



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt  
Chair

Steve Cich  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026 @ 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, May 5, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Nathan Ehalt called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

City Staff led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

**Present:** Commissioner Steve Cich, Commissioner Ross Otto, Commissioner Nate Ehalt,  
Commissioner Kelly Maurer, Liason Patrick Meacham

**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

**ACTION**

**RESULT:** Passed

**MOVER:** Steve Cich

**SECONDER:** Kelly Maurer

**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer

**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 April 7, 2026 Planning Commission minutes ACTION

**RESULT:** Passed

**MOVER:** Kelly Maurer

**SECONDER:** Steve Cich

**AYES:** Steve Cich, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt, Kelly Maurer

**ABSENT:**

**NOTES:**

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition - Preliminary Plat and Variance ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Sherwood Pine 2nd Addition-Preliminary Plat and Variance. Make Properties LLC. (Applicant) has submitted a request for Preliminary Plat and Variance approval for a new residential subdivision known as Sherwood Pines Second Addition, located generally to the east of 417th Street and Flink Avenue. The variance request is due to the inability to meet the required 300-foot lot depths for Lots 1-4 of Block 1 and Lots 1-3 of Block 2 based on the unique parcel boundaries and engineering standards for the internal roadway.

The undeveloped Subject Property consists of approximately 30.11 acres and is guided and zoned for Rural-Residential. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of 17 single-family residential lots (each exceeding 1 acre in lot size), organized into 2 blocks and 1 outlot. The development includes new public roadway infrastructure, stormwater management features, and individual well and septic systems. Access to the subdivision is provided via Flink Ave and includes an internal roadway and cul-de-sac.

The applicant has submitted a complete application, including preliminary plat drawings, grading and erosion control plans, utility plans, and stormwater management documentation.

**Analysis of Issue(s)**

1. Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Property is guided LURR, per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned RR – Rural Residential. The Subject Property is guided for low-density residential development under the City’s Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with the RR – Rural Residential zoning district. The proposed subdivision aligns with the City’s long-term land use vision by providing large-lot single-family development. The density of approximately 0.60 gross units per acre is consistent with rural residential expectations. The proposed subdivision layout, density, and lot configuration are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and zoning district requirements. Land Use and Zoning standards are satisfied.

2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat proposes 17 residential lots ranging in size from approximately 1.1 acres to 2.38

acres, as illustrated on the Site Plan. The subdivision is designed around a new internal public roadway system, consisting of approximately 2,050 linear feet of bituminous roadway with a cul-de-sac.

Each lot includes:

- Designated building pads
- Primary and secondary septic areas (5,000 sq ft each)
- Drainage and Utility Easements

The layout provides efficient circulation while maintaining rural lot characteristics. A stormwater infiltration basin is centrally located to manage runoff.

### 3. Plat Standards

Lots created by plat are required to meet minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements as established by City Code for the applicable zoning district. City Code requires a minimum lot depth of 300 feet and a minimum lot width of 110 feet within the Rural Residential (RR) zoning district. Based on the review of the proposed preliminary plat, all lots meet or exceed the minimum lot width requirement. However, several lots do not meet the minimum required depth of 300 feet. A variance application has been submitted and is analyzed in Section 4: Variance – Lot Depths of this report. All lots exceed the required area of 1 acre buildable.

### 4. Variance – Lot Depths

A variance from the required lot depths of 300 feet includes Lots 1 through 4 of Block 1 and Lots 1 through 3 of Block 2, with proposed depths ranging from approximately 177 feet to 278 feet. All remaining lots comply with the minimum depth requirement.

The purpose of the reduction of lot depths is in part due to other city regulations and imperative design decisions, such as the placement of the new internal roadway lining up directly with the existing 417th St across from Flink Ave. Additionally, engineering requirements for road sizes and Right-Of-Way widths would prevent lots on both sides of the proposed road due to the unique shape of the property and only having 521 feet of frontage along Flink Ave. City staff would support the decision to grant a reduction in lot depths in this scenario.

In considering all requests for variances, appeals, amendments, or conditional use permits, the planning agency and the city council shall make a finding of fact. Its judgment shall be based upon, but not limited to, the following factors:

1. Relationship to the city's comprehensive plan;
2. The geographical area involved;
3. The character of the surrounding area;
4. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;
5. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;
6. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;
7. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;
8. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;
9. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety;
10. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

### Sec 66-65 Conditions On Approval

- (a) The planning commission and the city council may not permit, as a variance, any use that is not

permitted under this division for property in the zone where the affected person's land is located.

A variance is a modification or variation of the provisions of this zoning code as applied to a specific piece of property. Variances shall only be permitted:

- When they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance, and
- When the variances are consistent with the comprehensive plan. Variances may be granted when the applicant for the variance establishes that there are practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance.

"Practical difficulties," as used in connection with the granting of a variance, means that:

- a. The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance;
- b. The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner; and
- c. The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties. Practical difficulties include, but are not limited to, inadequate access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems.

## 5. Engineering – Public Streets, Utilities, and Stormwater

The Preliminary Plat proposes a new public street designed to City of North Branch standards, including pavement width, right-of-way dedication, and implementation of a cul-de-sac. All streets will be dedicated to the City upon Final Plat approval.

Lots will be served by a private well and septic system as the parcel boundary is located outside the city's designated Urban Service Area. Stormwater management is addressed through drainage easements and an onsite infiltration basin located on Outlot A. All public improvements are subject to review and approval by the City Engineer and will require a Development Agreement. The Engineering report for this project is attached to this report.

The developer of the site is expected to enter into a Development Agreement with the City to meet these standards and specifications for the new Right-Of-Way.

## 6. Environmental Features and Site Constraints

The subject site is a former evergreen tree farm, and extensive tree clearing will be required. The Tree Preservation Plan for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition identifies areas of existing woodland to be preserved and areas to be cleared to accommodate development, including building pads, septic areas, roads, and grading. The plan designates specific tree save areas, tree removal areas, and existing off-site tree areas, with construction limits clearly shown to guide where disturbance can occur. Tree removal is primarily concentrated within proposed lot areas, building envelopes, road alignments, and septic locations, while preservation areas are generally located around the site perimeter and in less disturbed interior sections. In total, the plan indicates approximately 13.15 acres (572,942 sq. ft.) of trees to be preserved and 6.07 acres (264,356 sq. ft.) to be removed, out of a total wooded area of 19.22 acres. This reflects a majority of the existing tree cover being retained, with clearing focused on necessary development areas.

The plan also incorporates topographic contours, wetland areas (Outlot A), and delineates building and septic locations, ensuring that tree removal is coordinated with site constraints. Overall, the document demonstrates an effort to balance site development with preservation of significant wooded areas, though substantial clearing will still be required to establish lots and infrastructure.

Overall, the proposed development meets City standards related to landscaping, buffering, and

preservation of existing natural features.

The Public Hearing opened at 6:40 PM.

There was a question regarding if it made a difference where the house is put on the lot, or if the houses have to be on one side, so there's room for another mound system if needed? City Planner Ryan Saltis responded that there is still a need for setbacks. Typically, we see separate site surveys come in for each individual lot at the time of the building permit application. We review it to make sure that these setbacks and then the septic area is approved by our building department.

There was a question regarding how many driveways are going to be able to come out to Flink? City Planner Ryan Saltis responded that there will be 3, because one is a shared driveway between two lots.

The Public Hearing closed at 6:46 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council for the Preliminary Plat for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition, based on a preliminary review of the submitted plans.

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

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council, approving the Variance to reduce lot depths for Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition.

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

b. Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment - PID 11.00458.00

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment — PID 11.00458.00. A request has been proposed for a Comprehensive Plan/Map Amendment and Rezoning from Rural Residential (RR) to Agricultural District (AG) at PID 11.00458.00. The applicant, Johnathon Sanders, intends to rezone the parcel from RR to AG to operate a Farm Winery on the property. The parcel is currently zoned RR – Rural Residential, where crop production is permitted; however, a Farm Winery is not an allowed use. Farm Wineries are permitted within the AG – Agricultural zoning district. A Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment from RR to AG would allow the winery use by right and enable the project to proceed. The applicants have also indicated plans to construct a barn (Agricultural Building) to support a vineyard and wine production activities. Agricultural structures of this type are permitted in the AG district; however, in the RR district, such a building would not be allowed without a principal residential structure on the property.

At the April 7th Planning Commission Meeting, City staff and the prospective applicant presented two options for consideration. The first is to amend the permitted uses table to allow Farm Wineries as a Conditional Use within the RR district. This approach would require both a text amendment and subsequent review and approval of a Conditional Use Permit, including the establishment of specific standards for such operations. The second option is to rezone the parcel to AG, which would allow the winery use by right and enable the project to proceed more immediately. Planning Commission members preferred to have the applicant move forward with a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Rezoning.

### Analysis of Issue(s)

#### 1. Land Use & Zoning

The 16-acre vacant parcel located at PID 11.00458.00 is currently zoned Rural Residential (RR) and is surrounded entirely by Rural Residential properties. The intent of this request is to rezone to Agricultural (AG) and reguide the Land Use of this parcel as Agricultural (LUAG). The parcel is located east of North Branch off of HWY 95, in which all properties directly off of this roadway are currently zoned RR – Rural Residential. The subject property is just south of land designated as AG, designated in white on the above zoning map excerpt.

Properties immediately adjacent to the north and east of the site have historically been used for farming and agriculture. The proposed rezoning of this 16-acre parcel seems to fit the surrounding area and uses, while being over the 10-acre minimum for AG-zoned properties. The proposed comprehensive plan amendment would remove the area guided as Rural Residential by approximately 16 acres and increase the guided area as Agricultural by the same amount. When considering comprehensive plan amendments, it is important to consider the overall mix of uses, compatibility of uses, and future development potential before and after the change.

#### 2. Comprehensive Plan Compatibility

Analysis of the Rural Residential (RR) and Agricultural District (AG) are provided below. Comments from city staff are italicized and bolded:

#### DIVISION 9 RR RURAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

##### Sec 66-447 Purpose

The purpose of the RR rural residential district is:

- a. To prevent scattered non-farm uses from developing improperly.
- b. To allow suitable areas of the city to be retained and utilized in open space and/or agricultural uses.
- c. To promote orderly development and secure economy in government expenditures for public utilities and service.

##### Sec 66-384 Purpose

The purpose of the AG agricultural district is to preserve, promote, maintain, and enhance the use of land for agricultural purposes and to protect such land from encroachment by non-agricultural uses.

The use of the parcel is intended to initially be a Farm Winery with crop plantings and an Ag building for wine production. A single-family residence is proposed for a future phase and fits the purpose of both the RR Rural Residential District and AG Agricultural District. These zoning districts are similar in purpose; the permitted uses for each district differ. Based on the Zoning District Use Table, Agricultural zoned parcels show more permitted uses than parcels zoned Rural Residential. Permitted uses in Agricultural

Zoned parcels that are not permitted in Rural Residential include the following:

- Ag building accessory structures
- Farm Wineries

Approving the rezoning of the parcel would allow the above operations on this site and should be considered by the Planning Commission.

After reviewing minimum lot depths, lot widths, and lot sizes, the parcel would meet the requirements for rezoning to AG.

The Land Use & Growth section of the 2018 North Branch Comprehensive Plan addresses distinctions between zoning districts and gives direction for land uses. The Agriculture and Rural Residential District from the Land Use & Growth section of the Comprehensive Plan is described below:

#### Agriculture (AG1 and AG2)

Over one-third of the city's land area (37.6%) is currently used for agricultural purposes. Housing densities are low, and this zoning is characterized by active farms, hobby farms and homes on large lots. The Northeast corner of the city is the historic river bottom of the St. Croix River and is framed by the historic river bluff line. Soils are well-suited for sod farming and the production of produce. By maintaining a low density of development, it is the City's intent to preserve and protect the many natural resources found in this part of North Branch, including lakes, streams, wetlands and woodlands.

#### Rural Residential (RR)

Rural Residential makes up 9,961 acres or 43% of the total acreage in the City of North Branch. This land use is largely characterized by single-family residences set on larger lot sizes to accommodate onsite sewage treatment systems. Some of these areas are located within the city's designated Urban Service Area, and no new development is allowed within this zoning district without connecting to municipal services. Areas located outside of the Urban Service Area must meet a minimum buildable acre standard so as to ensure that there is sufficient land area with the appropriate soil separation to support both a primary and a future secondary onsite sewage treatment system.

The Planning Commission should examine these distinctions between zoning districts when considering the rezoning of the subject parcel from RR Rural Residential to AG Agricultural. The parcel and existing uses shall be considered whether or not they fit into the definition and guided land use of the Agricultural District.

#### Sec 66-64 Findings of Fact

In considering all requests for variances, appeals, amendments or conditional use permits, the planning agency and the city council shall make a finding of fact. Its judgment shall be based upon, but not limited to, the following factors:

1. Relationship to the city's comprehensive plan;
2. The geographical area involved;
3. The character of the surrounding area;
4. The availability and design capacities of existing or proposed utilities;

5. Whether such a request will tend to or actually depreciate the surrounding area;
6. Whether the request will place an undue financial burden on the city;
7. Whether the request will impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property;
8. Whether the request will unreasonably increase the congestion in the public right-of-way;
9. Whether the request will increase the danger of fire or endanger the public safety.
10. Whether the request is consistent with the spirit and intent of this division.

Public Hearing opened at 6:55 PM.

Public Hearing closed at 6:56 PM.

Motion to approve the proposed comprehensive plan map amendment to regard the subject property, from the land use rural residential to land use agricultural with conditions of finding of fact and approve the rezoning of the subject property itself from rural residential to agricultural with the conditions and findings of fact prese

c. Westside Commons 3rd Addition - Preliminary Plat

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Westside Commons 3rd Addition - Preliminary Plat. GS2 LLC, with Westwood Professional Services acting as the applicant, has submitted a request for a Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition. The subject property is located at the south-west corner of Highway 95 and Falcon Ave and is legally described as Outlot A, Westside Commons 2nd Addition. The purpose of the proposed plat is to subdivide the existing outlot to accommodate future development, including a senior living facility and associated infrastructure improvements. The Preliminary Plat includes the creation of one buildable lot, public right-of-way, and outlots for drainage and future development.

The subject site contains approximately 27.9 acres and is guided for B-Business within the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use and Zoning
2. Proposed Preliminary Plat
3. Plat Standards
4. Engineering and Infrastructure

Analysis of Issue(s)

1. Land Use & Zoning

The Subject Property is guided LUB – Land Use Business per the Comprehensive Plan, and zoned B – Business.

Senior Communities for Independent or Assisted Living is a Permitted Use in the B-Business Zoning District. This is consistent with the nearby Boka Haven development. The proposed preliminary plat supports the development of a senior living facility and associated site improvements, which is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the evolving character of the Highway 95 corridor.

Staff finds the proposed plat to be generally consistent with the City's land use guidance and

development objectives for this area.

## 2. Proposed Preliminary Plat

The Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition proposes the following:

- Creation of Lot 1, Block 1, intended for a future senior living facility (building footprint shown on plan)
- Dedication of public right-of-way for the 386th Street extension
- Creation of Outlot A for drainage and stormwater management
- Creation of Outlot B for future development
- Dedication of drainage and utility easements throughout the site

The layout provides a logical configuration that supports both the proposed development and future expansion of the surrounding area. The plat also ensures connectivity to existing roadways and utilities.

## 3. Plat Standards

Lots created by plat are required to meet minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements as established by City Code for the applicable zoning district.

Based on review of the Preliminary Plat:

- The proposed lot exceeds minimum area requirements for the B – Business Zoning District
- Lot dimensions appear adequate to support the intended development
- Out lots are appropriately designated for drainage and future use

Staff finds that the Preliminary Plat generally meets the applicable subdivision standards of the City Code.

## 4. Engineering and Infrastructure

### Streets & Access

The development includes the construction of the 386th Street extension, which will provide primary access to the site.

Key roadway elements include:

- Approximately 85-foot right-of-way with a 49-foot face-to-face roadway section
- Typical urban street section including curb and gutter, boulevard, and sidewalk
- A temporary cul-de-sac is proposed to accommodate phased development

This extension improves connectivity and supports future development in the Westside Commons area.

### Utilities

- 12-inch water main extension along 386th Street
- Sanitary sewer extensions, including approximately 350 linear feet of 10-inch sanitary sewer
- Hydrants and gate valves are placed throughout the site

Utility plans will be subject to detailed review during final engineering.

## Stormwater & Drainage

Stormwater Management is addressed through:

- Construction of proposed stormwater pond
- Installation of storm sewer infrastructure, including:
  - 24-inch storm sewer lines
  - Catch basins and manholes
  
- Designated drainage out lots and easements

Detailed stormwater calculations and final design will be reviewed during final plat and site plan approval.

## Grading & Erosion Control

The plans include erosion control measures such as:

- Silt fence and inlet protection
- Construction entrance to prevent tracking
- Erosion control blanket and temporary stabilization measures

All erosion control measures must be installed prior to construction and maintained throughout development.

Public Hearing opened at 7:04 PM.

Trent Olson asked how this was originally zoned. Community Development Director Nate Sondrol answered that it is zoned business, and it's guided for high-density residential.

Public Hearing closed at 7:07 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council approving the preliminary plat for West Side Commons, 3rd edition.

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

## 8. REPORTS

### a. Side Setbacks in Residential Zoning Districts

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Side Setbacks in Residential Zoning Districts. City staff has prepared this report to facilitate discussion regarding a potential amendment to the Zoning Code to increase minimum interior side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet in zoning districts where a 6-foot setback is

currently permitted.

As shown in the City's Dimensional and Design Standards Table, several residential zoning districts—including portions of R-1, R-2, and R-3 districts currently allow 6-foot interior side setbacks, particularly for single-family and certain attached housing types.

At this time, no formal application or ordinance is under consideration. This report is intended to provide an overview of potential impacts, benefits, and challenges to assist the Planning Commission in determining whether further study or direction is warranted.

The potential amendment would increase the minimum interior side yard setback to 10 feet, aligning these districts more closely with others that already require larger setbacks. The following sections outline key considerations when analyzing impacts to residents, developers/builders, and the city. Cost considerations are also analyzed further.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Increased Privacy:** Additional distance between homes may reduce noise and visual impacts between neighboring properties.
- **Improved Access & Maintenance:** Larger side yards provide more space for maintenance, drainage, and utility access.
- **Enhanced Light and Air:** Greater spacing can improve natural light and ventilation between structures.
- **Fire Safety:** Increased separation may improve fire protection and emergency response access.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Buildable Area:** Particularly on smaller lots, increased setbacks may limit home size or placement options.
- **Existing Development Pattern:** Established neighborhoods with narrower spacing may not reflect the proposed standard.
- **Nonconformities:** Existing homes built under the 6-foot standard would likely become legal nonconforming structures.

### Impacts to Developers & Builders

#### Potential Benefits:

- **Marketability:** Wider spacing between homes may appeal to buyers seeking lower-density residential character.
- **Consistency:** Standardizing setbacks across districts may simplify zoning interpretation and development review.

#### Potential Challenges:

- **Reduced Lot Yield:** Larger setbacks may decrease the number of buildable lots or require larger lot sizes.
- **Design Limitations:** Standard building plans may need modification to fit within narrower building envelopes.
- **Plat Revisions:** Concept plans or undeveloped subdivisions designed with 6-foot setbacks may require redesign.

### Impacts to the City

### Potential Benefits

- Community Character: Increased setbacks may support a more open and spacious residential environment.
- Stormwater & Drainage: Additional pervious area between structures may improve drainage conditions.
- Infrastructure Coordination: Greater spacing may reduce conflicts with utilities and easements.

### Potential Challenges

- Housing Affordability: Larger setbacks may increase development costs, which could impact housing prices.
- Land Use Efficiency: Reduced density may affect efficient use of land and infrastructure.
- Administrative Considerations: Managing nonconformities and transition standards may require additional staff review.

### Cost Considerations

#### Developers:

- Increased cost per unit due to reduced density
- Potential redesign costs for site layouts and building plans

#### Homeowners:

- Possible increase in home prices
- Potential long-term value benefits associated with increased spacing

#### City:

- Possible reduction in tax base efficiency on a per-acre basis
- Limited direct fiscal impact, but potential increase in administrative review complexity

### Planning Considerations

- The current zoning table reflects a mix of 6-foot and 10-foot side setbacks, depending on district and housing type .
- The 6-foot standard is most commonly associated with more compact residential development patterns.
- Consideration may be given to:
  - Whether a uniform standard is appropriate across all districts
  - Whether different standards should apply based on lot size or zoning district
  - How to address existing platted lots and nonconformities

### Summary

Increasing side yard setbacks from 6 feet to 10 feet presents a range of potential benefits related to privacy, safety, and neighborhood character, while also introducing considerations related to housing density, cost, and development flexibility. Larger setbacks may contribute to a more open development pattern and improved long-term livability, particularly in lower-density residential areas. However, the change could also reduce buildable area on individual lots, potentially impacting lot layout efficiency and limiting design options on narrower parcels.

Additionally, the amendment may have broader implications on housing affordability by increasing land

costs per unit and reducing overall development yield in affected districts. The existing mix of setback standards across zoning districts reflects differing development intensities, and modifying these standards may alter how those districts function over time. Consideration should also be given to how such a change would apply to existing platted lots and whether flexibility or exemptions may be appropriate. Overall, the potential amendment involves balancing community character objectives with practical development considerations, and further direction from the Planning Commission would help determine whether additional analysis or ordinance drafting is warranted.

The discussion included potential impacts on residents, developers, builders, and the city, as well as the need for standardization across all districts. Commissioner Ross Otto expressed concerns about the impact on existing homes and the ability to build garages and other structures. Chair Nate Ehalt emphasized the need for objective data and the potential impact on legal non-conforming uses and insurance. The commissioners discussed the importance of balancing long-term planning goals with practical development realities and the need for further research and data collection.

b. Maximum Density - R3 Zoning

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Maximum Density - R3 Zoning. City staff has been asked to evaluate a potential text amendment to the City Code that would establish a maximum base density within the R-3 High Density Residential zoning district. Currently, the Dimensional and Design Standards Table identifies the R-3 district as allowing “6+ units per acre” with no defined upper limit. The proposed amendment would revise this standard to a defined density range of 6 to 18 units per acre.

This report is intended to outline potential impacts, benefits, and considerations of establishing a maximum density cap. No formal action is requested at this time; this is for discussion and policy direction only.

The R-3 zoning district is intended to accommodate higher-density residential development, including town homes, apartments, and multi-family housing.

As shown in the Dimensional and Design Standards Table, R-3 districts already include development controls such as:

- Maximum building height of up to 3 stories or 50 feet
- Impervious surface limits up to 70-75% depending on housing type
- Minimum lot size and building coverage limitations
- Setbacks and design requirements

While these standards regulate building form and site design, the absence of a maximum density allows for potentially high unit concentrations if other standards are met.

Proposed Amendment

Current Standard:

- Max Base Density: 6+ units per acre (no cap)

Proposed Standard:

- Maximum Base Density: 6 to 18 units per acre

This would introduce a clear upper limit on residential density within the R-3 district.

The following analysis outlines the potential impacts of establishing a maximum density of 18 units per acre within the R-3 zoning district. This amendment would influence how residential developments are

designed and how they function within the community. The impacts are evaluated from multiple perspectives, including residents, developers, infrastructure, and overall land use planning, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with implementing a defined density cap.

### Impacts to Residents

#### Potential Benefits:

- Greater predictability in neighborhood character and intensity
- Reduced concerns related to overcrowding, parking demand, and traffic congestion
- Improved compatibility with adjacent lower-density zoning districts

#### Potential Challenges:

- May limit availability of diverse and more affordable housing types
- Could reduce opportunities for compact, walkable development patterns
- Potential upward pressure on housing costs due to constrained supply

### Impacts to Developers

#### Potential Benefits:

- Provides clear expectations and certainty for project planning
- Aligns density with infrastructure and site design constraints
- May reduce community opposition by limiting perceived over development

#### Potential Challenges:

- Reduced flexibility in site design and yield optimization
- Lower overall unit counts may impact project feasibility and return on investment
- Could discourage higher-density or mixed-use style developments

### Infrastructure and Service Impacts

#### Potential Benefits

- Helps ensure density levels remain consistent with available infrastructure capacity
- Reduces strain on utilities, roadways, and public services
- Easier long-term planning for schools, parks, and emergency services

#### Potential Challenges

- Lower densities may result in less efficient use of existing infrastructure
- Could increase per-unit cost of infrastructure expansion or maintenance

### Cost Considerations

#### Developers:

- Fewer units per acre may increase per-unit land and development costs
- Potential need for higher sale or rental prices to offset reduced density

#### City:

- Lower densities may reduce tax base potential per acre
- Lower residential density may reduce overall demand on public infrastructure systems; however, it may also decrease cost efficiency as infrastructure serves fewer households

## Planning Considerations

- A maximum density aligns R-3 zoning with common planning practices that define both minimum and maximum thresholds
- Helps reinforce transitions between zoning districts
- Supports long-term comprehensive planning goals if density targets are defined

However:

- May limit the City's ability to accommodate future housing demand
- Could reduce flexibility in responding to market conditions

## Key Policy Considerations

When evaluating this amendment, decision-makers may wish to consider:

- Whether 18 units per acre appropriately reflects the desired intensity of R-3 zoning
- If different density caps should apply to different housing types (apartments vs. townhomes)
- How this change aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan and housing goals
- Whether additional design standards could achieve similar outcomes without limiting density

Chair Nate Ehalt and Commissioner Steve Cich discussed the historical context of the density cap, mentioning that it was previously 18 plus seven. Commissioner Steve Cich suggested that 25 units could be a reasonable number, considering the height restrictions and the desire to keep a rural look. Chair Nate Ehalt raised concerns about the compatibility of higher-density areas with lower-density rural or single-family home areas.

### c. Design Standards

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Design Standard and Building Material Requirements review. City staff has been directed by the Planning Commission, Economic Development Authority (EDA), and City Council to evaluate the City's existing design standards under Section 66-943 of City Code. This review intends to determine whether current regulations are overly restrictive and whether modifications could improve development flexibility, reduce construction costs, and enhance the City's competitiveness for commercial and industrial investment.

The City of North Branch currently utilizes a three-zone design overlay system that establishes varying exterior building material requirements based on visibility and location within the community. These standards are intended to promote architectural quality, ensure cohesive design, and protect long-term property values. Recently, the City has taken steps to modernize these standards. Most notably, Insulated Metal Panels were added as a permitted Class II material through Ordinance No. 397-25, reflecting a shift toward accommodating newer construction materials while maintaining design intent. This report provides a comprehensive review of existing standards, summarizes how North Branch compares to surrounding communities, and outlines potential options for amending material percentage requirements and zoning applicability. This item is for discussion and policy direction only. No formal action is requested at this time.

## Potential Amendment Options

Based on the analysis, several potential modifications could be considered:

### *Material Percentage Adjustments*

- Reduce Zone 1 requirement from 65% to approximately 50% Class 1 Materials

- Reduce Zone 2 requirement from 50%
- Maintain flexibility in Zone 3

#### *Façade-Based Standards*

- Focus higher-quality material requirements on street-facing facades only
- Allow greater flexibility on side and rear elevations

#### *Expanded Material Allowances*

- Continue allowing modern materials such as insulated metal panels
- Shift focus toward design quality rather than strict material classifications

#### *Design Overlay Zone Modifications*

- Simplify or reevaluate the current three zone structure

#### Cost and Development Considerations

##### *Developers*

- Reduced material requirements may lower construction costs
- Increased flexibility may improve project feasibility
- Could encourage a broader range of commercial and industrial development

##### *City*

- Increased development activity may expand tax base
- More flexible standards may improve competitiveness with neighboring cities
- Lower material standards could result in long-term maintenance concerns if not carefully balanced

The City's current design standards have been effective in promoting quality development but may benefit from targeted updates to improve flexibility and reduce development costs. Recent amendments, including the addition of insulated metal panels, demonstrate a shift toward modernization. Adjustments to material percentage requirements, increased flexibility for non-visible façades, and potential revisions to the design overlay zones could help the City remain competitive while maintaining its desired architectural character.

Commissioner Steve Cich proposed reducing material requirements to 50% for street-facing sides and maintaining flexibility for non-street-facing sides. Commissioners Cich and Otto discussed the potential impact of reducing material requirements on the overall design and competitiveness of buildings. Chair Ehalt and Commissioner Cich discussed the appropriateness of the current design standards zones, particularly along the I-35 and Highway 95 corridors. Chair Ehalt suggested that the zones may need to be re-evaluated to ensure they are appropriate for the specific areas they cover. Chair Ehalt and Commissioner Cich discussed the potential impact of changing the zones on the overall design and competitiveness of buildings.

#### d. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's)

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). At the April 7 Planning Commission meeting, a resident raised the possibility of adopting regulations to allow Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) as an additional housing option within residential zoning districts. ADU's are

smaller, secondary residential units located on the same lot as a principal dwelling and may be either attached or detached. ADU's have gained increased attention as a planning tool to expand housing supply without large-scale development, support multi-generational living arrangements, and provide supplemental income opportunities for homeowners.

Currently, the North Branch City Code does not explicitly permit ADU's in residential zoning districts. As a result, the establishment of a secondary dwelling unit on a single parcel would require code interpretation or approval of a variance.

Nearby jurisdictions, including Chisago County, Minnesota, and Isanti County, Minnesota, allow ADU's (often referred to as "Accessory Apartments" or "Guest Houses") under specific conditions, typically within agricultural or rural zoning districts. These ordinances provide a useful framework for evaluating how ADU's could be regulated within the City of North Branch. This item is presented for informational purposes only, and no action is requested at this time. Planning Commission members are asked to review the attached ordinances from Chisago and Isanti Counties in advance of a more detailed discussion at the June Planning Commission meeting. That discussion will focus on whether the City should consider incorporating ADU regulations into its zoning code and how such regulations may be structured.

As the Planning Commission reviews the concept of allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), several policy and implementation considerations should be evaluated. These considerations are intended to guide future discussion on how ADU's could be incorporated into the City of North Branch zoning code in a manner that balances housing flexibility with neighborhood compatibility.

e. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis gave a Comprehensive Plan Update. Staff will be taking a deeper dive into the Comprehensive Plan and revising the language we discussed at the last meeting, along with making some minor tweaks to wording, numbers, and possibly updating some data depending on how in-depth we decide to go. Since a full comp plan review is planned in a couple of years, we're also weighing what's worth addressing now versus later.

The main topics from the last meeting were housing, transportation, utilities, and public safety. Housing and land use are likely the biggest areas where the planning commission may want to review and provide suggestions. If you read through the update and notice anything you think should be changed right away, feel free to send us your suggestions. The City is shooting to have a draft available to the City Council for their review and ultimate approval at the 2nd meeting in June.

9. NEXT MEETING - June 2, 2026; 6:30 P.M

10. ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission Meeting was adjourned at 8:58PM.