



NORTH BRANCH

—Minnesota—

Nathan Ehalt
Chair

Steve Cich
Commissioner

Ross Otto
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer
Commissioner

**PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 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, March 3, 2026

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

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:

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: Ross Otto

SECONDER: Steve Cich

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 February 3, 2026 Planning Commission meeting minutes ACTION

RESULT: **Passed**

MOVER: **Steve Cich**

SECONDER: **Ross Otto**

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

ABSENT:

NOTES:

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

8. REPORTS

a. Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-855 Surfacing ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Text Amendment to City Code Sec. 66-855 Surfacing. The Planning Commission held a public hearing at the February 2, 2026, Planning Commission meeting to obtain public input on potential Text Amendments to clarify City Code Sec 66-855. Surfacing to include commercial and industrial zoned properties requiring hard surfaces for driveways and parking areas. There was no public comment received at the meeting. The Planning Commission further discussed and provided input to staff for potential modifications to the code and to bring back to the March 3, 2026, meeting for discussion.

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. Rear yard driveway/parking surfaces

should be analyzed and discussed further to review whether the city should allow designated vehicle routes and parking behind the principal structure.

Regulating surfacing requirements across all development types supports orderly site design and overall community quality. Hard-surfaced parking and driveway areas improve safety, accessibility, and appearance while reducing long-term maintenance concerns. Establishing clear standards also promotes predictable development expectations and consistent code administration citywide.

Example Code Language Option 1:

“All driveways and parking areas serving commercial and industrial uses shall be hard surfaced with bituminous, concrete, or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director. On residential lots two (2) acres or less, the driveway from the public street to the front façade of the principal dwelling shall be hard surfaced. Parking areas and driveways located within the side or rear yard may be surfaced with gravel or other approved aggregate material.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Includes front and rear yard gravel surfacing flexibility
- Protects streets from gravel tracking near public right-of-way
- Maintains consistent neighborhood streetscape appearance
- Provides homeowner flexibility for recreational vehicles and accessory parking
- Reduces paving costs for homeowners
- Targets hard surfacing where usage intensity is highest

Example Code Language Option 2:

“All driveways and parking areas serving commercial and industrial uses shall be hard surfaced with bituminous, concrete, or equivalent pavement as approved by the City’s Public Works Director.

On residential lots two (2) acres or less, the driveway from the public street to the front façade of the principal dwelling shall be hard surfaced. Parking areas or accessory driveways located within a side yard may be surfaced with gravel or other approved aggregate material. Gravel or aggregate driveways and parking areas shall not be permitted within the rear yard.”

This language accomplishes the following:

- Maintain hard-surfaced access from the street to the home
- Allow limited homeowner flexibility for side-yard parking (trailers, boats, RV’s)
- Prevent expansion of informal parking areas behind homes
- Reduce visual and drainage impacts associated with rear-yard vehicle circulation
- Maintain clearer enforcement standards by limiting aggregate areas to one defined yard location

By allowing aggregate surfacing only in side yards, the City preserves opportunities for accessory parking while discouraging large rear-yard parking areas that may create drainage concerns, screening issues, or impacts to adjacent residential properties. This approach also simplifies administration by establishing clear locational limits for non-paved surfaces.

There was some discussion amongst the Planning Commission as to what constitutes impervious. Is Class 5 considered to be an impervious surface? An impervious surface means an artificial or natural surface through which water or air cannot penetrate. Do we need to have a clearer definition in the surfacing section, making it clear as to what material can be used, identifying bituminous?

There seemed to be a consensus that Option 1 would be good, as long as we define the types of surfaces and what should be included in the surfacing section. City Planner Ryan Saltis will bring this back to the Planning Commission next month.

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Comprehensive Plan Update. There was a meeting in February, and some of the Planning Commission, City Council, and various staff attended and broke into small groups. One of the small groups discussed accessory dwelling units, separate from the primary house. Another item discussed is to really dial in our design standards and whether they need to be revised. Ryan feels that we have the zones identified, like along 35, along 61, and 95. Heavily traveled areas typically have higher design standards. Then, there are sections like the industrial park where we're not as stringent about what materials are on the buildings.

Chair Ehalt said that the concern is that when we look at addressing this, it impacts the entire business district, so we need to be very cognizant and aware that one section change, which might make sense to a small portion of the City, is going to impact any acres that are undeveloped currently. He said he thinks we need to be really thoughtful about that, so we don't have a tax base issue long term. The valuable properties will build up much more quickly, which is a benefit right out of the gate, but they won't stand the test of time. That's where these design standards with materials really come into play.

There will be another meeting on Wednesday, March 18th, at 6 PM at the City Hall.

9. NEXT MEETING - March 3, 2026 - 3:30 PM

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on April 7, 2026.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The City Planning Commission adjourned at 7:07 PM.