

# Town of Crystal Bay

## Regular Meeting of the PLANNING COMMISSION

Clair Nelson Community Center  
6866 Cramer Road Finland, MN 55603

### Minutes

June 23rd, 2025

- I. **Attendance:** Stacy Breden, Roger Peterson, Lise Abazs, Honor Schauland, Nancy Olson, B.J. Kohlstedt, Ron Aldinger.
  - A. Chair Breden called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:14 pm with the Pledge of allegiance.
  - B. MOTION: To approve the Agenda. Motioned by board member Abazs, Seconded by board member Peterson, Passed by unanimous consent.
  - C. MOTION to approve June 3rds meeting minutes with Amended date on Agenda June 2nd's: Motioned by board member Abazs, Seconded by board member Peterson, Passed by unanimous consent.
- II. **New Business: Updating Comprehensive Plan**
  - A. Board Discussion on revisions for "A Vision for Crystal Bay Township"
    1. Community Input
      - a) Honor Schauland noted: In the Original Plan the Sentence: *Furthermore, when we consider the future of the Township and its location in the north shore region, we recognize that certain land uses require new investment in infrastructure by the County or the Township. May be more suitably located outside the township.* This was created by Lee Davis because many residents were concerned at that time about big box stores coming into the area. Honor doesn't want this point lost in transition because it was so important and is relevant today.
      - b) Board member Abazs stated we can move this or keep this statement in mind further down the road when we get to Overarching goals.
    2. MOTION: to accept the following revision to "A Vision for Crystal Bay";  
Crystal Bay Township, as a rural north woods community, seeks to remain small, vibrant, and friendly to those who live, work, and visit our community, by maintaining our abundance and quality of natural resources. We acknowledge the resulting limitations to development, but want to retain our unique residential and historical character and remain a desirable place to live, work, and play. We will promote a positive and identifiable community image. Crystal Bay Township includes six township areas, each 36 square miles, running from north to south. Of these six, the Township wants to maintain low levels of development in the northern five townships, and encourage any development to take place where there are already roads and other infrastructure in the southernmost township block. ***The Township acknowledges that change will happen and wants this plan to help guide changes in ways that our residents support.***

Crystal Bay Township, whose boundaries range from near Lake Superior's north shore to the heart of the Superior National Forest, recognizes the vastness of our Township and values its unique ability to provide a rich mix of wilderness, rural, and community opportunities. The township desires to offer a range of flexible housing options that serve different residents including young families, workers and seniors, but aims to remain a primarily low-density residential community with only those economic activities that are compatible with existing cultural conditions and traditions. ~~In other words, what is special about Finland needs to remain Finland.~~

Motioned by board member Abazs:Seconded by board member Peterson, passed by unanimous consent.

B. Board Discussion on revisions to " Background Information"

1. Community Input:

- a) Board member Abazs suggests adding: *Located on 1854 Territory ceded by the Lake Superior Chippewa, Finland was one of the last areas of Minnesota to be settled by Europeans. Also, board member Abazs was curious what people thought about the phrase climate change in the text.*
- b) Board member Peterson suggests removing the word **high** from in front of deer, as population of deer is an issue whether low or high. Board member Peterson is fine with the phrase climate change in the text.
- c) Board member Abazs suggests saying: The population~~(is again on the rise)~~ has fluctuated since the building of Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in 1988, and influx from COVID pandemic in 2020, and others choosing to move here for the welcoming community and love of the natural environment.
- d) The consensus between Honor Schauland, Nancy Olson, B.J. Kohlstedt and the Board is to omit the language: ~~In 2000 the population of Crystal Bay Township was 607 (per the 2000 Census). From 1990 to 2000, the population grew by 32%. Since then, the population has continued to grow. At the same time, the number of housing units has increased, but not kept pace with the population.~~ But to still leave the chart and credits.

2. MOTION: to accept the following revisions and Title Change from Background

a) Information to Natural and Cultural History

The Town of Crystal Bay is located in Lake County, in Northeastern Minnesota. The center for this Township is Finland, which has been built around the Baptism River Valley. Finland lies in the southernmost township block of the six which compose Crystal Bay Township. The Baptism River flows into Lake Superior. Rather than directly bordering Lake Superior, the Township lies mostly behind the first ridge of the Sawtooth Mountains and continues northward to the Boundary Waters. Almost 25% of the Township lies within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Most of the Township's 216 square miles are covered with forests, and earlier glacial activity left behind mountain ridges, igneous bedrock outcrops, many inland lakes, shallow soils, and many acres of wetlands. Ecologically, Minnesota is divided into several landscape regions by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to reflect the state's diverse natural heritage. Crystal Bay Township is within the huge Laurentian Mixed Forest Province, in one of the most rugged and remote sections of Minnesota called the North Shore Highlands. The climate is characterized by long, cold winters (reaching -30°F) and short, mild summers. The growing season is about

120 days, and annual precipitation averages 30 inches. Historically, spruce, fir and cedar formed the climax forest, with pines and sugar maple on the ridgelines. The region is also known for boreal animals including moose, wolves, bear, lynx, loons, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons. Before settlement, fire and wind were the primary natural disturbances, along with periodic insect outbreaks. Much of the forest remains, although it is changing from pines to more aspen and birch. Forest management and recreation are currently the major land uses, along with mining and tourism. **Conservation concerns include forest and stream degradation as well as the deer population, increased recreational development and extreme weather due to climate change. Located on 1854 Territory Ceded by The Lake Superior Chippewa, Finland was one of the last areas of Minnesota to be settled by Europeans.** “It wasn’t until the late 1890’s that the first Finns and other Scandinavians began to file for homesteads in this remote section of Lake County.... In 1907 the Alger Smith Company built a railroad to the community to facilitate its logging operations there.” (*How We Remember: Stories and Recollections of Finland, Minnesota’s First Century, 1895-1995*) The first industry in the area was logging. In 1913 the Finland Co-op was organized and “a truck was purchased to bring groceries from Duluth once a week. By 1935 there were 179 Finnish families with about 500 acres of cleared land. Electricity came in 1939.” (*Ibid*) Over the years the population of the Township has grown with the arrival of the Reserve Mining Plant and the USAF Finland Radar Station in 1950, and shrunk with the closing of the Air Force Base in 1980 and the Reserve Mining Plant in 1986. **The population has fluctuated since the building of Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center in 1988, and influx from the COVID pandemic in 2020, and others choosing to move here for the welcoming community and love of the natural environment.**

|               | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2022 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Population    | 824  | 760  | 460  | 607  | 423  |
| Housing Units | 261  | 307  | 312  | 350  | 381  |
| Households    | --   | 244  | 184  | 235  | —    |

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**Portions of this text were drawn from “Changes in Forest Disturbance Frequency and Patch Structure from Pre-Euro-American Settlement to Present in the Mixed Forest Province of Minnesota by Mark A. White (currently at the Nature Conservancy in Duluth, MN) and George Host (at the Natural Resources Research Institute at the University of Minnesota Duluth)**

Motioned by: board member Peterson, Seconded by board member Abazs , passed by unanimous consent

C. Board Discussion on revisions to “Overarching Goals”

1. Community Input:

- a) Board member Abazs suggests: adding *rural and remote* in the first paragraph, and moving the sentence: *One cannot have the richness of “Finland” without all*

*of its parts.* To the end of the first paragraph. Removing the word “part” to say “section”, and *omitting the last sentence of the first paragraph.* Adding the word “is” into the first sentence of the second paragraph.

- b) Honor Schauland said she suggests leaving the word “part” in and avoiding the word section as it means something totally different in Township speak.
- c) B.J. Kohlstedt would like to add in her opinion in number 2 c . to state no franchises somewhere.
- d) Honor Schauland mentioned that could be addressed or is currently in the Subtopic Economy.
- e) Board member Abazs said we can address it in Economy, and B.J. noted that and thanked everyone.

2. MOTION: to accept the following revisions to “Overarching Goals

- a) When thinking ahead to the next three years, the overarching goals are:
  - 1. Preserving the **remote & rural** character of Crystal Bay Township will be integral to all decisions made by the Township. Although the northern part of the Township is sparsely populated, its wilderness and resources are highly valued by the community and contribute to the rich mosaic of community life in the Township. **One cannot have the richness of “Finland” without all of its parts.**
  - 2. Crystal Bay Township **is** divided into three areas:
    - a. The northern five township blocks provide many diverse natural resources and ways for the community to benefit from them. Human development will remain limited in these areas.
    - b. The “Finland” area (or southern township block) will remain primarily rural while providing adequate housing for residents.
    - c. “Downtown Finland” is the economic center of the Township and will provide a town center where locally owned businesses can thrive, the needs of local residents are met, and services are provided for tourists.
  - 3. Crystal Bay Township will strive to be a place where people value community, their local history, and their individual rights. Motioned by board member Abazs ,Seconded by board member Peterson , passed by unanimous consent

D. Board Discussion on revisions to “Overarching Strategies”

1. Community Input:

- a) Honor mentions the following points in the current Comprehensive Plan are noteworthy because at the time they were people's concerns of new development and wanting to be proactive. Honor also acknowledges the current Planning Commission Boards position on wanting to create realistic goals for the Township for the short term 3 year plan this would be. The decision to move the following points to an appendix for now and revisit them as we move though the rest of the plan was decided as the conversation continued. A-c will be moved to an Appendix as we move through this process.

- 1. **The Township will develop a “sustainability resolution” and a corresponding set of criteria to systematically evaluate all economic, environmental and social decisions made by Board**

**Members. According to the President's Council on Sustainable Development (1997), Sustainable Communities Task Force Report, "Communities that flourish do so because they build a mutually supportive, dynamic balance between social well being, economic opportunity, and environmental quality. In a sustainable community, decisions must consider and account for long-term impacts and consequences; interdependence of natural and social systems; participatory, inclusive, and transparent decision making processes; equity between different groups in society and equity between generations; and proactive prevention, or anticipating and preventing problems before they occur."**

- 2. The Town Board will conduct a natural resource inventory to identify areas within the Township of particular historical, cultural and ecological value. They will use the inventory to identify, define, and prioritize viewsheds, environmentally sensitive areas, places with unique community or cultural identity and economic assets.**
- 3. The Town Board will also use the natural resources inventory to identify areas in which to proactively encourage development while discouraging development in those identified as critical to preserving the cultural, historical and environmental heritage of the Township.**

b). Board Members Peterson, Breden, Abazs and Community Members Honor Schauland, Nancy Olson, and B.J. Kohlstedt Also agreed to move subtopic 4 to the Draft. Honor Schauland mentioned that Shannon Walz did some work on that for the township and Board Chair Breden mentioned it was important to keep that there as work that needs to continue and then get out to the public.

c). Board member Abazs also has the following edits: Changing the opening sentence to state:

To achieve their overall goals, the Town Board will emphasize the following strategies, then add the wording included but not limited to in the first sub topic.

d). B.J. Kohlstedt suggested moving the Planning Commission ahead of the Board of Adjustments. She also noted that it is "The Cooperative Light and Power?" Not Coop Light and Power, and adding North Shore Forest Collaborative to topic #1.

e). Chair Breden noted in #2 to change the County to Lake County.

2. MOTION: to accept the following revisions to "Overarching Strategies

A. **To achieve their overall goals, the Town Board will emphasize the following strategies:**

1. The Township will establish relationships with relevant government and non-government entities, including but not limited to the Lake County Board of Commissioners, **the Planning Commission**, Board of Adjustment, **The Cooperative Light & Power**, **North Shore Forest Collaborative**, and The Nature Conservancy, so that they respect the Crystal Bay Plan in all decisions affecting the Township.
2. The Township will actively collaborate with **Lake** County when **Lake** County is working on its comprehensive plan.
3. **The Township will document areas of importance in the Township including relevant topics which affect community development, the local economy, and land and natural resource uses.**

In addition to these overall vision, goals, and strategies, the Township has adopted this comprehensive plan which considers the four general sections of Community, Infrastructure, Natural Resources, and the Economy.

Motioned by board member Peterson: Seconded by board member Abazs , passed by unanimous consent.

E. Discussion on revisions to "Land Use Regulation Authority"

a) Board member Abaz added the following edits;

Currently,~~At present,~~the Town of Crystal Bay is not engaged in ~~the activity of doing its own zoning.~~ ~~This is done through~~ **Zoning and other regulations are determined and enforced** by Lake County with Township leaders, ~~the Township~~ being informed of variances, conditional uses, platting, rezones, and other proposed land use changes. Land use permits that are sought in the Township can be reviewed by the Board but the ultimate decisions are made at the County level. **Some** State Agencies who play a **land use** role in the Township include: the MN Pollution Control Agency, and the MN Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (~~wetlands, water plan~~).

As the Town of Crystal Bay continues **to** work through **its** Comprehensive Plan, ~~it looks forward to working with the other levels~~ it seeks to collaborate with other levels of government on ~~in both the implementation of the~~ their plan. ~~vision and enforcement.~~

b) Community input on grammar

MOTION: to accept the above revisions to "Land Use Regulation Authority" Motioned by board member Abazs, Seconded by board member Peterson, passed by unanimous consent

F. Board Discussion on revisions to "Definition of Terms"

1. Chair Breden noted taking the word "Policies" out of the new plan as "Policies" in Township language means you have something to show someone per "Policy"

2. Board member Abazs had the following suggestions:

The **Comprehensive Community Plan** is the framework that the Township will use to guide its land use over the next three ~~ten to twenty~~ years. The Plan contains a vision, goals, and strategies to be used to achieve that vision.

**Vision** is the desired future, the big picture of how ~~what~~ we want the Township to look and function in the next three years. ~~like and be in the next ten to twenty years.~~

**Goals** are long term ends, statements that guide us in how to reach the vision.

**Strategies** include the planned directions or steps to achieve the goals.

3. Community Input: -None everyone was in agreement

MOTION: to accept the above revisions to "Definition of Terms" Motioned by board member Peterson, Seconded by board member Abazs, passed by unanimous consent

G. Board Discussion on revisions to Comprehensive Plan: Community - Tabled until next meeting.

**VI. CLOSE MEETING:** MOTION: to adjourn at 6:30pm until our next scheduled meeting on Monday June 30th, 2025 at 5:00pm at the Clair Nelson Community Center. Motioned by board member Abazs , Seconded by board member Peterson , Passed by unanimous consent.

\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Stacy Breden- Board Chair

\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lise Abazs- Board Member

\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Roger Peterson- Board Member

Attested to this 29th day of June, 2025

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Stacy Breden - Town Clerk