

VILLAGE OF SISTER BAY
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2025
APPROVED

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Bhirdo called the Plan Commission meeting to order on Tuesday September 23, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. and took roll call.

Present: Plan Commission Chair Denise Bhirdo, and Commission members Steve Bacsi, Nate Bell, Laurel Harff, Skip Heidler, Ron Kane, and Patrice Champeau via Zoom.

Staff Member(s): Village Administrator Julie Schmelzer, Admin Assistant Sarah Bertges.

Others: Tricia Janssen, Kurt Harff, Atty Andrew Maertahl, Cynthia Geocariss, Stephen Scripp, S. Gullick, "Lisa's iPhone", bmeys, Karen Berndt.

2. Approve of Agenda

Motion by Bell, second by Heidler, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried – All Ayes

3. Approve Meeting Minutes: July 22, 2025

Heidler requested a correction on page 2 of the packet (page 1 of the minutes), lines 40 and 41, noting that when he asked about the proposed use of the property, Nick Deviley had actually stated that he would "rather not disclose that at this point."

Motion to approve the minutes as amended made by Heidler, second by Bell. Motion carried – All Ayes

4. Comments, Correspondence and Concerns from the Public

There were no comments from the public.

5. Public Hearing

a. Conditional Use Permit Application; Nonconforming Use & Structures; GEOS SB; 10849 N Bay Shore Drive

Bhirdo opened the public hearing at 5:34 PM. Schmelzer read the notice into the record. Schmelzer summarized the staff report, explaining that the applicant proposes to remove the main home and attach the two non-conforming structures to the new home. The property is zoned R1, where multiple structures with living quarters are not permitted uses. Any work to expand or replace structures requires a conditional use permit. Additionally, the cottages do not meet setback requirements. Schmelzer noted that she had discussed alternatives with the applicant's builder, including removing the cottage by the water or purchasing land to the south to make the setbacks conforming.

Andrew Martzahl, attorney representing the applicant, introduced himself along with property owner Cynthia Geocariss and architect Chris Renier. He clarified that they are not seeking to connect the three structures, but rather to rebuild one structure that was damaged in a recent tornado. Martzahl explained that the property has had three structures with living quarters for decades. The family wishes to maintain the historic cottages while rebuilding the tornado-damaged primary residence.

Ms. Geocariss explained that she has been coming to Sister Bay since she was 10 years old and purchased the property with her parents in 2002. She described the sentimental value of the

property and stated that they never rented it, only using it for family. She noted that the main house is 72 years old and severely damaged from the tornado. Their plan is to rebuild a main home while preserving the guest cottages, with the intention of retiring there. Geocar is explained that the cottage by the water would be converted to more of a boathouse for water equipment storage rather than having bedrooms.

Heidler noted the applicant applied prior to the storm that damaged the home. Commissioners asked questions about the property, including the total square footage of the proposed new structure, the size of the main floor, and the existing primary structure. Concern was expressed about the size of the proposed building but acknowledged that other large homes had already been built along Bay Shore Drive.

Tracie Krist, a neighbor from 10850 North Bayshore Drive, spoke in support of the application, noting that the property owners were victims of a natural disaster and should be allowed to rebuild their home.

Schmelzer clarified that the owners could repair what is there, but the main house is beyond repair according to Ms. Geocar is. Schmelzer also noted that there is a letter on file from 2003 indicating the owners' intent not to rent the cottages, but it was not a formal deed restriction.

Bhir do closed the public hearing at 6:04 PM.

6. Discussion/Action Items

a. Conditional Use Permit Application; Nonconforming Use & Structures; GEOS SB; 10849 N Bay Shore Drive

During deliberation, commissioners expressed varied concerns:

- Allowing multi-family use in an R1 district.
- Reluctance to compel the owners to tear down older buildings with historic value to the owner or community.
- The close proximity to property lines (3-6 feet) and potential impacts on neighbors.

Schmelzer cautioned about setting precedents and suggested deed restrictions and conditions if the commission was inclined to approve the application.

Motion by Bell, second by Champeau, to approve the conditional use permit.

Before a vote was taken Bhir do asked if Bell and Champeau would be open to amending their motion to include conditions. After extensive discussion, commissioners developed several proposed conditions for approval:

- A deed restriction prohibiting short-term rentals in the cottage by the water and the cottage by the road.
- Converting the cottage closest to the water to an accessory use for storage only, without living quarters, but allowing only bathroom facilities without a shower.
- The cottage near the road could maintain its use as a unit with living quarters.
- No replacement, extension, addition, or structural alterations to either the cottage by the water or the cottage near the road, although routine maintenance would be allowed.

Motion to approve the amendments made by Harff, second by Bell. Motion carried: Aye -5 (Bell, Champeau, Harff, Kane, Bacsi); Nay -2 (Bhir do, Heidler)

1 *Motion to approve the conditional use permit application with the specified conditions was made by*
2 *Bell, second by Champeau. Motion carried: Aye -5 (Bell, Champeau, Harff, Kane, Bacsi); Nay -2*
3 *(Bhirdo, Heidler)*

4
5 **b. Preliminary Site Plan Review; Employee Housing; Northern Grill & Pub; 10573 Country Walk**
6 **Drive**

7 Schmelzer explained that Lisa McDonald is looking to repurpose an old 400-square-foot cottage from
8 Gibraltar to place on her property for employee housing. The applicant is still waiting for the
9 surveyor to prepare a site plan but needs to know if the commission would be supportive of the
10 concept before proceeding.

11
12 Ms. McDonald, identified as connected to the Northern Grill & Pub, stated that the cottage would
13 match the exterior of the restaurant and would be located in the southwest part of the property. It
14 would be connected to sewer and water. Schmelzer noted that a deed restriction would be required
15 to ensure the building remains as employee housing.

16
17 *By unanimous consensus, the commission indicated support for the project provided it meets all code*
18 *requirements, and McDonald applies for Site Plan and Architectural Review.*

19
20 **c. Site Plan Review; Expand Residential Condominium; Randell & Tricia Janssen; 2232 Mill Rd., Unit**
21 **B5**

22 Schmelzer explained that the applicants wish to add a bedroom in their basement, changing their
23 unit from a 2-bedroom to a 3-bedroom condominium. The code requires Plan Commission approval
24 when increasing the number of bedrooms in a unit. She noted that this change would not affect
25 green space or the exterior, only parking requirements, which the applicants can accommodate with
26 their existing garage and driveway spaces.

27
28 *Motion to approve the Site Plan Review, with no need for a Development Agreement, made by Bell,*
29 *second by Kane. Motion carried – All Ayes.*

30
31 **d. Draft Text Amendments; Parks District, Signage, CS-1**

32 Schmelzer presented several draft text amendments for the commission's consideration:

33 • **Commercial Center and Multi-Use Development Signage:**

34 Commissioners discussed the size of marquee signs (currently allowed up to 72 square feet
35 per side).

36 There was expressed concern that 72 square feet was excessive.

37 Commissioners agreed to have village staff measure the existing Country Walk Shops sign to
38 determine an appropriate standard.

39 Commissioners agreed to change the maximum sign height from 12 feet to 8 feet for both
40 commercial center and multi-use development signs.

41 The commission discussed clarification of how signage should be allocated among tenants.

42 • **Window Signs:**

43 The commission agreed that window signs displaying business names or logos should count
44 toward total signage allowance and require permits.

45 Temporary window signs (e.g., sale announcements) that change regularly would not require
46 permits or count toward total signage.

47 • **Historic Signage:**

48 The commission reviewed and refined the definition of historic signs, removing "paint applied
49 directly to a building" from the criteria.

Commissioners supported Schmelzer's recommendation that historic sign determinations should be made by the Plan Commission through a public hearing with findings of fact.

● **Agritourism:**

Schmelzer proposed adding a definition and provisions for agritourism to the code. Commissioners discussed whether products sold at agritourism venues should be limited to those grown on-site, ultimately deciding not to include such restrictions in the definition.

The commission agreed to schedule these amendments for public hearing in October.

e. Fee Schedule; Signs

Schmelzer presented information on sign permit fees in other municipalities. It was recommended by some to increase the fee to \$150-200. Also change sandwich boards: \$50 changeable script, \$100 non-changeable script.

The commission agreed to forward this recommendation to the Village Board.

7. Administrator's Report

Schmelzer reported:

- She had announced her retirement effective January 2, 2026.
- The Village Board discussed updating the zoning ordinance.
- The Village needs to update its zoning map to match the comprehensive plan within a year.
- She provided commissioners with ideas for increasing housing units in the village, including eliminating the requirement that lots held in common ownership be considered as one lot.

The commission expressed appreciation for Schmelzer's work and requested that she continue working on housing-related amendments if time permits before her retirement.

8. Matters to be Placed on a Future Agenda or Referred to a Committee, Official or Employee

The commission agreed to discuss how to address historic structures in the context of nonconforming uses and structures at a future meeting.

9. Next Meeting

Regular Monthly Meeting; October 28, 2025, at 5:30 P.M., Large Meeting Room, Sister Bay-Liberty Grove Fire Station

10. Adjournment

At 8:09 P.M. a motion to adjourn was made by Kane, second by Harff. Motion carried – All ayes.

Respectfully submitted by, Sarah Bertges, Administrative Assistant