

**THE BENZIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**And**  
**BENZIE COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**June 14, 2007**

The Benzie County Board of Commissioners met in a joint special meeting with the Benzie County Planning Commission on Thursday, June 14, 2007, in the DHS Conference Room, Government Center, Beulah, Michigan, 49617.

Present were: Commissioners Damm, Kelley, Pitcher, Roper, Sandman and Walterhouse  
Planning Commissioners Graves, Pitcher, Moorman, Roberts, Ralston, Damm and  
Ross

Absent: Commissioner Smeltzer  
Planning Commissioners Luedtke and Tanner

Guests: 29 total

The pledge of allegiance was given.

Motion by Graves, seconded by Pitcher, to approve the agenda for the Board of Commissioners as presented and merge the Planning Commission agenda into it. Motion carried. Ayes: Damm, Kelley, Pitcher, Roper, Sandman, Walterhouse, Graves, Moorman, Roberts, Ralston and Ross Nays: None Exc: Smeltzer, Luedtke and Tanner

Chairman Roper turned the meeting over to Mark Wyckoff and Kurt Schindler with MSUE to present the Administration Analysis of the Planning, Zoning & Building Departments for Benzie County.

They presented a power point production of their written report and provided copies of the report to the county who in turn have provided copies to other. The report is available at several offices and via email to those that wish to receive it that way.

Mr. Schindler states that they were asked to look at the current functions of the Planning and Zoning Department; a great effort was made in a short amount of time; they appreciated the opportunity to prepare this report and the accommodations everyone made to help them out. He states that this is an opportunity for the county to regain the trust from the public to the Board of Commissioners;.

Table 1: Principal Problems -- Apparent and Real.

Mr. Wyckoff states that a lot of information was hearsay; the perception continues until all people believe it to be true; the best practices need to be acted upon soon and they boards need to look at all issues, not just a couple, they all go together.

All persons interviewed care deeply about what goes on in this county; we will assist in scheduling and doing trainings that are needed.

Table 2: Basic Characteristics of the Planning, Zoning and Building Departments – Which shows Basic Responsibilities; Recent Changes; Staff; Budget (prior to change); Budget (after change); Permit Activity; Staffing, budget and revenues compared to other similar departments.

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There is a lot of support for the current County Plan – which is a huge positive for this county. You need to build on that strength with the townships, citizen groups and stakeholders.

There is the feeling that the current planning commission is too “green” – environmentally. It has taken too long to update the Zoning Ordinance and there is a growing distrust in the commission to the public.

A number of new Planning Commission members are taking the citizen planner course on line.

Table 3: Pros & Cons of Organizational Options – County Planning & Zoning Function; County Building Code Administration Function; Organization of Management of County Planning, Zoning & Building Code Administration; Organization of the County Planning Commission.

Townships can drop out of County Planning and Zoning at any time.

County Planning and Zoning Departments are non-mandates.

Recommendations:

1. The County Board of Commissioners should commit to building the best rural Michigan County Planning, Zoning and Building Code program.
2. The County should dramatically improve intergovernmental cooperation and communication with local governments, contractors, builders, other stakeholders and citizens.
3. Establish and consistently apply new procedures for hiring, supervising, training, and evaluating County employees (or at least Department heads).
4. Require basic and continuing education of all staff, elected and appointed persons involved in land use decision making in the County beginning with a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each party involved in each of the common types of planning, zoning and building decisions.
5. Move deliberately to completion of the comprehensive update of the County Zoning Ordinance.
6. Evaluate organizational options and staffing levels in the Planning, Zoning and Building Programs and make changes as appropriate after proper consultation and when the right opportunity presents itself.
7. Move to a more representative Planning Commission.
8. Initiate update to County Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Wyckoff states that there could be consequences if the county does not act in a timely manner; Acting in a timely manner does not mean rushing to act; and he proposed ten steps to begin the process.

8:10 p.m. Chairman Roper opens the discussion to Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission members:

Mike Moorman asks if a planning commission can have 11 members. Yes, and the new act will address that.

Cliff Graves feels that the last questions to the townships that were interviewed should have been, What do you want for your zoning?

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Karen Roberts asks that when you interviewed the townships that are pulling out, was their reason the frustration or lack of communication.

8:23 p.m. Chairman Roper opens the discussion to Department Heads and Elected Officials: Dave Neiger states to Mr. Wyckoff that we have a lot on our plate with the zoning ordinance and we need to talk with you more often; we need to commit to talking more often – Mr. Wyckoff agrees. Craig Seger says thank you for a quick turn around on this matter and asks what do you find most smoothly runs for the number of planning commissioners. Mr. Wyckoff states it depends on geography too. Find that nine is most often used.

Craig asks that once basic trainings are gone through, could he and Dave do training (together they have over 30 years experience). Yes. Check with your liability carrier too.

8:37 p.m. PUBLIC INPUT

Jim Dulza asks about a digital copy of this. Yes, it can be done and will be emailed.

Jim Laarman, should there be a blend of population and geography – not just geography. Mr.

Wyckoff says stakeholders should be first.

Ted Curran states this is an incredibly thorough report and is more than we can consume; have you thought of the timeline and what we can take on.

Chairman Roper states that we will work together (BOC and Planning Comm) and prioritize the ten bullet points.

Eric VanDussen says there was no recommendation regarding the contentious situation with the zoning administrator being the department head; did you have any recommendation on that structure? They recommend not doing anything on it.

Mr. Wyckoff says we need to spend more energy on other things first.

Eric VanDussen asks if you did an evaluation on the inequality of salaries. Not our study.

Al Brown says education is important, the Board of Commissioners have a tough job there a lot of fires to put out.

Mr. Schindler says the power of democracy falls in the voters lap.

Deb Lindgren says she has a problem with the contracts that went to the townships to cover the Zoning Administrator position; he wasn't supposed to be hired until the funds were there to cover it.

Pat Bard asks who they spoke to? Appendix C list 18 or 19 people.

Marv Blackford supports Inland township pulling out of county planning; we have no new business coming to Benzie County; some areas are good; Compliment the board of commissioners on doing this study; would like to see that as work decreases, hours get cut, it is the responsibility of the Board of Commissioners to streamline each department. Thank you very much.

9:00 p.m. PUBLIC INPUT CLOSED

Chairman Roper thanks Mr. Wyckoff and Mr. Schindler and we will take the study and talk together to work through these points; we do have an ad hoc committee looking at issues in the building department.

Motion by Walterhouse, seconded by Kelley, to accept the Benzie County Planning, Zoning & Building Code Administration Analysis Report as presented. Motion carried.

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Board of Commissioners: Ayes: Damm, Kelley, Pitcher, Roper, Sandman, Walterhouse  
Planning Commissioners: Ayes: Graves, Pitcher, Moorman, Roberts, Ralston, Damm, Ross  
Absent: Smeltzer, Luedtke, Tanner

No other business to come before either board.

Motion by Pitcher, seconded by Walterhouse, to adjourn at 9:05 p.m. Motion carried.  
Board of Commissioners: Ayes: Damm, Kelley, Pitcher, Roper, Sandman, Walterhouse  
Planning Commissioners: Ayes: Graves, Pitcher, Moorman, Roberts, Ralston, Damm, Ross  
Absent: Smeltzer, Luedtke, Tanner

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Mark E. Roper -- Chairman

Dawn Olney – Benzie County Clerk