

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
KEWEENAW COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
July 24, 2024

The special meeting of the Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners held on July 24, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Horizons School, Mohawk, MI, opened with the pledge of allegiance.

Commissioners present: Robert DeMarois, Randy Eckloff, Del Rajala, Jim Vivian and Don Piche.

The special meeting was posted on the door of the Courthouse and on the Website.

Motion by Vivian supported by Eckloff and unanimously carried to approve the Agenda.

The meeting was held to hear public opinion on the future of County zoning.

After hearing public comment, the majority of people were in favor of keeping zoning, but possibly revising it to make it shorter and more simplified by updating the master plan.

One of the solutions that was discussed was the possibility of turning zoning over to each Township, but they just don't have the funds to take that on.

Chairman, Don Piche stated that the Board didn't just decide to get rid of zoning, he stated that we are losing our Zoning Administrator and need to figure things out.

Suggestions were made to possibly seek help from other sources such as WUPPDR.

Gina Nicholas did not have enough time during public comment to read each letter that she had with her, so she asked to have them be part of the minutes. They have been attached to the minutes.

There being no further business motion by Rajala supported by DeMarois to adjourn at 7:18 p.m. Meeting adjourned sine die.

Donald Piche, Chairman

Roxanne Billing, Deputy Clerk

July 24, 2024

Mr. Don Piche
Chairman, Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners

Dear Don:

The purpose of this letter is to express my strong support for continuing zoning in Keweenaw County.

I am the descendent of an immigrant copper miner who worked in mines from Calumet to southern Keweenaw County and participated in the 1913 Strike. My grandmother was born in Wolverine Location and I grew up spending the summers here. As soon as I could afford it (in the late 1980's), I started buying land in Keweenaw County and have been paying property taxes ever since.

Today, I own or am responsible for land in all 5 Townships in Keweenaw County and pay over \$100,000 in property taxes each year. My son and I pay property taxes for our personal land, pay taxes for Nicholas North Company, a for profit corporation, and as the president of a Michigan non-profit corporation and 501(c)(3) public charity, we pay nearly \$90,000 in taxes every year. Public charities can petition to be removed from the property tax rolls, but Keweenaw Community Forest Company (KCFC) never did this – here's why – we believe in Keweenaw County and want it to succeed as the beautiful and globally unique and significant place that it is. We want to maintain our wilderness feel and expanse of northern Great Lakes habitats intact forever, for all outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

Keweenaw County has had relatively strong zoning since 1975. The more recent zoning updates of the 2000's (Mark Wycoff and Jon Soper) have continued this legacy that has prevented the proliferation of billboards, box stores, pole barns, trailers and driveways that clutter other counties like Houghton, Baraga and Marquette. Zoning helps keep our beautiful Keweenaw County, beautiful and special. KCFC pays taxes because zoning helps make sure the wrong things don't happen that permanently damage our land for posterity.

County zoning should continue and we do not want the County to abandon zoning until there is time to work out a plan. We know you have staff retention and financial considerations that are impacting this rush to abandon zoning. Zoning is typically the purview of townships; The only reason we have county zoning is because the townships are so small in population. Please remember that we were almost swallowed by Houghton County back in the 1970's-80's because of our small resident population. We don't want that!

We want to be Keweenaw County, forever.

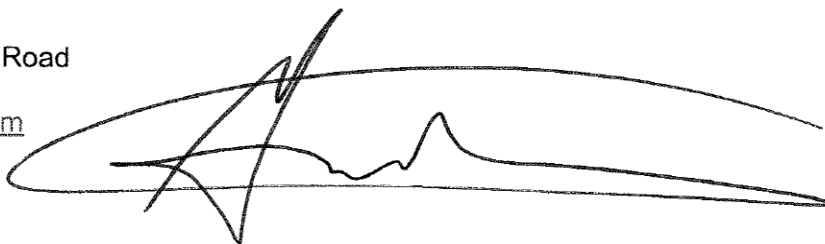
As an officer of KCFC/KORC, we want to help the County get to a good place with zoning. You don't have to do it alone. Just like our support for the Sheriff's Search & Rescue Program, KCFC/KORC are ready to help you through a transition period for Zoning. It is better to keep existing zoning and move to a new form than abandon zoning. If we abandon zoning, it will be much harder to restart. Some of the Townships are too small to administer zoning alone probably ever. We need to come up with a workable plan for all constituents in Keweenaw County.

On Friday, July 26, 2024, when you meet, please appoint a committee to work out a transition plan for zoning and keep County Zoning in place until an orderly transition can be accomplished. KCFC/KORC will bring human and financial resources to the table to help you.

Thank you for holding a Public Meeting and Thank You for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gina M Nicholas
13992 Smith Fishery Road
Mohawk, MI 49950
wildlandco@gmail.com
906 370-7248

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Gina M Nicholas', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and somewhat abstract, with a large loop at the end.

July 24, 2024

Mr. Don Piche
Chairman, Keweenaw County Board of Commissioners

Dear Mr. Piche,

The purpose of this letter is to express my support for continuing zoning in Keweenaw County.

As a Keweenaw County taxpayer, I want my tax dollars to continue to support zoning, which preserves quality of life for residents, protects public safety, and enhances the area's tourism-driven economy.

Without zoning, Keweenaw roadsides may become cluttered with billboards, trailers, buildings and driveways -- undercutting the area's natural beauty and degrading the experience of visitors and productivity of the area's economy.

Additionally, if the board chooses to dissolve county zoning now, it will be extremely difficult to replace or restart in the future. Dissolving county zoning with no replacement plan is unwise. I do not want the county to abandon zoning until there is time to develop and implement a plan.

On Friday, when you meet, please appoint a committee to work out a transition plan for zoning and keep county zoning in place until an orderly transition plan is in place.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nicholas Wilson
(906) 369-3248
nickww42@yahoo.com



Dear Chairman Piche,

I strongly support zoning regulations at the county level. I believe they are critical to maintaining the beauty of our community and the lifestyle we all enjoy. I gather the current debate over STRs has boiled over into a larger discussion about ending zoning at the county level; to me this is throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As a former Rock Solid employee and co-owner of the East Bluff Bike Park and Campground, I have firsthand experience working with the zoning regulations. Is there room to update them to reflect the current needs of the community, absolutely, but as a whole, they are good and could be strengthened even more, in my opinion. Lakefront and waterfront protections are a particular concern of mine, in addition to light, noise and visual pollution.

Sending this issue back to the townships would place undue strain on them and also likely create significant disparities in land use development patterns. I find it likely that Grant Township would enact zoning, but others may be less inclined or adopt less strict zoning. There is already kind of a divide between the townships in terms of north vs south. If a patchwork of zoning is enacted across the county, I feel like the divide between our communities will grow.

Finally my take is that a full time zoning administrator is absolutely critical. A full-time position with benefits is much more likely to attract an experienced qualified applicant who will be able to manage their workload and fill the needs of the community more effectively than a part-time position with no benefits. I did not have any personal/professional interactions with the previous administrator. My objective after going through several zoning applications for East Bluff is that the previous administrator often did not have the most solid grasp on the requirements of the position. Perhaps a funding mechanism for the position would be to increase zoning application fees? Or perhaps there is a consulting firm who can process zoning applications for the county in an expedited manner, if the applicant is willing to pay the

outside consulting fee (Schube Consulting does not offer these services). A fee based system seems like a more fair way to pay for it than a sales or tourism tax.

PS Could alternative funding sources include permitting a marijuana dispensary or production facility? Currently all of our residents and visitors must purchase marijuana in Houghton County or elsewhere. Copper Harbor school desperately needs money too.

OK, that is all.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Best,

Jon Schubbe
Schubbe Consulting
15624 East Gate Lane, Copper Harbor, MI
651-238-3292