



NORTH BRANCH —Minnesota—

Steve Cich
Chair

Nathan Ehalt
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Gary Schaefer
Commissioner

Open
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 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, December 2, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

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:

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.

5. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

RESULT: Passed

ACTION

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 October 7, 2025 Planning Commission Minutes ACTION

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

7. **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

a. Walker Hill Farm Preliminary and Final Plat ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Walker Hill Farm Preliminary and Final Plat presentation. Sarah Wald (Applicant) is requesting Preliminary and Final Plat approval for Walker Hill Farm. The Plat proposes to subdivide the existing lot (PID 11.00148.00), totaling 39.74 acres, at 40926 Hemingway Avenue (Subject Property). The purpose of the Plat is to create two additional lots for a total of three parcels. There is an existing home on Lot 2 of the plat (40926 Hemingway Ave). Lots 1 and 3 of the proposed plat are intended to be future build sites for single-family homes. The analysis section of this report will address the subdivision requirements for this parcel, based on the Rural Residential zoning and guided land use. City staff must ensure that the lots created from this subdivision meet minimum lot standards and are buildable.

Saltis informed that the parcels are guided and zoned rural residential and that there is an existing home on lot two in the northeast corner of the development. Specifically lots one and three, are intended for future single-family homes. All lots do meet the minimum rural residential zoning standards. What does the rural residential district require? It requires one acre buildable area, minimum 110 foot width and 300 foot depth for all lots, kind of broken down there into table, form, format by a lot, just the area acreage. Lots one and two on the north section are roughly the same size, and then lot three is a little smaller, at 10 acres. The setbacks and everything are shown compliant. They do a standard five-foot drainage utility easement for interior lot lines. They do have wider easements of 20 feet along Hemingway, and there is a northern natural gas line on lots one and three. Once the new homes come in for a building permit, we'll review the grading for each lot. Lot one would be accessible from 410th Street to the north, and then lot three would be accessible from Hemingway to the east. These are some things that we have to consider when approving a plat, just the consistency of policy, purpose, design standards of the zoning chapter, consistency with the growth management system or other development plans, zoning chapter, physical characteristics, and then that the new plat will not create a new burden on services or infrastructure with the city staff finds that they need all these that wouldn't be a problem. We are recommending a few conditions of approval, just some park dedication fees. So it was brought to the park's meeting in November, and they did opt for the cash option to make them pay for that. So when you divide lots, each lot has to pay a separate Park fee.

Chair Steve Cich opened the Public Hearing at 6:41 PM.
Chair Steve Cich closed the Public Hearing at 6:43 PM.

A motion to approve the preliminary plot and final plot request for Walker Hill Farm, with findings of fact and the conditions typical to plot approvals.

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

- b. North Branch Marketplace 3rd Addition Preliminary/Final Plat and Easement **ACTION**
 Vacation

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the North Branch Marketplace 3rd addition Preliminary/Final Plat and Easement Vacation. Sunrise River Commons East LLC (Applicant) is requesting Preliminary/Final Plat and Easement Vacation approval for North Branch Marketplace 3rd Addition. The purpose of the submitted plats is to split the current parcel (PID 11.00410.14) into two developable lots. This will subdivide the existing 1.1 acre parcel into Lot 1, totaling 0.4 acres, and Lot 2, totaling 0.7 acres. The applicant also proposes to vacate an existing easement to better fit site conditions for current utility locations on the parcel.

The analysis section of this report will address the subdivision requirements for this parcel, based on the B-Business zoning and guided land use. City staff must ensure that the lots created from this subdivision meet minimum lot standards and are buildable. They will need a park dedication, even for a commercial property. If it's split, they'll need that as well. And that's a \$1,800 same price as residential.

Chair Steve Cich opened the Public Hearing at 6:50PM.

The owner of Cartful asked a question regarding questions about easements. Community Development Director Sondrol explained that this would not impact anything outside of their site.

Chair Steve Cich closed the Public Hearing at 6:52PM.

Motion to approve the preliminary, final plat and easement vacation request for the North Branch Marketplace 3rd Addition with findings in fact, conditions of typical, typical to plat approvals.

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

ABSENT:

NOTES:

8. REPORTS

a. Flink Ave Flex Zoning

INFO

Planner Saltis provided an overview of the Flink Ave Corridor zoning noting As part of the November 18th City Council Work Session, the City reviewed whether the east side of Flink Avenue—currently zoned B-Business—may be better suited for a “flex zone” that allows both commercial and light industrial uses. He noted several businesses in the corridor already operate with industrial characteristics, prompting questions from residents and business owners about whether the current zoning best aligns with existing and future uses and outlined the attached Work Session report outlines the benefits of a flex zone—such as increased economic adaptability, efficient land use, and a broader tax base—as well as drawbacks, including potential land-use conflicts, aesthetic challenges, and infrastructure demands. He noted after reviewing the analysis, the City Council agreed during the work session to move forward with additional research on flex zoning for this corridor and that Staff will begin exploring the concept further, which would include public engagement and future public hearings before any formal rezoning or reguinding is considered. He provided the following overview of pros and cons to flex zones

Pros to Flex Zones:

A flex zone would offer a range of economic and planning benefits that support adaptability, growth, and efficient land use.

~~Key Advantages of Flex Zones:~~ Flexibility provides Growth:

1. Attracts a Diverse Range of Employers
2. Promotes Efficient Use of Land and Infrastructure
3. Supports Redevelopment and Adaptive Reuse
4. Expands the City’s Tax Base
5. Enhances Local Employment Opportunities
6. Encourages Innovation

A Flex Zone provides an area where both industrial and commercial uses can coexist, offering adaptability and long-term economic benefits. By allowing a wider range of business types, Flex Zones help communities respond to changing market demands, attract diverse employers, and promote redevelopment of underused properties. This mix of uses makes more efficient use of public infrastructure, supports job creation across various industries, and strengthens the city’s tax base. Overall, a Flex Zone encourages growth, innovation, and flexibility—creating a thriving, future-ready business environment.

Cons to Flex Zones:

While Flex Zones offer many benefits, they can also present some challenges and potential drawbacks that cities need to manage through planning and design standards.

Disadvantages to flex zones are provided below:

1. Land Use Conflicts
2. Infrastructure Strain

3. Uncertain Development Patterns
4. Design and Aesthetic Challenges
5. Market Imbalance
6. Regulatory Complexity

He added while Flex Zones offer versatility and economic opportunity, they can also create planning and operational challenges. Allowing both industrial and commercial uses in the same area may lead to conflicts between heavier industrial activities and customer-oriented businesses, such as noise, traffic, or aesthetic concerns. He noted the broad range of permitted uses can make it difficult to predict development

Commissioner Ehalt questioned if we seem to be favoring a particular business, and is there a practice in the City of changing zoning or comprehensive land use to favor the business that's currently there, or to ensure that a business remains. Commissioner Ehalt stated that if we're to look at one specific area, we should be looking at that entire district, so we are not specifically singling out one particular area unless there's an actual practice that the community has exhibited in the past that's been directly for and specifically changing zoning and comprehensive planning for one specific business. He noted he just wanted to make sure that what's good for one will be good for all. Chair Cich responded that city has helped keep businesses here in the past by changing our design standards, noting that they would have left their locations if we didn't do that.

Commissioner Ehalt recognized that there is no action to be taken tonight, but if we do go forward to continue in the direction of having staff look at this, that the entire corridor from 95 and 35 to 400th Street, and the four corners on the North side, Northwest, and Northeast should be looked at.

Chair Cich asked City Planner Ryan Saltis to work on the design standards, as there's likely to be more consensus around the design standards. Cich would like to see us be sort of farm or rural.

The commission discussed having further conversation in January.

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol provided an update on the Comprehensive Plan noting that they were working on establishing dates for the subcommittees to meet to start working on each individual section of the comp plan.

c. Website Update

INFO

City Clerk Kostuch provided an update on the website noting that it would be going live on December 9th and that City email addresses will also be changing to northbranchmn.gov.

d. Planning Commission Vacancy Application

ACTION

Community Development Director Sondrol introduced Kelly Maurer, who submitted her application for the Planning Commission vacancy. Maurer introduced herself to the Planning Commission. The Commission provided consensus support of her application to the city council. Sondrol noted this would go to the City Council for their consideration on December 9.

9. NEXT MEETING - JANUARY 6, 2026

10. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Steve Cich adjourned the meeting at 8:09 PM.