

SANDS TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
SANDS TOWNSHIP OFFICE COMPLEX
February 25, 2025

1. **Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance:** Shelley Brauer called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. **Roll Call:**
 - Present:** Shelley Brauer, Cory Bushong, Justin Yelle
 - Absent (excused):** Suzanne Sundell, Pam Lajewski-Pearson,
 - Employees in Attendance:** Randy Yelle (zoning administrator), Barb Kransi (recording secretary), Thomas Wahlstrom (fire chief)
 - Public in Attendance:** Matthew Treado, Jean Johnson, Spencer Johnson, Mary Kay Johnson, Carl Johnson, Jeremy Johnson, Devin Mahoney
3. **Agenda:** Commissioner Bushong moved; Commissioner Yelle seconded motion to approve the agenda.
Ayes: 3 Nays: 0 Motion carried.
4. **Minutes:** Commissioner Bushong moved; Commissioner Yelle seconded motion to approve the minutes from the January 28, 2025 Planning Commission meeting as presented.
Ayes: 3 Nays: 0 Motion carried.
5. **Public Comment:** Several attendees reserved time and indicated their intention to speak.

Business: Jeremy Johnson, representing The Preserve, LLC and Kona Hills, requested an amendment that would remove requirement number seven of the existing SUP (SUP2022-01) for Kona Hills Campground for a 12,000-gallon holding tank and instead allow fire departments (City of Marquette, Chocolay Township, and Sands Township) to have access to a pond with a dry-hydrant.

- a. Public hearing SUP22-01
 - Commissioner Brauer opened the public hearing.
 - Randy Yelle summarized the request to remove condition of previous approval number seven to SUP22-01 “For fire protection, install a 12,000-gallon holding tank located on property with adequate access and turning area to allow three fire trucks the ability to refill (one exiting, one filling, one holding to refill)” and instead allow a retention pond with a dry-hydrant.
 - Requestor input – Jeremy Johnson:
 - ❖ Summarized the request to remove condition of approval to SUP22-01 number seven.
 - ❖ Shared his belief that requirement was included to mirror Raging River’s requirements.
 - ❖ Stated that he consulted with all three affected fire departments.
 - ❖ Shared that things are going well on site and they plan to open this summer.

- Public input
 - ❖ Matt Treado: Introduced himself as the engineer working on the pond project and shared his fifteen years of local engineering experience, including work on the Rippling River campground. Stated that he has extensive experience with retention ponds and dry hydrants. Present to answer questions.
 - ❖ Spencer Johnson: Stated that he had undated memo that said the Sands Township fire chief did not consider the retention pond acceptable. Expressed concerns about changing requirements and said that any amendment should be equal to or an improvement over original requirement.
 - ❖ Mary Kay Johnson: Read a statement previously provided to the commissioners (attachment) representing herself and her husband Carl Johnson and expressing concerns about forest fire risks associated with campfires as a result of the topography and winds at the property. Ms. Johnson requested that the commission deny the amendment to SUP22-01.
 - ❖ Carl Johnson: Stated that pond could be good assuming DNR guidance regarding campfires is followed. Expressed concerns about homeless encampments and squatters and potential for trespassing on private property.
 - ❖ Jean Johnson: Stated water tank is most consistent and reliable method of maintaining water volume and a buried water tank would not be an eyesore.
- Randy Yelle shared letters of conditional approval from two of the three affected fire department chiefs (attachments), and recommended allowing Fire Chief Tom Wahlstrom, who was present, to share his opinions and insights.
- Chief Tom Wahlstrom stated his support of the retention pond and dry hydrant as long as the minimum 12,000 gallons of usable water can be maintained.
- Commissioner Brauer closed public hearing at 6:47 p.m.
- Planning Commission questions and comments
 - ❖ Commissioner Brauer reminded Jeremy Johnson of requirement for project to be fully approved before opening activity can take place. Specifically concerned about acceptance of reservations. Mr. Johnson stated that reservations anticipated a June 1, 2025 opening date.
 - ❖ Commissioner Bushong asked about status of a revised site plan. Mr. Johnson stated that a final plan would be submitted as decisions are confirmed.
 - ❖ Commissioner Brauer asked Matt Treado about maintaining water volume and concerns about gallons per minute available from the well. Mr. Treado stated that water loss into the ground would be mitigated by the pond's liner and most volume loss would be through evaporation.
 - ❖ Commissioner Brauer asked about debris in the pond and risk of clogging fire hoses. Chief Wahlstrom and Mr. Treado led a discussion about the design of the pond and intake cleaning and maintenance. Chief Wahlstrom offered to perform an annual inspection as the department does with other dry hydrants.

- ❖ Commissioner Brauer expressed concerns about uncontrolled wildfires and risks to adjacent properties and businesses. Mr. Treado stated that he would not have recommended the pond as an alternative if he did not believe that the pond is a superior option to a water tank, which is subject to weather-related problems.
 - ❖ Commissioner Yelle asked if more than one fire truck could access the pond at once. Chief Wahlstrom, who said he has seen the pond, stated that yes, more than one truck could probably access at once. Mr. Treado stated that the pond would likely have more than 12,000 gallons – potentially as much as 15,000-18,000 – and that maximum capacity is approximately 20,000 gallons.
 - ❖ Jeremy Johnson and Mr. Treado shared information about the possible use of a temporary pump on the well and contracting water hauling vehicles. Mr. Mahoney reminded everyone that even at three gallons a minute, the well could put 4300 gallons a day into the pond.
 - ❖ Chief Wahlstrom mentioned that for wild land fires, all wild land trucks rely on “trash pumps,” which they use to draw from any source of water.
 - ❖ Commissioner Brauer suggested requiring more than 12,000 usable gallons. Randy Yelle expressed concern that would be inappropriate considering the minimum 12,000 gallons recommended by the fire department was previously approved.
 - ❖ Commissioner Bushong suggested some conditions that could be included in a possible approval of the amendment.
- b. Following commissioner questions and discussion, Commissioner Bushong made a motion to approve the requested amendment, removing the condition of approval number seven and adding the following conditions:
- Pond volume must remain at or above 12,000 usable gallons.
 - A representative of the Sands Fire Department will perform an annual inspection of the pond and dry hydrant to ensure appropriate maintenance and periodic checks to confirm adequate water volume.
 - The diagram of the pond will be revised to reflect its as-built condition, to include but not limited to the maximum water volume and inclusion of a “story pole” that provides a visual indication of the volume of water in the pond at all times.
 - Operators will create an Order of Operations document to accompany the diagram of the pond that proceduralizes what will happen and in what order to mitigate a decrease in pond volume that approaches the lower threshold of 12,000 usable gallons. The mitigation plan could include adding water using the on-site well (with or without a temporary pump), or using contracted water hauling vehicles.

Commissioner Brauer seconded the motion.
Ayes: 3 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

6. **Zoning Authority and MCSWMA Reports:** None
7. **Public Comment:** None
8. **Commissioners Comment:** None
9. **Adjournment:** Commissioner Shelley Brauer adjourned the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Shelley Brauer
Chairman

Pam Lajewski-Pearson
Secretary

Barb Kransi
Recording Secretary

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