

Milton Township
7023 Cherry Ave., Kewadin, MI 49648
Planning Commission
Unapproved Regular Meeting Minutes
March 4, 2026

1. Call to Order: Chairman Warner, Hefferan, Ford, Peters, and Merillat.

Members absent: Renis, excused.

Also present: Jenn Cram, Sarah Kopriva, Jackie Petersen and 12 audience members.

2. Public Comment: None.

3. Approval of Agenda:

Motion by Ford to approve the agenda. Seconded by Hefferan. **Motion carried.**

4. Approval of Minutes dated February 4, 2026:

Corrections: Correct the spelling of Jenn Cram.

Motion by Hefferan to approve the minutes dated February 4, 2026 as corrected. Seconded by Merillat. **Motion carried.**

5. Correspondence:

Many letters were sent and some have been presented tonight. They will be reviewed by commission members and be included as a matter of record for the March meeting.

6. Old Business:

A. Migrant Workers Facility Discussion:

Cram provided research regarding state laws for licensing. This covers five or more workers and their families. 1-4 units would not require licensure. There is language in the existing ordinance (117.1005) and Cram read from this. At some point, she recommends carrying language forward to be in AR as well as AG. Should “any living quarters” in 117.213 M be amended? We have had a request to utilize an RV for migrant quarters. We may wish to change to “any dwelling unit,” which is defined well in our ordinance.

Hefferan asked how this issue came up. Cram said we received an application for someone to use an RV for their migrant workers. There is nothing saying an RV cannot be used. Warner said he can see it could be necessary but for how long? Cram said we could speak to the local farming community and study the issue further. This particular applicant is looking to use the RV seasonally. We should also clarify that there is ag production going on and it would need to be maintained in order to continue to use the RV for living facilities.

Hefferan said this is a permitted use. Warner said someone could park a camper and say it is for seasonal workers and then if there are no regulations, there is potential for using the extreme end of it. Hefferan said he has no problem with 117.1005 B, but he is not interested in the rest of it.

Peters said mobile units must be licensed if the farm has five or more workers. Warner said they could have up to 4 RVs on their property due to the definition. Commission members determined to add the language in 117.1005 B to 117.905 when we change the ordinance again, but otherwise, they do not want to change the ordinance.

B. Bylaws:

Cram asked members to review the bylaws in front of them rather than what was in the packet. Changes are in red. Warner read the changes. Commission members discussed changes.

Motion by Hefferan to approve the bylaws as amended. Seconded by Merillat. **Motion carried.**

7. New Business:

A. Public Hearing: ZOA 2026-01 117.1616 Planned Residential Development:

Cram gave a presentation regarding the history of this public hearing. This zoning ordinance amendment was requested by Tad Dowker, a member of the public. A complete application was received. Staff moved forward with a public hearing that was advertised in the Elk Rapids News on February 15th, 2026. Commission members requested a definition of “development”. There are several definitions already in the ordinance included for your review. There was also discussion regarding consistency with the master plan. The PRD is an existing tool in the zoning ordinance. Cram read from the overall goals of the PRD. The applicant provided us with a visual of why the PRD will help preserve agriculture. Cram reviewed the visual. Public Act 58 has become law and will be effective in 2027. We will see more divisions. It doubles the number of splits that could occur. From a professional planner perspective, this amendment allows more dense housing and preserves farmland. Cram clarified that this public hearing is for a zoning ordinance amendment to clarify the language in the PRD. Dowker does have an application for a PRD in process, but that is not what is being discussed tonight.

Dowker gave a presentation and added that this was in subcommittee and reviewed for about a year. The ordinance currently contradicts itself and should be rewritten. It was written incorrectly and the intent was not to limit the lot size but rather the PRD development to five acres.

Cram pointed to the areas where “lot” and “developments” are not used correctly. Clarification is needed.

Warner said he was on this subcommittee and we did not intend to restrict the placement, but just the development. Ford concurred with that intent.

Hefferan asked Cram about the conflict with 117.1616 B-3. Cram reviewed this area and explained the base residential density. Cram said clarification needs to be made.

Hefferan asked regarding our intent. In our meeting September 2024, the minutes are very clear - Merillat specifically asked if we are limiting this to five acres and the answer was yes. I would respectfully disagree regarding our intent.

Warner said it is correct in the minutes, but not what the subcommittee discussed. Cram said if it stays "Lot" it will have people create two or five acre lots instead of keeping 40 acres. Kopriva said even if it was your intent to write this a certain way, looking at what we have currently, do you agree with what we have now or should we change it?

Warner said we looking at how best to serve the master plan and property conservation. We wanted farmers to be able to develop property and preserve the other section. It would create a financial option.

Warner asked regarding doing the math on it and we put it to five acres because we did not want it to exceed 20 units.

Public Comment:

Mitch Renik, Rex Terrace Road: What is to say that if you do this five-acre parcel that you cannot do another five acres and another five. Warner said there is a 1,000-foot setback between developments.

Adam Ford, a neighboring property owner, said the 1,000-foot property creates a hardship for him. He knew this property was not going to be developed because of the existing ordinance. He wanted to build a house. If we are going to allow this, I am the hardship in the middle.

Simon, Rex Terrace Road: The five acre max, separates from a farming operation. But that five acres is important to keep people from over developing. Growing is good, but it is important to do it in the right way. This was not what was discussed in previous meetings.

Matthew Feenstra, a neighboring property owner said he cannot build a home on a nearby lot.

Janene Parish is concerned that the surrounding areas will be developed as well. The guardrails of 2-5 acres should stay in place and shifting into larger parcels goes against the master plan.

Kelsey Ford is a neighboring property owner said this would set a precedent and we did our due diligence and we made sure because we did not want to live next to a development. We understand the 1,000-foot rule, if there is a development next to us, then the rule means we can only have a home. We could not sell it to someone who wants to have a development.

Ken Flannery said Tad's purpose is to house his employees. He owns property closer to his business. We do not want this in our neighborhood.

Tad Dowker said the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the ordinance language. This ordinance would allow the township to develop more in accordance with the master plan and help with the

housing shortage. The only way is to increase the density. It is in the ordinance and is already passed and we are looking to amend it and have more green space and not change the lot sizes.

Bruce Veliquette said to help preserve farmland, it is good to have higher density. He supports this ordinance and supports the master plan. If you lose a 40 to 2 acre lots, that is the worst use of farmland.

Mitch Rinek said if you talk about the development and the density, you have to look at this patchwork.

Janene Parish said you have to look at the good of the whole versus the good of the one. Take that into consideration.

Public Comment closed.

Deliberations:

Warner said the 1,000-foot setback does not prohibit someone from building on their property. It disallows another PRD within that 1,000 feet. You can build a home. You can divide your property. Kopriva said they can use their property for anything allowed in the Ag zone. This is only related to PRDs.

Kopriva said the open space in this example is that it is preserved forever as long as the development is recorded and active. That is done with a deed restriction.

Merillat said he will not repeat his comments from last month. He does not believe this is supported by the master plan. Before we made the prior amendment, on an ag parcel you could do a PRD. You would not get 20 houses on a 5-acre parcel. The issue is density. In the entire township, we are talking about a higher density than is allowed in the Village zone. We did not want these PRDs everywhere. This would open it up to all Ag parcels. If you were smart, you would split off five acres. Preserving the rest of the land would not be the economic way to do it.

Warner said this is approved for the AG district. Merillat said that is the majority of the township. One can go in every 1,000 feet depending on parcel layouts.

Hefferan read from the public hearing procedures. It is not popularity contest. He enjoyed reading everyone's letters. Does the request meet the ordinance? He recently went to an agricultural symposium and a barrier to growth is housing. The township, over a year process, made an attempt to help with that. I believe the master plan says we must support our farmers and small businesses. Hefferan said, in the letters and reference in the comments tonight, people are talking about moving the goal posts. We were presented with a special land use permit and when it appeared that there were concerns about the application, the applicant presented an application to amend our ordinance. Have we done this before? Kopriva said to her memory, no. You are not obligated to approve his recommended changes. Hefferan said he was a supporter of our change to chapter 16 back in September 2024. I am not opposed to the original amendment

as it is. I am concerned with changing the ordinance before we have even processed one application. There is some merit to the argument that I bought property and I knew the ordinance recently changed, but it appeared to me that based on lot sizes, something like this could not go in near me and now with this amendment it can. These things can be changed all the time, but there is a process for it.

Ford said he is struggling with this but he goes back to when we were developing it over the year. We talked about all of these issues. He feels this is a clarification of what our intent was. Our goal was to help our farmers and local business people. To me, this is a clarification of that.

Warner said when we did this, we had several people come in and inquired about housing and how we would address this. Warner said we were not trying to limit the property being used, but rather AG property having the ability to develop without using large tracts of land in order to preserve open space. We should approve the language clarification as it still falls within the master plan. Warner asked in the state ordinance, does that have any bearing on this? Cram said it would apply to any land division.

Merillat and Warner discussed development and density in the village zones.

Motion by Ford to approve the language as presented in ZOA 2026-01 117.1616 Planned Residential Development. Seconded by Warner. Discussion. Peters asked for clarification on the proposed changes.

Roll Call:

Peters: Yes; based on it does not matter if this is a 2-5 acre parcel, there is an opposition to the development period. Our intent was to limit the development to five acres.

Hefferan: No; based on the minutes of September 4, 2024 in which Merillat asked if the change would only allow PDRs for 2-5 acres in the ag. It was our intent to not allow on parcels larger than 5 acres in Ag.

Ford: Yes; based on this being a clarification of the original intent. Regardless of the size farm you had, you could only develop 2-5 acres. This is consistent with the master plan.

Merillat: No; because it is not consistent with the master plan and it opens the township to lots of development and is inconsistent with preserving farmland.

Warner: Yes; as this will conserve farmland and allow development of smaller homes in affordable areas and opening up some development that has no other place to be positioned in the township and it serves the master plan.

Motion carried 3-2

Hefferan asked for clarification from Kopriva regarding next steps. She said this will go to the county for their April meeting and then it will come back to the township board for approval. This will be before the township board in April or May.

B. Public Hearing: ZOA 2026-02 117.1601 Special Land Use Procedures:

Cram gave a presentation and said this helps the process so the commission can make better decisions. This allows for an introduction prior to a public hearing. This way you can make sure questions are answered before proceeding to a public hearing. We have had some challenges in the past that if an application was submitted it was scheduled for a public hearing. This is to inform people further ahead.

Public Comment:

Tad Dowker said this process makes a lot of sense and gets information to you sooner to allow for a more informed conversation.

Public Comment closed.

Deliberations:

Motion by Hefferan to recommend adoption of ZOA 2026-02 117.1601 Special Land Use Procedures. Seconded by Merillat. **Motion carried 5-0.**

8. Reports:

A) Zoning Administration Office Report:

Provided in the packet. Cram provided a brief summary.

B) Township Board Report:

Hefferan gave the report for Renis. He said the Planning Commission voted 3-2 in December to recommend rezoning a parcel from AG to AR. The township board did not take the recommendation to rezone the property. The property was not rezoned.

C) ZBA Report: No meeting.

D) Planning Commission Updates:

There are applications available for a vacancy on the planning commission. Please apply and join us.

9. Future Meeting Considerations:

The April 1 meeting will be canceled. There is an ag tourism summit April 14th. Get with Janet Beebe if you want to participate. This is also the last call for the citizen planner class.

10. Adjourn:

Meeting adjourned by order of the chair at 8:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Merillat