



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt  
Chair

Steve Cich  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 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, April 7, 2026**

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chair Nathan Ehalt led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **ROLL CALL**

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

**Absent:**

**Remote:**

**Others Present:** Mayor Kevin Schieber

**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:** Ross Otto

**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 March 4, 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 ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Plat Public Hearing. The Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Plat Public Hearing will be postponed to the meeting on May 5, 2026.

Chair Nathan Ehalt opened the Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Public Hearing at 6:34 PM, if anyone who was present wanted to say something to the Commission. There wasn't anyone in attendance who wanted to comment. Chair Nathan Ehalt closed the Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Public Hearing at 6:34 PM.

Motion to postpone the Sherwood Pines 2nd Addition Preliminary Plat Public Hearing to the May 5th, 2026, Planning Commission meeting.

**RESULT: Passed**

**MOVER: Ross Otto**

**SECONDER: Kelly Maurer**

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

**ABSENT:**

**NOTES:**

b. Surfacing ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Surfacing Public Hearing. City staff have been reviewing provisions of the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or subject to varying interpretation. One section that has repeatedly arisen during discussions with developers and property owners is Section 66-855 (Surfacing), particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial districts are required to be paved.

As currently written, Section 66-855 only establishes surfacing requirements for residential properties two (2.0) acres or smaller and does not clearly address surfacing standards for commercial or industrial zoned properties. This omission has resulted in uncertainty during project review and inconsistent expectations between applicants and the city.

Additionally, Section 66-856 (Drainage) requires poured-in-place concrete curbing for parking lots and access drives within commercial and industrial developments. The intent of this requirement assumes hard-surfaced parking areas; however, this relationship is not explicitly reflected in the surfacing section, creating potential conflicts in interpretation and enforcement.

During prior Planning Commission discussions, Commissioners expressed interest in maintaining neighborhood appearance and protecting public infrastructure while also allowing reasonable flexibility for residential properties, particularly for side or rear parking areas. At the February 3rd Planning Commission Meeting, surfacing locations for residential properties 2 acres and under were debated, and it was determined that it is appropriate to require hard-surfaced driveways and parking areas in the front yard, while allowing flexibility for gravel surfaces on the side yard.

At the March 7th Planning Commission Meeting, staff presented three options for text amendments that addressed driveways and parking surfaces in the front, side, and rear yard locations. The Planning Commission agreed that Option 1 was the preferred language to include in City Code. There was additional discussion about clarifying the impervious surface definition to clearly identify surface types. Proposed text amendment language to the definitions section of city code is found in the Analysis section of this report.

Motion to recommend/deny approval to the City Council:

- Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing establishing updated surfacing requirements for residential, commercial, and industrial properties.
- Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-8 Definitions to include material types in the “impervious surface” definition

Chair Nathan Ehalt opened the Surfacing Public Hearing at 6:38 PM. There wasn't anyone in attendance who wanted to comment. Chair Nathan Ehalt closed the Surfacing Public Hearing at 6:38 PM.

Motion to approve Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-855 Surfacing, establishing updated surfacing requirements for residential, commercial, and industrial properties, and approve Text Amendment to City Code Sec 66-8 Definitions to include material types in the “impervious surface” definition.

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

## 8. REPORTS

a. Farm Winery Discussion - Text Amendment or Rezoning

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Farm Winery Discussion - Text Amendment or Rezoning. City staff has received a request for a proposed winery on a vacant parcel (PID 11.00458.00). The prospective owners intend to establish a small vineyard and winery operation on the site. 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.

To accommodate the proposed use, two options are available 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. The applicants have also indicated plans to construct a barn to support 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.

Staff is seeking Planning Commission discussion and direction on whether to pursue a rezoning of the parcel or a text amendment to the zoning code.

The applicants were present to answer any questions that the commission had. There was some discussion regarding the access to 95 and the driveway placement approval by the State. The applicants explain that if everything gets approved, they would probably start building this summer. It would be 16 acres with 10 of them planted. The Mayor brought up that traffic is a concern of his and that there may be something needs to be considered down the road if traffic increases.

City Planner Ryan Saltis will send a rezoning application to the applicants.

b. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's) INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's). Resident Ben Hedberg is requesting the City to adopt an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) section within the City Code.

The City currently does not allow for ADU's. Section 66-898 "Accessory Buildings, Uses, and Equipment" addresses this with the following language:

(h) Detached garages and accessory buildings shall not include living space nor shall be used as a dwelling unit.

However, surrounding cities and counties have ADU ordinances in place.

Ben would like the opportunity to share the following information with the Planning Commission:

- Overview/Definition of Accessory Dwelling Units
- Purpose and Benefits of ADU's
- Drawbacks of ADU's
- Other City's experiences with ADU's
- Proposed Code Change

Staff is seeking Planning Commission discussion and direction.

Ben Hedberg was present and discussed his reason for the request, and also to answer any question that the commission had. Ben explained that an ADU is a secondary dwelling on a single property—often called a guest house, granny flat, or in-law suite. These can be attached (like a basement or garage apartment) or detached structures.

Historically, zoning rules from the 1950s discouraged multiple dwellings on one property. That policy still exists in North Branch today. However, attitudes have shifted—especially after the pandemic and the rise of housing alternatives like tiny homes and short-term rentals.

Many nearby communities, including Isanti County, have already adopted ADU policies. While our county allows ADUs, the city of North Branch does not—putting us behind current trends. Minnesota overall is very supportive of ADUs.

ADUs offer practical benefits:

- Housing options for young adults not ready to buy a home
- Space for aging parents or caregivers
- Opportunities for homeowners to generate rental income
- Increased housing availability during local events
- Additional tax revenue for the city

They also help people stay in the community longer by offering flexible living arrangements.

Concerns like parking and neighborhood impact can be addressed through clear policies. Other cities already require off-street parking and have straightforward application processes—we can learn from those models. Even our current comprehensive plan states that North Branch is open to considering ADUs. We don't need to wait for a new plan—we can act now. In short, ADUs provide more housing options, support residents at different life stages, and can be implemented responsibly with thoughtful guidelines.

Chair Nate Ehalt spoke, saying that he's a firm believer that if we can provide more opportunity for property rights and folks to be able to use their property in a more effective manner, we should also be considering this. Nate asked staff if we'd be able to circle back to this within the next 90 days or so to discuss further.

c. Zoning Ordinances and Building Design Standard Amendments

VERBAL  
UPDATE

Mayor Kevin Schieber presented the Zoning Ordinances and Building Design Standard Amendments. Following the last City Council meeting, several zoning and development-related topics were identified for further discussion. These include side yard setbacks, maximum density standards, design standards, and the Central Business District (CBD) boundary. The intent is to better understand Council priorities, community expectations, and the potential impacts of any changes.

### 1. Side Yard Setbacks

Currently, most residential developments require 6-foot side yard setbacks. The Council discussed the possibility of increasing this to 10 feet to create more space between homes.

The motivation behind this proposal is to:

- Preserve the small-town, rural character of the community
- Avoid the perception of homes being “stacked” too closely together
- Maintain a sense of openness that residents value

However, several considerations were raised:

- Increasing setbacks may reduce the number of buildable lots in a development
- This could increase housing costs and impact affordability

- Developers may face challenges redesigning projects already in progress

There was general agreement that even small changes (e.g., 4 additional feet) can have ripple effects on lot widths, home design, and overall development yield.

## 2. Maximum Density Standards

The Council is considering reinstating a previous standard (pre-2018) that capped R-3 zoning density at 18 dwelling units per acre.

Key goals include:

- Preventing overly large apartment complexes
- Maintaining a scale consistent with community character
- Supporting a balanced mix of housing types

At the same time, the group acknowledged:

- The need for additional housing, including apartments, due to low vacancy rates
- The importance of providing diverse and affordable housing options
- That density restrictions may limit the city's ability to support workforce growth and attract employers

This item was generally viewed as a high priority, with interest in acting within the next 30–60 days.

## 3. Design Standards

The Council discussed whether current design standards—such as requirements for brick, stone, or specific exterior materials—may be too restrictive.

Concerns raised:

- High material requirements can significantly increase construction costs
- Some businesses may choose to locate in other communities with less stringent standards
- New materials and construction methods (e.g., prefab panels) may offer cost-effective, durable alternatives

Suggested approach:

- Focus on performance and durability rather than prescribing specific materials
- Encourage architectural quality without overregulating
- Identify ways to reduce costs while maintaining long-term appearance and value

This was seen as an opportunity to support economic development while maintaining reasonable aesthetic expectations.

## 4. Central Business District (CBD) Boundary

There was discussion about potentially contracting the CBD boundary, rather than extending it further.

Key points:

- Some areas currently designated as CBD include existing residential homes with limited redevelopment potential
- Traffic and safety concerns (especially along Highway 95) may make further commercial expansion impractical
- The city may benefit from focusing investment in the core downtown area instead

An alternative concept was introduced:

- Create a transitional or mixed-use zone (e.g., “village district”)
- Allow existing homes to remain and be improved
- Permit small-scale businesses while maintaining neighborhood character

This item was considered a lower priority, but still important for long-term planning.

#### 5. Industrial / Business Zoning Flexibility

The Council also discussed whether certain business or industrial areas—particularly along the freeway—should allow:

- Expanded permitted uses
- More flexible zoning classifications (e.g., light industrial or mixed-use)

Considerations include:

- Avoiding overly restrictive zoning that limits economic opportunities
- Planning for future infrastructure changes (e.g., potential interchange development)
- Ensuring land is used for its highest and best long-term purpose

This remains an ongoing discussion with no immediate action proposed.

#### Key Themes from the Discussion

- Balance is critical: Growth is inevitable, but it should be managed in a way that reflects community values
- Community character matters: Many residents value space, openness, and a small-town feel
- Affordability and flexibility must be considered alongside regulation
- Over regulation vs. under regulation is a central tension, with differing perspectives among stakeholders
- Timing is important: Some changes may need to happen quickly to avoid conflicts with incoming development proposals

#### Next Steps

- Prioritize analysis of the first three items (setbacks, density, design standards)
- Continue discussion and aim for initial recommendations within 30–60 days
- Provide data on:
  - Potential lot loss and housing impacts from setback/density changes
  - Economic impacts of design standards (e.g., cost differences, lost projects)

d. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis introduced the Comprehensive Plan Update. The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee requests that the Planning Commission review two specific sections of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan:

Section 2: Values and Vision (all groups will review this section)

Section 3: Land Use and Growth

Your focused review is vital as we move toward the final revision of the plan. This should include a thorough overview of the current language, and listing any changes that the group feel necessary due to the changes and growth of the City.

The committee met on February 18 and March 18 and discussed the following items:

- Urban Service Area Boundary
- Types of Housing/Demand
- ADU's: Where are they acceptable and identified a Goal for placing regulations
- Short Term Housing
- Redevelop and Repurpose opportune areas
- CBD is emphasized for only holding .18% of the total land in the city
- Analyze planned transportation routes and review zoning accordingly
- Update acreages, numbers, facts, and data within Comp Plan
- Ecological Preservation
- Goal: Design Standards

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 15, at 6 pm at City Hall.

April 15 2026: Housing, Transportation, Utilities, Public Safety -

May 2026: Presentation of the Comprehensive Plan review results to the Planning Commission for public hearing and consideration, and Council approval in June.

9. NEXT MEETING - May 5, 2026, 6:30PM

10. ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission meeting adjourned at 8:23 PM.

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

**ABSENT:**

**NOTES:**