



NORTH BRANCH

—Minnesota—

Steve Cich
Chair

Nathan Ehalt
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Gary Schaefer
Commissioner

Open
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 @ 6:30 PM
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH
BRANCH, MN 55056**

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORTH BRANCH IN THE COUNTY OF CHISAGO AND IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Steve Cich called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Steve Cich led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Present: Commissioner Gary Schaefer, Commissioner Steve Cich, Commissioner Ross Otto,
Commissioner Nate Ehalt

Absent:

Remote:

Others Present: Commissioner Robert Canada

Notes:

4. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Provides an opportunity for the public to address the Council on items that are not on the Agenda. Please raise your hand to be recognized. Please state your name and address for the record. This section is for the express purpose of addressing concerns of City services and operations. It shall not be used to clarify individual's views for political purposes.

There was no public comment.

5. **AGENDA APPROVAL**

Commissioner Ehalt requested that 8(a,b,c) Reports be moved before 7(a) Public Hearings.

a. Approve Agenda ACTION
RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Nate Ehalt
SECONDER: Steve Cich
AYES: Gary Schaefer, Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt
ABSENT:
NOTES:

6. CONSENT AGENDA

All matters listed under Consent Agenda are considered routine and/or non-controversial and will be approved by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Councilmember or citizen so requests, in which case the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the Agenda.

a. Approval of August 5, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes ACTION
RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Nate Ehalt
SECONDER: Steve Cich
AYES: Gary Schaefer, Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt
ABSENT:
NOTES:

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Public Hearing to consider a proposed Zoning Text Amendment to City Code ACTION
Section 66-943 Design Standards for permitted building materials and to amend
the design overlay district map

The Public Hearing is to consider a proposed Zoning Text Amendment to City Code Section 66-943 Design Standard for permitted building materials and to amend the design overlay district map. City Planner Ryan Saltis gave a recap from last month's Planning Commission meeting. We discussed the map, particularly changing some of the interior parcels from zone two to zone three, and then also just remaining the parcels along 400th Street, remaining those as zone one, because they have more visibility, same with 35 but we were looking to change from a stricter zone one and be more lenient to zone two. We also discussed insulated metal panels, just being added to class two materials. So along 35 is zone one, and then also the parks is along 400 are also zone one, again, that was due to visibility from traffic, just having a more appealing looking buildings in those areas. Then that interior zone two, still being a little bit more lenient their, but still having required percentages for certain higher end materials. The proposed map that we discussed at the last meeting, so kind of changing that area along 35 to zone two, and then keeping all those parcels along 400th and then total interior ones as zone one. That's due to the future interchange that might be a halfway travel road. We'd like to keep the design standards up in that area, and then anything interior in the industrial park would be zone three. Zone three is not having any required percentages of materials from either class one or class two from the materialist, it pretty much follows what the zones were set out for being a little bit more lenient on that 35 area. Going to the insulated metal panel discussion that we had, this would be added to the class two list. I don't know if we want to put anything in there about the industrial park as a class two material, I know it was part of the discussion that we can put something after insulated metal panels, like parentheses only in industrial park, that would make sure that no other areas could have these.

Commissioner Ehalt asked on the eastern side of the map, what is the amount of right of way there before we get into the residential area, from the industrial to the residential. Director Sondrol answered that the road right of way of County Road 30 is roughly 110 feet, and then you have the rail, which is going to get

another 100 feet. There's a pretty significant tree line that goes along that rail corridor that does act as a very good buffer for residential homes.

The Commission opened it up for public comment. There was a question from Loren Beach about the insulated panels if they were the same panels on the big red building. Director Sondrol commented that is a different material, that is a class 3 material. Loren asked if currently that building does not meet code, Director Sondrol responded that the city implemented, modified design standards, amended the code. What the City is discussing tonight is that everything yellow on that map on the right would be proposed to allow that.

There was a motion to approve the design standard zone modification as presented and add the insulated metal panels to the permitted class 2 materials within section 66-943, subdivision 2, subsection D1.

RESULT: **Passed**
MOVER: **Nate Ehalt**
SECONDER: **Ross Otto**
AYES: **Gary Schaefer, Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt**
ABSENT:
NOTES:

8. REPORTS

a. Proposed R-2 Development

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis introduced the proposed R-2 Development discussion item. The City met with a developer who is interested in developing a 0.34-acre vacant parcel located at PID 16.00482.10. The location is South of McDonald's. There are some other townhouses in that general area. It's .34 acres zoned R2, also guided as R2 medium density residential. Some options that were provided to us are: option one is to build something identical to what is just north of this vacant parcel, a four-unit development; option two is to build a four-unit housing structure with preset plans that were provided to us on a website; and option three is to build a fourplex at the maximum size allowed. That means with setbacks and just kind of maximizing how much space they could have for those units. The parcel doesn't meet the lot width, so it's less than 150 feet in width. Currently, it has four water services to the parcel, so it could serve four separate units, but it does sound like they want to do a single building. Commissioner Gary Schaefer asked if all three of the different designs would require a variance. Ryan explained that because the lot itself doesn't meet the lot depth requirements, the applicant would have to come in and apply for that. Ryan thought it sounded like the applicant wants to do one building; if the applicant did that, he would not have to go through that planning process, he would just need the variance.

Commissioner Ehalt said he would be supportive of this idea, but would prefer some clarification, along with other constructed homes.

Chair Steve Cich asked if this would be rentals, and City Planner Saltis said they hadn't gotten that information from the applicant at this point. Commissioner Robert Canada brought up his concern with parking.

b. Viking Meadows Development

INFO

Commissioner Nate Ehalt recused himself and joined his colleagues for this portion of the agenda.

City Planner Ryan Saltis discussed the parcel that is located just east of the North Branch wastewater treatment plant. It's access to Hemingway Avenue from the south is zoned R-3 high-density residential. The requirements for this are 6 units per acre. To the West, we have industrial properties and

the wastewater plant. East is single-family houses on Hemingway Avenue. To the South is also zone R-1 single-family houses. Then, to the North is currently vacant farmland. There are a couple of houses to the west, but it is also zoned high-density. Ryan stated that the one thing that the City noticed from our initial comments on this project was that in the comprehensive plan, they do show a potential option for the 95 alternate route, and that kind of goes through the middle of the site. Ryan then invited the applicants to discuss their proposal.

Nate Ehalt explained that one of the questions that they are trying to continue to clarify with the city and certainly three focuses when we think about density. It requires a minimum of 6 units. When we start to think about roadways or park dedication, we start to think of all those things that really start to limit the amount of actual net acreage that we would construct or provide lots for builders. We're at about 90 units or so that we would be able to produce on this particular layout at a lot size of about 80 by 150, so they're not super small lots, but they are smaller lots that would still accommodate duplex lots as well as a single-family home. Nate Ehalt explained that they were trying to get some feedback on the acreage and whether or not they'd be able to use net or gross. If they look at gross, it's going to be virtually impossible, based upon the design that we're considering moving forward with for the development of that, versus perhaps what another developer would be looking at. It's not clear within the existing code, zoning code for North Branch, whether or not it's based upon gross would be the question for the commission. Currently, the 27 acres are under a contract or purchase agreement at this point in time. Nate also expressed that if they were thinking about the corridor for 95 and if they're looking at 100 feet right away, which would be necessary to meet the state standard, knowing that it isn't a state road, there may be some leeway there, but if they take out 10 feet of right away, it significantly cuts down the usable portion of that particular land, which means less lots, but we'd still have all the same infrastructure costs. This pushes up the price per lot to develop. He also asked that it be noted that they have had some conversations with relators who are interested in these particular lots. They've also had strong interest from local builders, builders that want to see lots that they can acquire and that are owned and controlled fully by the Nationals. There is a concern, and a growing concern, that they've heard from builders in this area that they want to be able to have access for future development for their own business, so as to be able to construct those homes and not get crowded out. He mentioned that they've gotten some commitments already for folks who are highly interested in these particular lots, once they're able to get them developed.

Chair Steve Cich asked that in regards to the bypass, if the bypass would split the site. Nate Ehalt responded that it would be on the western edge, right up against the water treatment area, creating a little bit more of a buffer from that particular type of site prior to the development of the residential portion. They had some general conversation with the city about having that start to run our angle in order to preserve as much land to the east of that in the northern parcel, so that it doesn't just bisect down the middle. Nate went on to clarify that it would be a locally owned road, and that's where there's some flexibility.

Commissioner Ross Otto asked the City staff if the staff had a proposed route that they'd want to see 95 take. Community Development Director Nate Sondrol responded that he felt like the City was flexible, and wanted to work with developers to see what would make the most sense. He agreed with the applicants that placing it along the water treatment plan would allow for the development that makes a lot of sense, and provides other opportunities.

Commissioner Gary Shaefer mentioned that the wastewater plant has a huge stormwater retention pond, and if the applicants are aware of that, and if the stormwater from this development could be directed to that. Nate Ehalt responded that they are aware of that and that going forward, it would be on the table. He mentioned that the less that we would have to do on site, provides that opportunity then develop those additional lots that we would be losing to the right of way for the 95 reroute.

The applicant brought up that in phase two, you're potentially looking at over 300 homes coming to the city, a substantial amount of infrastructure and homes, and new roofs.

Commissioner Gary Shaefer said that he appreciated the effort and that the big question in his mind is whether the city is going to have to determine if there is going to be a bypass there or not. Nate Ehalt responded that is also their concern. They realize that the City's identified 96 reroute, but there hasn't been any action taken to dedicate that, and they want to make sure that they get some really good, clear direction. He mentioned that it's one of the things that they would certainly continue to want to work with the city on, and they've asked for a workshop as well with the City Council to be able to have further conversation so that they get that clarity. Nate Ehalt also asked if they could get some clarity on net versus gross acreage, because it's not clear what that means for density. Based on the depth right now, they're looking at about 90 units. That's not taking into consideration the right away expansion of possibly 95. If you looked at gross, we would be having to get closer to about 160 - 165 in terms of the number of units. Chair Steve Cich you could put the buffer in there for that possible bypass to the City when you're planning this.

Commissioner Gary Shaefer asked the applicants about what timeline fits into their decision. The applicant replied that they want to keep the conversations going. The purchase agreement is due by the end of September; they can keep extending it out longer, as long as everything looks good at Council.

c. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol gave a brief update regarding the Comprehensive Plan. The survey that was conducted ended at the end of August. The results of that survey are being compiled and will be brought to the steering committee. The steering committee will be reviewing each component of the comp plan, looking at the vision for the City and the vision of each one of the subcategories.

9. NEXT MEETING - OCTOBER 7, 2025 : 6:30 PM

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 PM.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Gary Schaefer
SECONDER: Steve Cich
AYES: Gary Schaefer, Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt
ABSENT:
NOTES: