

PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 2025 @ 6:30 PM

City Hall, 6408 Elm St., North Branch, MN 55056

Members Present: Steve Cich, Gary Shaeffer, Ross Otto, Nate Ehalt

Council Liaison Patrick Meacham, City Staff

Members Absent: None

1. CALL TO ORDER
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
3. ROLL CALL

Members present: Cich, Otto, Schaefer, Ehalt, Council Liaison Meacham, along with City Staff and members of the public.

4. AGENDA APPROVAL

Member Cich asked Community Development Director Nate Sondrol if the item for the Main Street Apartments has been pushed back to the July 1st Planning Commission Meeting. Sondrol confirmed that the developer has asked City Staff to move the item to the upcoming July 1st meeting. Otto motions to approve the agenda with the modification to move the public hearing for the Main Street Apartments to the July 1st meeting, seconded by Member Schaefer. All aye 4-0, motion approved unanimously.

5. CONSENT AGENDA
 - a. Approval of May 6, 2025 Planning Commission Minutes

Member Schaefer motions to approve the minutes from the May 6, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting, seconded by Member Otto. All aye 4-0, motion approved unanimously.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments. Public comments were closed at 6:35 P.M.

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS
 - a. Public Hearing to consider a conditional use permit to allow for multiple principal buildings on one parcel for the Main Street Apartments

This item has been moved to the July 1st Planning Commission Meeting per request from the developer.

- b. Public Hearing to consider a Comprehensive Land Use Amendment and Rezoning from R-2 to R-3

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the request for a Comprehensive Land Use Amendment and Rezoning from R-2 to R-3. The subject site is located on a vacant lot to the west of the Cherokee Place Townhomes and to the south of 400th Street. The vacant parcel is roughly 7 acres in size identifiable as PID 11.00359.30 and is owned by the North Branch Economic Development Authority. There has been interest in this parcel for apartment style housing which is currently not permitted in the R-2 Zoning District. A request has been made to change the guided land use as LUR-3 and to change the zoning to R-3. The R-3 District will allow for apartment style housing and change the density from 3-6 units per acre (in the R-2 District) to 6+ units per acre in the R-3. The R-3 District accommodates High Density development.

Public Hearing:

The Public Hearing was opened. Brenda VanElsberg a resident of 399th St began the public hearing. VanElsberg mentioned that the 14 single family homes on 399th had income requirements and was a 55+ community. She mentioned that apartments on this vacant lot are not harmonious with the surrounding single family houses and is inconsistent with the comprehensive plan. Traffic was also a concern with high density development and she expressed that it would be dangerous for surrounding residents. Crime, property values, light pollution were additional concerns mentioned. VanElsberg asked the Planning Commission to reject the proposal for the Land Use Amendment and Rezoning. Walt Anderson approached the podium for Public Comment. Walt expressed that the City should look at all development as a whole with what it does to a city. Walt mentioned that the city does not have official controls to regulate and guide zoning. The Public Comment was closed at 7:05 P.M.

Planning Commission Member Ehalt asked staff if the proposed interchange was known when the R-2 District was established. Sondrol said that the last comp plan update was in 2018 but the interchange was a part of the city's long-term goals. Ehalt asked when the Cherokee Place development was approved. Sondrol said around 2020 or 2021 was when the development was in place. Ehalt asked these questions to better understand the timeline of the land uses and what was known when residents moved in to the single family houses on 399th. Member Schaefer said that the interchange has been planned for many years. Sondrol mentioned that the city is in the process of acquiring the southwest corner of the proposed interchange but has been seeking funding to move this process along. Cich asked if the parcel was left as R-2, would the development be along 399th and 400th. Sondrol mentioned that access to the site would not be off of 400th St and would rather be along Fletcher Ave and/or 399th St. Sondrol mentioned the difference in density going from 3-6 units per acre in the R-2 to 6+ units in the R-3 District. Cich asked if this density would limit development by keeping the parcel R-2. Sondrol said that it would limit development from a density perspective. Sondrol also said that businesses in the industrial park have asked for separation from single family homes and this is why the designated R-3 land along 400th and Forest Blvd was rezoned in the past to industrial. The rezoning of the subject parcel would replace this lost R-3 designated land in this area. Cich also asked about the design and height requirements of R-3. Sondrol said that the max height is 50 feet for development in this designation.

The nearby apartments to the east of the subject site are an example of what could be built on the vacant parcel. Sondrol said that the housing study of the city concludes that the city is behind on rental unit numbers with a goal of 30% being designated as rentals. Currently the city is around 14% of its housing inventory being available for rent. The housing study also addresses that nearly 75% of residents lack the income needed to purchase a median value home. Ehalt asked if the EDA has been working with a developer interested in the site. Sondrol confirmed that there has been interest in the site but they haven't been provided with plans. Ehalt concluded that these are difficult decisions to make and that based on the information provided that the city may have to explore alternative sites or areas for high density development. Ehalt said that they should be respectful of what is already in place in the area and recommended denial of the denial of the rezoning and comp plan amendment. Cich agreed that he is thinking similarly and the city can look at alternative options through the comp plan amendment process. Ehalt asked if there is anything else that staff could provide that wasn't already in the agenda packets to consider. Sondrol mentioned that there are studies regarding concerns of property values decreasing with high density development and that there is not conclusive evidence of high density directly impacting surrounding property values. Property value concerns are mostly tied to instances of maintenance issues or blight. Ehalt agreed that it is tough to directly correlate concerns of crime, safety, and property values with high density residential and would not make these concerns part of the denial findings.

Ehalt made a motion to deny the Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment from R-2 to R-3. Otto seconded the motion to deny. Denial for the Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment passed 4-0 with a unanimous aye vote.

c. Public Hearing to consider a preliminary plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition

City Planner Ryan Saltis presented the request for preliminary plat approval of Westside Commons 3rd Addition. The plat would subdivide the 27.91 acre parcel located adjacent to Highway 95 and Falcon Ave at PID 11.00399.05. This would create one new developable lot in the northeast corner of the parcel and the remaining land would be considered Outlot A. The purpose of the plat would support development of a restaurant and drive-thru for Culver's. The plat is required to meet lot standards of the B-Business Zoning District in which the new lot meets all minimum standards.

Cich mentioned that he likes the RV parking aspect of the concept plans. Staff mentioned that they will continue to work with developers for the site planning efforts once official plans have been submitted for review. Schaeffer asked what the street design and circulation would look like around the site. Sondrol said that access will be from Explorer Way, a proposed city dedicated road, which connects to 386th St and Falcon Ave. Additional streets for circulation on the entire site will be platted in the future. Cich asked if sidewalks would be proposed on both sides of Explorer Way. Sondrol said that there would be an internal sidewalk on the west of Explorer Way constructed with the development to the west. There is currently a trail/sidewalk along Falcon on the east of the subject site and the sidewalk would extend along the north of the site towards the west with this development.

Public Hearing:

Cich opened the public hearing for discussion on the item. Surrounding property owner Renee asked if there is still a plan for a senior housing community. Sondrol mentioned that there are continued efforts with developers for that community but the public hearing presented is only regarding the creation of the single lot for Culver's. Sondrol said that if Senior Housing is proposed, a separate public hearing meeting and notification will be sent out to nearby residents for plat approval. Walt Anderson made public comment regarding sidewalk locations and that it would make sense for them to be on the east side of the street so that pedestrians would not have to cross over an additional street to get to the future building. Walt asked staff how long the subject parcel has been zoned Business. Staff said that this site has been zoned business for decades. Public comment closed at 7:50 P.M.

Planning Commission Discussion:

Ehalt said that he has nothing to add since it meets lot minimums and is straight forward. Schaeffer questioned if the senior housing that was presented the previous year is proposed near the subject site or on this parcel. Sondrol confirmed that the proposal for senior housing was part of the subject site.

Cich made a motion to recommend approval to the City Council for the Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition with conditions as stated within the packet. Ehalt seconded the motion for approval. Approval for the Preliminary Plat for Westside Commons 3rd Addition passed 4-0 with a unanimous aye vote.

8. REPORTS

a. Zoning Code Update

Community Development Director Sondrol went through items of the zoning code that staff has identified needing amendments. Sondrol asked that the Planning Commission Members provide feedback and insight for moving forward with these amendments.

Fence setbacks were discussed regarding the 30 foot sight triangle for corner lots. Staff believes that this can be reduced and that they suggest looking at other communities and how they deal with these corner lot setbacks. Sondrol showed an example of the corner setback impact in which homeowners would lose a major portion of their yard. Sondrol said that he will consult with the city engineer to determine acceptable sight lines for vehicles. Ehalt said that setbacks from curb lines make sense rather than property lines. Otto mentioned that 30 feet sounds excessive and encouraged staff to look further into acceptable sight line distance. Ehalt asked if these code item changes consistently come up and whether these would burden staff with other work at this time. Sondrol responded by saying that there has been a pattern of these concerns but staff will prioritize some items based on need to change immediately at upcoming Planning Commission Meetings. Schaeffer asked if the speed of roads would matter for the sight line setbacks. Sondrol said that it may factor into specific instances but would potentially be difficult to include different road classifications into the written code.

Accessory Structure setbacks currently require 10 feet from principal structures. Staff would like to allow the placement for these accessory structures to be closer to primary

structures (homes). Otto mentioned the fire code requirements would have to be looked at and has concerns from this standpoint if it was changed. Cich asked about setbacks from property lines. Sondrol said that for most residential areas it is 6 feet from property lines.

Shipping container allowance was discussed whether the city would consider including these as a permitted use in certain zoning districts of Public/Semi-Public, Industrial, or Agricultural. Additional requirements of screening would also be reviewed if approved to allow them in certain zoning districts.

Single Family Homes and Accessory Structure setbacks within the Central Business District were discussed. Currently there are zero lot lines for homes but accessory structures would have to be setback 6 feet. Cohesion for types of structures and setbacks will be looked at as part of the review.

Home Occupation Permits were discussed for having clear direction of when to bring in these permits for Planning Commission review and consideration. Ehalt asked how prior applications have been handled. Sondrol responded that typically they are reviewed administratively and would have to follow city code for these home occupations.

Kennel Licenses were discussed whether these should be considered a Conditional Use Permit or Interim Use Permit. The Kennel License section of City Code might need to be amended to include additional language. Licenses can be revoked immediately, but if they were considered a CUP or IUP, it would require review from Commissions.

The sign code was reviewed for meeting 30 foot sight lines, similar to the fence discussion. The sign code could use amendments to be more up to date with zoning district allowance and placement to provide greater leniency.

Other topics to look at in the future are design standards for buildings in certain zoning districts, parking commercial vehicles on residential driveways, accessory dwelling units, and short term rentals.

b. Comprehensive Plan Update

There was no discussion for Comprehensive Plan updates.

9. NEXT MEETING – July 1, 2025 – 6:30 PM

a. Upcoming Agenda Items

i. Main Street Apartments

ii. Text Amendments for inconsistency in zoning districts

10. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 8:35 P.M.