



# NORTH BRANCH

## —Minnesota—

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR AGENDA  
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2026 @ 6:30 PM  
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH  
BRANCH, MN 55056**

Steve Cich  
Chair

Nathan Ehalt  
Commissioner

Ross Otto  
Commissioner

Kelly Maurer  
Commissioner

### **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, February 3, 2026**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Steve Cich called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Steve Cich led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. OATH OF OFFICE

a. Oath of Office - Steve Cich

VERBAL  
UPDATE

The oath of office was administered to Steve Cich to the Planning Commission by Community Development Director, Nate Sondrol.

4. ROLL CALL

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

**Absent:**

**Remote:**

**Others Present:**

**Notes:**

5. 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.*

6. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

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

7. ELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE CHAIR

a. Elect Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair for 2026

ACTION

Commissioner Kelly Maurer nominated Nathan Ehalt for Chair.

**RESULT:** Passed  
**MOVER:** Kelly Maurer  
**SECONDER:** Ross Otto  
**AYES:** None  
**ABSENT:**  
**NOTES:**

Commissioner Ross Otto nominated Commissioner Steve Cich as Vice Chair.

**RESULT:** Passed  
**MOVER:** Ross Otto  
**SECONDER:** Kelly Maurer  
**AYES:** None  
**ABSENT:**  
**NOTES:**

8. 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 January 6, 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:**

9. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition

ACTION

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol presented the Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition. The North Branch Economic Development Authority (EDA), has submitted a request for a Preliminary Plat for Essby Business Park 5th Addition. The site is located within the City's established industrial park area, generally west of CSAH 30, east of I-35, and south of 410th Street.

The purpose of the proposed plat is to consolidate and reconfigure existing lots, outlots, and public right-of-way areas to allow for the development of a large-scale manufacturing facility. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of a 120-acre lot intended to accommodate a future LP Siding manufacturing facility, along with additional industrial lots, outlots, drainage and utility easements, and associated right-of-way adjustments. The subject property consists of approximately 220.14 total acres and is zoned I-Industrial.

#### Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use and Zoning - Staff finds the proposed plat to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and zoning district standards.
2. Proposed Preliminary Plat - The proposed layout provides logical lot boundaries, efficient access to existing and planned public streets, and flexibility for phased industrial development while maintaining compliance with City Code requirements.
3. Plat Standards - Based on review of the Preliminary Plat, all proposed lots meet or exceed the minimum lot area, width, and depth requirements of the zoning district.
4. Engineering and Infrastructure -

- Streets & Access

The plat relies on existing and proposed public streets, including Fletcher Ave, Goodview Ave, and access connections to 410th Street and CSAH 30. The proposed vacation of a portion of Fletcher Ave right-of-way reflects the revised circulation pattern.

- Utilities

The Subject Property is located within the City's Urban Service Area and is intended to be served by municipal water, sanitary sewer, stormwater infrastructure, and other public utilities. Existing and proposed drainage and utility easements are shown on the Preliminary Plat. Final utility design, sizing, and service connections will be reviewed and approved as part of future site plan, final plat, and engineering plan submittals.

- Stormwater & Drainage

Stormwater management will be addressed through designated outlots and drainage easements. Detailed stormwater plans, grading, and erosion control measures will be required and reviewed at the time of final plat and/or site plan approval.

Public Hearing opened at 6:42 PM. There was no public input.  
Public Hearing closed at 6:43 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to City Council, approving the Preliminary Plat for Hemingway Meadows, with the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall submit and obtain approval of a Final Plat that is consistent with the approved Preliminary Plat, City Code, and Minnesota Statutes.
2. The applicant shall submit detailed engineering, utility, stormwater, grading, and erosion control plans for review and approval.
3. All required permits, fees, development agreements, and financial obligations shall be satisfied prior to the recording of the Final Plat.

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

- b. Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific. Louisiana-Pacific Corporation (LP) has submitted an application for a Conditional Use Permit to allow outdoor storage of raw materials and finished products associated with a proposed 120-acre industrial site within the City of North Branch.

The proposed facility will receive unpainted OSB-based siding products by truck and rail, which will be temporarily stored outdoors prior to being processed inside the building. Finished products will also be stored outdoors in designated storage areas prior to shipment. Outdoor storage is a required operational component of LP's ExpertFinish facilities and is necessary due to the volume, variety, and logistics of the materials involved.

The proposed outdoor storage areas are shown on the submitted site plan and will consist of large paved storage yards, internal forklift aisles, and truck circulation routes. Product stacks will generally be approximately 16 feet in height for inbound materials and less than 12 feet in height for finished products. Other outdoor storage will include pallets, empty paint totes, and related materials. Trash compactors and dumpsters will be located outdoors but under roof.

The site is planned to operate 24 hours per day, though shipping activities are currently anticipated to occur primarily during weekday day shifts.

#### Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses
2. Site Improvements and Outdoor Storage Operations
3. Consistency with City Code Requirements

Public Hearing opened up at 6:54 PM. There was no public input.  
Public Hearing closed at 6:55 PM.

Chair Nate Ehalt asked if, for some reason, the existing tree coverage somehow gets decimated by a weather event, are there any provisions that we should be considering from a screening perspective that would be longer term or replacement? City Planner Ryan Saltis explained that we don't have any screening requirements, although Forest Boulevard, County Road 30 would act as a buffer. But there

isn't anything in our City Code related to screening industrial areas.

Chair Nate Ehalt also asked about whether there is potential for expansion, if the Company was looking at operational expansion or finishing, would the company be looking at additional outdoor storage? Nathan Roach, Regional Engineering Manager at LP, answered that they would be looking at more finishing. They're balancing how much yard they build versus what the cost of that yard is versus how much they think they can sell.

Motion to recommend approval/denial to City Council, for a Conditional Use Permit for Outdoor Storage associated with a proposed manufacturing facility for Louisiana Pacific, with the following conditions of approval:

1. The applicant shall comply with all applicable city, state, and federal regulations, including but not limited to building, fire, and environmental requirements.
2. Outdoor storage materials to be stored shall limited to the areas shown on the approved site plan unless amended by the City.
3. Outdoor storage materials to be stored shall be consistent with applicant's narrative unless otherwise approved by the City.
4. Maximum storage heights shall be consistent with the applicant's narrative unless otherwise approved by the City.
5. Any substantial expansion of outdoor storage areas beyond what is approved shall require an amended Conditional Use Permit.
6. All conditions of approval are subject to modification by the City if necessary to protect public safety, health, and welfare or to meet future code requirements.

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

c. Variance for Lot Width reduction at PID 16.00482.10 ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the Variance for Lot Width reduction at PID 16.00482.10. Dennis Christ (Applicant) has requested approval for a Variance from the City of North Branch Zoning Code Sec 66-210 minimum lot width requirement for an R-2 zoned parcel with 3-6 attached units. The subject property is legally described as PID 16.00482.10 and is generally located West of Oakview Ave and South of Pecan St. The parcel is currently 120 feet in width, while the zoning ordinance requires a minimum lot width of 150 feet for the proposed development. The variance is requested to allow construction of a four-unit residential building consistent in size, scale, and orientation with the existing adjacent multi-family building immediately to the north.

The subject property and the adjacent parcel were historically under common ownership and were developed at a time when zoning standards permitted the existing configuration. The lot has remained vacant for several years, and all necessary public utilities (water and sewer) are already installed and sized to accommodate a four-unit building.

Issue(s) to Consider

1. Land Use/Zoning and Surrounding Uses - The Subject Property is zoned R2 – Medium Density Residential and guided LUR-2 - Land Use Medium Density Residential, per the Comprehensive Plan. The subject site is surrounded by similar zoned R-2 townhomes to the north, B-Business zoned parcels to the west, and R-3 High Density Residential developments to the east. The proposed use is permitted within the zoning district, and the variance request relates solely to lot width, not use or density beyond what already exists in the immediate area.
2. Variance from Lot Width Requirements - It's consistent with the comp plan.

Public Hearing opened up at 7:08 PM. There was no public input.  
Public Hearing closed at 7:08 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to the City Council for a Variance from the minimum lot width requirement to allow a lot width of 120 feet where 150 feet is required, for property located at PID 16.00482.10 subject to the following conditions:

1. The development shall substantially conform to the plans submitted with the variance application for a 4-unit townhome development.
2. All other applicable City Code requirements shall be met unless otherwise modified by this variance.
3. Any future expansion or reconfiguration of the lot shall comply with current zoning standards.

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

d. Hemingway Meadows Minor Subdivision

ACTION

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented Hemingway Meadows Minor Subdivision. Reliable Land and Trust (Applicant) has submitted a request for a Minor Subdivision for a new residential subdivision known as Hemingway Meadows, located generally east of Hemingway Ave and south of 372nd St. The undeveloped Subject Property consists of approximately 40.08 acres and is guided and zoned RR “Rural-Residential”. The Preliminary Plat proposes the creation of 4 single-family residential lots that are each approximately 9.7 - 9.8 acres in lot size.

The applicant has submitted a complete application, including preliminary plat drawings, wetland delineation, and septic locations.

Issue(s) to Consider

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

Public Hearing opened up at 7:16 PM. There was no public input.  
Public Hearing closed at 7:16 PM.

Motion to recommend approval to City Council, approving the Minor Subdivision for Hemingway Meadows, with the following conditions:

1. Chisago County approval of the Wetland Permit Application and Wetland Delineation Report is required prior to construction on the lots.
2. The application shall provide the required Park dedication in the form of land or fees prior to release of the Final Plat for recording.
3. The Applicant or the future owner of the lots shall obtain all necessary approvals, including submittal and approval of a site grading plan, and pay all applicable fees prior to commencing construction on the lots.
4. All fees and financial obligations shall be received by the City prior to releasing the approval documents related to this project for r

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

e. 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. City staff has been reviewing the City Code to clarify sections that may be confusing or misleading. One section that has repeatedly come up in discussions with developers is the surfacing requirement in Section 66-855, particularly regarding whether parking areas and driveways in commercial and industrial developments should be paved.

As currently written, the surfacing section only specifies paving requirements for residential properties that are two (2.0) acres or smaller and does not clearly address surfacing standards for commercial and industrial zoned properties. Additionally, Section 66-856 (Drainage) requires poured-in-place concrete curbing for parking lots and access drives in commercial and industrial developments. The intent of this section assumes hard-surfaced parking areas; however, this relationship is not clearly reflected in the surfacing section and should be addressed to avoid conflicting interpretations and enforcement.

At the January 6th, 2026, Planning Commission Meeting, additional discussion occurred regarding whether the two-acre threshold for residential properties requiring hard surfacing remains appropriate. Planning Commissioners expressed interest in reducing the two-acre hard surface requirement down to one acre and directed staff to research the impacts of this possible text amendment.

Public Hearing opened up at 7:23 PM. There was no public input.  
Public Hearing closed at 7:24 PM.

After a brief discussion among the Planning Commission, they agreed that option 4, needs to have updated language added from staff and postponed until next month.

Hard Surfacing in Front Yards Only



The City Council has a purchase agreement in place for the sale of the property, which is comprised of two (2) parcels totaling approximately 0.41 acres to MN Bolt & Screw, LLC. The parcels are legally described as Lot 1, Block 1, North Branch Downtown Addition, and Lot 4, Block 1, North Branch Downtown Addition. The company is proposing to use the property for the sale of industrial products supplies (nuts, bolts, threaded rod, unistrut, and pipe supports).

Per state statute, the Planning Commission must analyze proposed sales of city-owned land to determine (and make the appropriate finding) that the intended purpose of the buyer is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Chair Nate Ehalt asked if there was a plan to improve the gravel parking lot. The proposed buyer was in attendance and answered that at some point they would want to tar it. Commissioner Steve Cich asked if there were any thoughts about expanding the existing building. The proposed buyer answered that hopefully there would be a time for expansion, but not in the immediate future. Councilmember Patrick Meacham asked if there would be a retail component at this location, and the buyer responded that, in fact, there will be a retail component at this location and that he is aware of ADA-compliant graphics.

Chair Nate Ehalt brought up his concern with the gravel surface with vehicle traffic that's coming and going, and delivery vehicles, there will be a lot of tracking of gravel.

The Motion for the proposed use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

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

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol gave the Comprehensive Plan Update. Currently, the comprehensive plan is specifically focusing on the vision. Nate asked the Planning Commission if the commission still feels like the same vision that we have today.

There will be a Comprehensive Plan work session meeting on Wednesday, February 18th, 2026, at 6 PM at the City Hall.

11. NEXT MEETING - March 3, 2026, 6:30PM

12. ADJOURNMENT

The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:14 PM.