

**HARRIS TOWNSHIP
Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2026**

Members in Attendance:

Kent Baker
Bob Igo
Jeff Duerr
Phill Becker
Peggy Johnson
Maria Spencer – via Zoom
Bob Hoffman
Renee Diehl
Alexander Schmidbauer
Kelly Wolgast

Staff in Attendance:

Mark Boeckel, Township Manager
Todd Shea, Zoning/Ordinance Enforcement Officer
Debbie Lang, Administrative Secretary – via Zoom

Public in Attendance:

Chris Murrell, Supervisor

Public in Attendance via Zoom:

Jeff Fredericks
Darren Nicholson

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Baker called the January 12, 2026 meeting of the Harris Township Planning Commission to order at 7:00 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Duerr moved to approve the minutes of the November 17, 2025 meeting. Mr. Becker seconded the motion. The minutes were unanimously approved as submitted.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chris Murrell said he was the newest member of the Board of Supervisors and wanted to introduce himself to the Planning Commission members and thanked them for the work that they do. He said he knows the short-term rental ordinance was a lot of work and he thinks we ended up in a good place. He said he is looking forward to working with the Planning Commission members. He said he is glad to meet all of the members and glad to be a part of the group of people here that is helping keep Harris Township what Harris Township is.

4. PLANNING COMMISSION BUSINESS:

a. INTRODUCTION OF NEW PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Chair Baker said at their January 5th meeting, the Board of Supervisors appointed Bob Hoffman to fill the vacant regular position on the Planning Commission. They also appointed Alexander Schmidbauer and Kelly Wolgast to serve as alternates on the Planning Commission.

Phill Becker and Renee Diehl (alternate) were reappointed.

All the members introduced themselves.

b. ELECTION OF A CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR FOR 2026:

Chair Baker said he appointed Mr. Duerr, Mr. Igo, and Ms. Johnson to serve on the Nominating Committee. The Committee should report on their choices for chair and vice chair, and an election should be held.

Mr. Igo moved to appoint Kent Baker as Chair and Peggy Johnson as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission for 2026. Mr. Duerr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. CENTRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ALTERNATE:

Mr. Boeckel said Mr. Duerr was appointed by the Board of Supervisors to serve as the primary representative to the CRPC in 2026 and 2027. An alternate representative should be appointed by the Board if Mr. Duerr is unable to attend a meeting. The CRPC meets on the first Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. If a Planning Commission member is willing to serve as an alternate representative to the CRPC, they can be appointed by the Board at their February meeting.

Mr. Becker volunteered to be the alternate to the CRPC. Mr. Boeckel said he would let the Board know and an appointment should be made by the Board.

d. AIKENS CABINS PROPERTY SITE PLAN:

Mr. Shea said on November 6, 2025, staff received from PennTerra Engineering, Inc. a site plan for the Aikens Cabins property adjacent to Bear Meadows Road between the Tussey Mountain ski area and the state forest. The site plan is a required precursor to a change-in-use zoning permit application since the property is located within the Natural Areas zoning district. Mr. Aikens wishes to change the use of the property from “recreational cabins” to “campground”.

Two reviews of the site plan have been completed, the second of which was included with the agenda as well as a copy of the site plan. Two signatures remain to be applied to the site plan, which can be done in a timely fashion. The site plan must be reviewed by the Board of Supervisors next, after which staff can complete the approval process and entertain the zoning permit application for the change-in-use.

Ms. Johnson asked staff to give a summary of what this change means. Mr. Shea said in the big picture, it means very little. He said the site was just under ten acres. He said in the rural district rewrite, we added campground as a use in the Natural district. He said recreational cabins isn't a use in the Natural Areas zoning district now. He said Mr. Aikens submitted a minor subdivision plan last year to add a little bit of acreage to make the property ten acres so he could officially change the use of this property from recreational cabins to campground. He said Mr. Aikens doesn't propose any development as part of this site plan, nor does he anticipate doing anything new in the foreseeable future. He just wants to be in compliance with the ordinance regulations as they exist now.

Mr. Igo asked about the potential for future development. Mr. Shea said he could develop more cabin sites if he wanted to. He could have RV parking or tent sites. In response to a question from the Commission, Mr. Shea said he could put in a campground store but it would be a very limited capacity.

Ms. Johnson said there is also a sizeable wetland on this property and he would not be able to encroach on that wetland. Mr. Shea said there is a line on the plan that shows the riparian buffer area so he cannot do anything at all within the wetland.

Ms. Spencer said there are very specific regulations about roads accessibility, etc. and wondered if that has already been taken care of or if he would be grandfathered in. Mr. Shea said he is not proposing any additional access so what he has now is perfectly fine. He said if he was to propose any new camp sites and he proposed any kind of access to them through the existing site, he would have to meet whatever regulations are in the ordinance now for that access.

Mr. Becker said the current definition of a campground says it has to have at least ten or more accommodations for either cabins, RVs or tents and this plan shows five sites. Mr. Shea said in this case, he doesn't think it really matters since it is an existing facility and in essence, it would be grandfathered. Mr. Becker said the current use isn't defined either.

Mr. Duerr asked why we put the ten in there. He said if you have under ten, you don't meet the requirement then. Mr. Shea said he would guess for someone proposing a new one, yes, they would have to have at least ten unless we decide to change that.

Mr. Becker asked if this was something he would need to show that there are ten available or is this something that is going to require a waiver later on if somebody looks at it and complains. Mr. Shea said no, he thinks it is fine as it is. It is an existing site and an existing use. He said if Mr. Aikens expands, he would probably have to do so to a minimum of 10 sites.

Ms. Johnson asked if we need to update the definition of a campground. She said that number seems incredibly arbitrary. Mr. Shea said we can add this to our list of updates and discuss it further. Mr. Boeckel said it has been many years since we did the rural update and it may have had something to do with DEP requirements for how many sites there had to be before DEP requirements were triggered for a campground. He said he would have to go back and do some research to see why we went with that definition. He said he thinks there was a reason why and that we didn't just pull a number out of the sky.

Mr. Igo moved to recommend approval of the Aikens Cabins Property Site Plan to the Board of Supervisors contingent upon satisfactory completion of the review comments from the January 6, 2026 letter of the Zoning Officer. Mr. Becker seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. PLANNING COMMISSION BYLAWS REVISION:

Mr. Shea said at the November PC meeting, staff presented information describing recommended updates and revisions to the Planning Commission Bylaws that have been mostly unaltered for several decades. Staff researched local and state-wide bylaws for guidance regarding the information such bylaws should contain.

Staff largely followed the same form as the existing bylaws, amending and adding information considered to be typical in the 21st century. The Planning Commission should review the draft and recommend any edits or changes deemed appropriate.

This document does not require approval by the Board of Supervisors – the PC gets to determine the guidelines for how they conduct business. The Planning Commission section of the Harris Township Code of Ordinances does require amendment, however, as the alternate PC member component was never officially adopted by the governing body. This amendment is expected to be presented to the Board early this year.

Ms. Wolgast noted in Section 11.D., it says public comment shall be limited to three minutes per speaker and in the agenda, under Public Comment, it says comments are limited to five minutes. She was wondering if one of these needs to be changed. Chair Baker said he wondered about that also. He said the number in the bylaws is referring to agenda items and the agenda item is for anything that is not on the agenda. He said we could make them consistent if the members want to. Mr. Boeckel said he can clarify that in the draft bylaws by referring to it as to three minutes per person for Planning Commission business. In response to a question from Chair Baker, Mr. Shea said that most of the PC bylaw documents he saw across the state, three minutes or less was pretty common.

Ms. Johnson moved to adopt the document as the official bylaws of the Harris Township Planning Commission. Mr. Duerr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Igo said just as a point of clarification on that, it says in Section 11.D., this is recognized as part of the discussion, not as public comment. He said the agenda item where we give them 5 minutes, he said that is distinctly different than that point, especially if you are looking at Robert's Rules of Order.

f. 2026 WORK PLAN:

Mr. Boeckel said the Planning Commission discussed and finalized the 2026 work plan at the November 2025 meeting. A list of 2025 accomplishments and the proposed 2026 work plan

were included with the agenda. Staff will provide an overview of the work plan, which will be presented by the Chair to the Board of Supervisors at their January 28, 2026 meeting.

Ms. Spencer said at one point last year, the Planning Commission discussed a traffic calming policy but she did not see that in the work plan and she wondered if it should be on the work plan. Mr. Boeckel said this policy would not be under the purview of the Planning Commission from an MPC point of view. He said staff worked on a traffic calming policy and the found out PennDOT changed all the rules for them so we have to start over. He said there could be a role for a member of the Planning Commission on the potential Traffic Calming Committee that could be created as a result of a policy. He said he did not know that the Planning Commission would have any involvement in work on that policy since it doesn't fall under the MPC. Ms. Spencer said she remembered that now and thanked Mr. Boeckel for the clarification.

Chair Baker said there is not much redundancy on the work plan this year. Mr. Boeckel said the Planning Commission accomplished a lot in 2025. Chair Baker said one thing he liked about the 2026 work plan was that we do not use the word parking in the Village and Village Residential Zoning Districts item. He said he thinks it is important to recognize that we are doing a lot more even though the parking amendments are clearly part of it. Chair Baker said he will be at the meeting on the 28th and told any other members of the Commission that they were welcome to attend also.

g. AGENDA FOR FEBRUARY:

This was not read at the meeting but was part of the agenda language.

*The February meeting will be held on **Tuesday, February 17th**, to avoid a conflict with the Presidents Day holiday.*

Mr. Boeckel said the Commission could probably start working on the public outreach and when we could hold the open houses regarding the Village and Village Residential zoning districts and what format we want to use for those. He said we could probably also start the amendments to the SALDO and zoning ordinance which is item number 2 on the work plan. These two items are on the Commission's 2026 work program. Mr. Shea said there might also be another site plan for somebody who wants to build a house on a property that contains a wetland. He said that should be relatively simple. He did not think there were any subdivision or land development plans that would be ready for that meeting.

Mr. Boeckel reminded the Commission that we will no longer be receiving local planning from CRPC. He said we do have a consultant that we are working with through the COG. The company is Strategic Solutions and they have a local planner named Greg Garthe who used to work at COG and was a planner at Patton Township and in the Borough. He said Mr. Garthe would be the local representative. He said he and Mr. Shea will be meeting with Mr. Garthe on Friday to see how much we will be getting him involved with the work plan for 2026. He said Mr. Garthe is knowledgeable of the area. He said this is a work in progress to see how this is going to move forward in getting those professional planning services from a consultant. He said he will keep the Commission apprised of how this goes moving forward. He said there might be

a little bit of overlap with CRPA at least on the Village project just because they were ~~going~~ doing a lot of that work for us anyway.

5. REPORTS:

Zoning permits: Zoning permits for November and December were circulated.

CRPC: Mr. Duerr said this group did not meet.

CCMPO Technical Committee: Ms. Johnson said this group discussed the State College Area Connector project. She said this project is moving along and the environmental impact statement will probably be released in the spring. She said they also had a presentation on the TSMO and discussed CCTV and signal improvements. They also discussed the TIP priorities. She said something she wanted the members to be aware of is in the MPO Strategic Plan, they are proposing changes to the Technical Committee. The proposal is to remove the six spaces held by the Township representatives on this committee and replace them with a few subject matter experts. Those subject matter experts can be up to four people and they will change according to whatever the issue is. The group discussed the pros and cons to this change. Ms. Johnson said the Technical Committee will discuss this again at their next meeting.

Spring Creek Watershed Commission: Mr. Igo said this group will reorganize at their January 24th meeting. He said Chris Murrell was appointed as the Township's representative and Mr. Igo was reappointed as the alternate. Mr. Igo said he thinks it is good when the elected officials sit in on those meetings and represent their community. He said it is one of the things the Watershed Commission lacks, the visibility from elected officials. He said getting more elected officials involved in that is a good idea. Mr. Boeckel asked if Mr. Igo will still continue to attend these meetings and if this item should remain on the agenda. Mr. Igo suggested leaving this on the agenda for now and he will discuss how Mr. Murrell would like to proceed with this.

6. RECENT ACTIONS BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Mr. Boeckel said there were no recent planning related actions by the Board of Supervisors.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, Mr. Becker moved to adjourn and Ms. Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:53 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Boeckel, AICP
Township Manager