these cabins are being utilized as hotel rooms. Hollerith, Dohan, and Green suggested the following conditions. MDOT approval of the site in regards to the driveway based on the numbers that the applicant has provided, hours of operation beginning at 7:00 a.m., concluding at 9:00 pm., grant special exception for special events, no day passes for initial six months, parking surface material; concrete or impervious gravel, possible berms for noise abatement, the number of parking spaces, ensuring that emergency vehicles have the needed room, determine the maximum total of people on site, no outdoor amplified music, make Lane point of contact for complaints and come back within a year of project completion and issuance of certifications of occupancy to reevaluate conditions and if there were any complaints and/or negative effects. Discussion concluded and **Thompson made the following motion. "I move to recommend approval to the Township Board of Trustees Case #3-2025, a site plan review and the expansion and enlargement of a legal nonconforming use by Special Use Permit, as submitted by Israel Hernandez, on behalf of JV North Shore Lodge LLC and the Otis Harbor Springs, for the properties at 7291 S. Lakeshore Dr and 7707 S. Lakeshore Dr tax parcel #24-16-15-09-100-031 and tax parcel # 24-16-15-09-100-032, as described and depicted in the submitted application materials, including the revised materials submitted on January 9, 2026, and the site plan dated November 18, 2025, the floor plan and elevation drawings by Michael Hsu, Architect, dated June 21, 2022, and the concept site plan dated January 9, 2026, because the applicable standards of the West Traverse Township Zoning Ordinance have been satisfied, subject to the following conditions: A) The number of parked vehicles at 7291 and 7707 S. Lakeshore Dr. shall not exceed 132. B) There shall be a guest and event attendee limit of three hundred people at any one time at 7291 and 7707 S. Lakeshore Dr. C) 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 and a copy shall be provided to the Township and kept on file with the West Traverse Township Clerk. D) All outdoor activities and events shall commence no earlier than 7:00 a.m. and shall terminate no later than 9:00 p.m. All outdoor amplified sound shall commence no earlier than 12:00 p.m. and shall terminate no later than 9:00 p.m. E) All driveways and accessways on site shall be comprised of concrete. All parking spaces shall be comprised of the materials depicted and described in the concept site plan dated January 9, 2026, prepared by Michael Hsu, Architect. F) Landscaping and screening shall be provided as depicted by Michael Hsu, Architect, with additional landscaping for screening added along the rear property line of 7291 S. Lakeshore Dr and continuing along to the east property line of 7291 S. Lakeshore Dr. G) The detached cabins shall be used exclusively as hotel rooms, and shall be occupied and reserved in the same manner as rooms in the two other hotel buildings on the property. H) Day passes shall be limited to hotel guests for the first 6 months after the issuance of certificates of occupancy by the Emmet County Building. I) Lighting details shall be added to a revised site plan submitted by the applicants prior to review of the Special Use Permit by the West Traverse Township Board of Trustees. J) The Planning Commission shall reevaluate this approval and these conditions within one year of the issuance of certificates of occupancy by the Emmet County Building Department and determine if any negative effects have occurred. If no negative effects have occurred, the Planning Commission may extend this approval to a future date or indefinitely. No public hearing or further amendment of the Special Use Permit is required for this review.” Dohan seconded. All ayes. Commissioner Remus rejoined the board.

New Business:

- a. **Discussion – Zoning Ordinance Amendment Request – Section 409, Fences and Walls.** Forster suggested that as the applicant was not present the discussion be tabled. Lane did not mind presenting the subject, noting it was up to the Planning Commission if they wanted to move forward with the proposed amendment. The Board agreed to continue. The applicant is requesting the Planning Commission eliminate the provision in Zoning Ordinance stating that woven wire fencing is not allowed. Lane noted that it was discussed in 2024, and it was specifically excluded. He is not supportive of amending the Ordinance the way it is proposed given that woven wire fencing rusts, deteriorates and requires a lot of repairs. Lane noted it is allowed for agriculture and that there is a modification/waiver where someone can come in, have a public hearing, and present their case before the Planning Commission who then can decide whether to allow an exception or not. Hollerith questioned who the applicant is and why they are asking to amend the Zoning Ordinance. Lane explained that the applicant, Lisa Morris, currently has woven wire fencing on her property that she wants to add to and extend further back on her property. Lane noted that if woven wire fencing is damaged to an extent less than 50% of the total, it can be repaired, but in this case, it would be an addition. Thompson asked for context that if they were to disagree with the proposed amendment could she come back and ask for

a waiver. Lane responded yes. Lane explained that if the Planning Commission amends the Zoning Ordinance, it wouldn't be necessary as it would change the Ordinance for the entire Township. The consensus of the Planning Commission was not to amend the ordinance as requested. Forster asked if a motion was needed to deny the request. Lane stated he can inform the applicant of the decision.

Other:

- a. Zoning Administrator Report – Lane noted his report in the packet and commented on the new cases coming before the Planning Commission in March. He received an application for a Special Use Permit for an adult foster care of assisted living homes submitted by Ann's Nest for the property on State Road north of Hughston. The Polo Field applicants wanted to be on the March agenda as well.
- b. Township Board Representative – Green updated the PC on the progress of the new Township Hall, the weekly design meetings, that they are close to finalizing the design, the bids for the project will be going out soon and the Township hopes to start construction late Summer, early Fall 2026. He also mentioned the recent Personnel Committee meeting noting that there will be pay rate increases for Board members, Township employees, Planning Commissioners, Board of Review and Zoning Board of Appeals.
- c. Correspondence – provided in the packet

Planning Commissioner Comments (open discussion) – Thompson stated she enjoyed the Joint Meeting held at the recent West Traverse Township Board meeting and thanked Green for organizing it. Green also commented on the joint meeting; he enjoyed it as well and meetings such as that should happen more often. Hollerith agreed with Thompson and Green and thanked Lane and Peters for all they do.

Public Comments – none

Next Meeting: Planning Commission next regular meeting will be held March 11, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

Adjournment: Forster asked for a motion to adjourn. **Hollerith made the motion to adjourn at 8:23 p.m. Thompson seconded. All ayes.**

Respectfully Submitted by:
Jim Osetek, Secretary

Transcribed by:
Amy Peters

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