

**VILLAGE OF SISTER BAY
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025
APPROVED**

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Denise Bhirdo called the Plan Commission meeting to order on Thursday, December 18, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. and took roll call.

Present: Plan Commission Chair Denise Bhirdo, and Commission members Steve Bacsi, Laurel Harff, Skip Heidler, and Patrice Champeau (Via Zoom). Nate Bell was absent.

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

Others: Kurt Harff, James Lohmiller, Erin Peddle, Ellie Soderberg-Guger.

2. Approve of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Harff, second by Heidler. Motion carried - all ayes.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes: November 25, 2025

Motion to approve the minutes of November 25, 2025, was made by Heidler, second by Harff. Motion carried -all ayes.

4. Comments, Correspondence and Concerns from the Public

Bhirdo took a moment to express appreciation for Village Administrator Julie Schmelzer's service over the past 3.5 years. Bhirdo highlighted Schmelzer's extensive knowledge of zoning and administration, her exceptional work ethic, and her commitment to the village. Bhirdo noted that Schmelzer had updated numerous sections of the code and policies to ensure compliance with state statutes and federal law and praised her as an out-of-the-box thinker who helped find clear paths forward when the board struggled with decisions. Schmelzer thanked Bhirdo for her kind words and also thanked Laurel Harff, and Trustees Harff and Champeau, who had reached out to express their appreciation for her work.

5. Discussion/Action Items

a) Proposed Sauna at Dorr Hotel for Wellness Event

Schmelzer presented a request from the Dorr Hotel to place a temporary sauna on their property during a wellness event. Schmelzer noted that a similar request had been approved the previous year and suggested the commission consider not requiring annual approvals for this recurring request.

Ellie Soderberg-Guger from Sister Bay Advancement Association (SBAA) clarified that this would be the inaugural Winter Wellness Weekend in Sister Bay, with businesses hosting various wellness events for residents and visitors.

James Lohmiller from the Dorr Hotel provided details about the sauna, explaining it was a wood-burning model in an Airstream-style trailer with a capacity for up to 8 people. The sauna would operate Saturday from 9 AM to 6 PM and Sunday from 9 AM to 3 PM. It would be positioned in the front yard area as indicated by the 'red X' on the site plan.

The commission discussed concerns about the smoke from the wood-burning sauna, placement logistics, and potential damage to village property. Members agreed that placing the sauna in the front yard made sense for visibility purposes rather than in the parking lot.

Motion to approve the sauna placement according to the 'red X' in the packet with conditions that: 1) if any damage or ruts to Village property occur, the applicant would be responsible for repairs; 2) the applicant would not need to return annually unless the location, size, or additional temporary uses/structures were added; 3) no signage would be permitted; and 4) the sauna would only be present from Friday to Sunday of the event. Motion made by Bacsí, second by Harff. Motion carried - all ayes.

b) New Zoning Map; Discussion No. 2

Schmelzer presented the updated draft zoning map incorporating changes discussed at the previous meeting. The commission addressed several remaining items:

- The triangle area at Highway 57 and Orchard Road: After discussion about the size and appropriate zoning, the commission decided that the front of the property, along Highway 57, should be zoned Business (B-1) with the remainder zoned Large Lot Residential (R-3).
- Properties north of Northwoods: The commission agreed to designate the front portion along Highway 57 as Business (B-1) with the remainder as Large Lot Residential (R-3).
- CBRF on Fieldcrest: The commission agreed this community-based residential facility should be zoned Residential (R-1) rather than Business, as it is a residential use in a residential neighborhood. Schmelzer noted the need to update the zoning definitions to match state statutes regarding these facilities.
- Pebble Beach Corner: The commission discussed a business-zoned property across from the south end of the cemetery that currently contains a residence. Despite the property owner's preference to maintain business zoning, the commission felt the property would be more appropriately zoned as Residential (R-2) given its location and surroundings.
- Woodland Overlay: The commission reviewed the proposed woodland overlay district on the map. Schmelzer explained that this overlay protects significant woodland areas while still allowing appropriate development. Heidler raised concerns about ensuring clarity in how the woodland definitions interact with other code sections.
- PUD (Planned Unit Development) Designation: Schmelzer noted that state statutes require PUDs to be identified on the zoning map. The Dorr Hotel was identified as one such development, with others to be added as they are identified.

Motion to proceed with the discussed zoning map changes to a public hearing was made by Heidler, second by Champeau. Motion carried -all ayes.

c) Misc. Text Amendments; Ch. 66

The commission reviewed proposed text amendments to Chapter 66 of the Village Code. Key discussions included:

- Parking Lot Lighting: The commission clarified that the requirements apply to free-standing light fixtures in parking lots, not lighting mounted on buildings.
- Woodland Definitions: The commission discussed clarification needs between "woodlands" as defined in the code and the "woodland overlay" district to avoid confusion.
- Nonconforming Uses and Structures: The commission reviewed updates to these sections to align with state statutes. Schmelzer explained how the 50% rule for repairs to nonconforming buildings helps phase out nonconformities over time.
- Woodland Overlay Requirements: The commission had an extensive discussion about tree removal requirements in the woodland overlay district, particularly regarding how close

1 structures can be to tree canopies. The requirements aim to balance development rights with
2 woodland preservation goals.

- 3 ● Wellhead Protection Overlay: Schmelzer noted that this section would need to be updated in the
4 future, as it mentions a road name no longer used, and the current 500-foot protection radius
5 likely does not reflect the actual capture zone. She recommended a future meeting with the
6 Utilities Department to coordinate on this issue.

7
8 *By consensus the commission agreed to include the text amendments to the zoning map*
9 *amendments at the January public hearing.*

10 11 **6. Annual Permit Log**

12 Schmelzer presented the annual permit log, noting that it was not yet complete for the year but
13 represented the significant volume of permits processed. She highlighted that no permits had been
14 denied during the year, demonstrating the staff's commitment to working with applicants to find
15 solutions.

16 17 **7. Matters to be Placed on a Future Agenda or Referred to a Committee, Official or Employee**

18 The commission identified two items for future agendas:

- 19 ● Public hearing for the zoning map and text amendments in January
- 20 ● Wellhead protection overlay district update (to be scheduled after consulting with the Utilities
21 Department)

22 23 **8. Next Meeting**

24 The next regular monthly meeting will be held on January 27, 2026, at 5:30 P.M. in the Large
25 Meeting Room of the Sister Bay-Liberty Grove Fire Station.

26 27 **9. Adjournment**

28 *Motion to adjourn at 7:35 PM was made by Heidler, second by Harff. Motion carried -all ayes.*

29
30 *Respectfully submitted by Sarah Bertges, Administrative Assistant*