

**CITY OF ESCANABA  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
Official Minutes – Friday, April 26, 2024**

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**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

A meeting of the Escanaba Planning Commission was held on Friday, April 26, 2024 at 6:00 PM in Room C101 at City Hall, 410 Ludington Street, Escanaba, MI 49829.

*Chair Connor called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.*

**Attendance**

Members:

Chair Patrick Connor .....	Present	Commr. Kasja Nelson .....	Present
Secretary Roy Webber .....	Present	Commr. Christiana Reynolds.....	Present
Commr. Michael Harris .....	Absent	Commr. Mark Sadowski.....	Present
Commr. James Hellermann.....	Present		

With six in attendance, a quorum of the Planning Commission was present.

Others:

- Tyler Anthony, Planning & Zoning Admin.
- Brianna Ecklid-LaVigne, Confidential Sec.
- John Iacoangeli, Principal and Planner, Beckett & Raeder, Inc.
- Alex Wilkinson, Project Professional and Planner, Beckett & Raeder, Inc.
- 1 other unnamed individual

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Anthony led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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**PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**PB1: Agenda Public Comment**

None.

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**HOUSEKEEPING BUSINESS**

**HK1: Approval of Agenda**

**Hellermann moved to approve the meeting agenda as proposed. Nelson seconded.**

**A roll call vote was taken with the following results:**

**Yes: Sadowski, Webber, Connor, Nelson, Reynolds, Hellermann**

**No: none**

**MOTION PASSED.**

**HK2: Announcements**

Reynolds announced that she had filed for candidacy to run in the upcoming election for State Representative of the 108<sup>th</sup> District. She asked what that meant for her seat on the Commission, as she understood that her membership was still valid while running, and that she only needed to give up her seat if she had won. Anthony read from the City Code of Ordinances.<sup>1</sup> He explained

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<sup>1</sup> "... To be qualified to be a member and remain a member of the [Planning Commission], the individual shall ... not be a declared candidate for any political office ..." (City of Escanaba, Michigan, Code of Ordinances, Sec. 21-17(a)).

that she did indeed have to resign from the Commission. Hellermann felt that the Commission should have addressed the City Council on this point; he saw the rules as too broad, and they had kept good people off the Commission. Anthony noted that a new Planning Commission ordinance was already on the May 2<sup>nd</sup> City Council agenda; Hellermann felt that it was important for the Commission to officially bring it to City Council.

**Hellermann moved to have City Council/Admin. address rules related to political candidacy and sitting on City boards and commissions. Connor seconded.**

**A roll call vote was taken with the following results:**

**Yes: Sadowski, Webber, Connor, Nelson, Reynolds, Hellermann**

**No: None**

**MOTION PASSED.**

Reynolds then asked what she should do in the meantime; discussion ensued over the proper course of action. Webber asked Reynolds if she felt capable of staying on the Commission and running for office; she felt that she did and, if elected, would resign from the Commission at that time. Anthony explained that, according to the Ordinance, it was best if she resigned, effectively immediately. Reynolds agreed, then thanked her fellow Commissioners for all their hard work.

*Reynolds left the meeting at 6:06 p.m.*

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## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS; REPORTS**

None.

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## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **NB1: Planning Consultant Interview**

Anthony introduced the item, reading from the packet's report.<sup>2</sup> Iacoangeli gave a presentation on Beckett & Raeder, Inc.'s (BRI) proposal on a new master plan for the City. He briefly reviewed the firm's strong history of awards. He noted that community engagement is crucial to planning, and he briefed on how BRI works with residents to understand their needs. By knowing past and present conditions, plans, and studies, BRI was to create a profile and summary of Escanaba. Since the City is a coastal one, shoreline resiliency, climate change data, and natural features were to have special focus.

Data was to play an important role, with focuses on housing, shifting demographics, future needs, and transportation. BRI used a special program to forecast changing industries in an area. They were to use this in planning how the City evolved to serve prospering industry clusters.

Through their research, BRI was to help the City find three focus subjects, around which they were to develop clear action plans. Implementing this work was to be done by collaborating with the Planning Commission and residents. Through this collaboration, BRI expected to create self-guided principles to use as a foundation for later planning policies. They were also to prepare a zoning plan. Over the course of their work, BRI was to put together action programs and coordinate with administrators and Planning Commission to schedule plans and review.

Once Iacoangeli finished his presentation, Connor opened the floor to Commissioners. Webber noted that he had met Iacoangeli when BRI worked with the City in the past. Webber said that,

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<sup>2</sup> See Appdx. 1, NBI.

since the last time Iacoangeli visited, a lot of work had been done; he asked Iacoangeli what he felt were the best changes that had happened so far. Iacoangeli felt that moving the Delta County Jail was a big breakthrough, as were updates to Stephenson Ave., which made it more usable.

He added that Escanaba, like many coastal communities, had its own set of challenges and advantages – seasonal housing and short-term rentals were two of the leading issues. Iacoangeli stated that the outcomes needed now were vastly different from those in 2006.<sup>3</sup> Webber asked him how Escanaba compared to other communities in the area. Iacoangeli felt that, as Escanaba had strong retail, financial, and other industries, the City was like Marquette. This isolated the City from some of the problems other communities faced, but it made our issues unique, as well.

Sadowski asked how BRI weighed their demographic data. He had lived in various places around the country, and he found that many communities did not keep realistic planning goals. Iacoangeli explained how the firm analyzed and used demographic data to paint a complete, realistic picture of their subject community; good choices could only be made if realistic data was used.

Sadowski then asked Iacoangeli about what he saw as the future for Escanaba, where that future was focused, and if the City could grow industries – while keeping a safe, family friendly and tourist-focused area. Iacoangeli could not answer that question without seeing the data, but he noted that there were many good questions to be asked. He felt that, from a recreation perspective, Escanaba was where it needed to be. The question to ask, then, was, “who is attracted to Escanaba?” Many other communities were finding new residents that were considered “climate refugees” looking for safe, stable places to live. Another group that was moving in were retirees looking for places that offered cultural amenities and good access to healthcare.

Hellermann noted that he was on the Commission for the 2016 Master Plan, adding that he was the only one to vote against adoption.<sup>4</sup> He felt that it was not realistic and that, sometimes, residents could not see the big picture; they seemed to get excited often about ideas that were either very difficult or impossible to reach. He also felt that there was a feedback loop from City leaders at the time. He asked Iacoangeli to explain how the firm would help citizens understand the importance of being realistic. Iacoangeli felt that many master plans fell into that trap, and that it was very easy for people to dream big. He said that people need to know what they have, and that some communities simply cannot support their big dreams. The way people plan today was different from how they had in the past; many communities leaned into redevelopment to buffer declining growth, thus learning how to make a big impact with what they already had.

In then-recent years, BRI was using data from county equalization departments, mapping out the taxable value per square foot of communities. They used this to show them which areas held the most taxable value. Many people were shocked by such findings, not realizing where their tax income was coming from. A stable community was one that took limited resources and used them wisely. Hellermann felt that, during his time on the Commission, there had been too much talk about ideas instead of practical options. Iacoangeli understood that these kinds of conversations were difficult to have, but that they were vital for practical solutions.

Connor asked if Iacoangeli had any questions for the Commission. Iacoangeli asked what the City’s timeframe was. Anthony explained that there were no hard and fast deadlines. Hellermann

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<sup>3</sup> BRI had previously done a master plan for Escanaba in 2006.

<sup>4</sup> This master plan was done by the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission, aka CUPPAD.

asked Iacoangeli what he saw as a reasonable timeline for this project; he felt that the proposed 12-to-14-month timeline was best.

**Hellermann moved to recommend Beckett & Raeder, Inc as the planning consultants for the Escanaba Master Plan. Sadowski seconded.**

**A roll call vote was taken with the following results:  
Yes: Sadowski, Webber, Connor, Nelson, Hellermann  
No: None  
MOTION PASSED.**

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**GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

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**ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by Connor to adjourn the meeting. Hellermann seconded.  
MOTION PASSED by unanimous consent.**

*The meeting adjourned at 6:55 PM.*

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**APPENDICES TO THESE MINUTES**

**Appendix 1: The meeting agenda and packet**

**Appendix 2:**


A. Iacoangeli, J. (2024, April 26). *Community Master Plan Update: City of Escanaba* [PowerPoint Slides]. Beckett & Raeder, Inc.

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**APPROVAL**

I, Roy Webber, Secretary of the City of Escanaba Planning Commission, hereby certify that the foregoing constitutes the true and complete proposed minutes of a meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Escanaba, County of Delta, State of Michigan, held on 26 April 2024; that I have reviewed said proposed minutes; and that said proposed minutes shall be made publicly available.

REVIEWED:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Roy Webber, Secretary  
Escanaba Planning Commission

Draft reviewed on: 5-1-24

Draft available on: 5/3/2024

I further certify that the foregoing proposed minutes are now approved; that these approved minutes shall be made publicly available; and that all the foregoing was/is made/given/kept in accordance with the Open Meetings Act (MCL 15.261 et seq.), the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MCL 125.3801 et seq.), the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MCL 125.3101 et seq.), said City’s Code of Ordinances, and said Commission’s Bylaws.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Roy Webber, Secretary  
Escanaba Planning Commission

Final approved on: \_\_\_\_\_

Final available on: \_\_\_\_\_