

PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

TUESDAY, MAY 6, 2025 @ 6:30 PM

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

Members Present: Steve Cich, Gary Shaeffer, Ross Otto

Council Member Robert Canada and City Staff

Members Absent: Nate Ehalt

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

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

4. AGENDA APPROVAL

Member Schaefer motions to approve the agenda, seconded by Member Otto.
All aye 3-0, motion approved unanimously.

5. CONSENT AGENDA
 - a. Approval of April 1, 2025 Planning Commission Minutes

Member Schaefer motions to approve the agenda, seconded by Member Otto.
All aye 3-0, motion approved unanimously.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments. Public comments were closed at 6:38 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

Community Development Director Sondrol presented an overview of the Main Street Apartments. The site is the old Main Street School site and zoned CBD, Central Business District. Four apartment buildings with 8 units each are proposed. Surrounding uses include mostly residential with a funeral home to the southwest of the site. The site is 2.4 acres with a density of 13.3 units per acre. The site is located in Zone 1 for building materials which includes a need for 65% of brick, stone, glass curtain wall. The applicant is proposing 15% of natural stone, 15% for glass and windows and steel. The steel will not

meet the Zone 1 classification but the other materials will meet the requirement. Parking on site exceeds parking minimums per city code with 88 stalls proposed while only needing to provide 64 stalls. A traffic study was conducted in the area for a previously proposed 64 unit development on this site in 2023 and the recommendation was that the roadway was unlikely to be impacted significantly with the increase in vehicles on site. Thirty two trees are proposed for screening on site from nearby residences. The Parks Commission recommended the acceptance of cash for this development, as there are already parks nearby the site. Sondrol finished the presentation of the project and asked if Commission Members had any questions. Member Cich asked how far along in conversations Sondrol was with developers regarding the proposed siding material of the building. Sondrol expressed that the developer would like to use a vertical steel siding due to durability and a 50 year warranty. The code prohibits steel in the class 1 building materials. Member Cich expressed that the apartments should be intended to look similar to homes in the immediate neighborhood and that the proposed steel siding will not look similar.

Public Hearing:

Emmanuel Kintu asked if these apartments would be low income. Sondrol responded by saying that these will be market rate apartments. Kintu asked if this would change in the future. Sondrol said that they would remain market rate. Kintu was concerned about traffic and if the study from 2023 could be relooked at. Sondrol said that the previous study didn't show a concern for traffic with 64 units proposed. This project is 32 units and would essentially be half the amount of vehicles as the original proposal. Charlie Klopp commented that he would like to see a small playground on site for residents of the future apartments since the nearby parks do not have playground equipment and Central Park is dangerous to get to from this particular site. Charlie also would like to see "no parking" signs on some of the surrounding streets to avoid congestion. Walt Anderson was concerned of the underlying zoning district used to be residential and this project would be too high density for the area. Resident Travis Miles stated that the proposed development would meet the zoning district classification of CBD Central Business District and the comprehensive plan designation and home town feel. The pitched roofs meet the look of the neighborhood homes. Travis mentions a need for multifamily housing in the state and the general area. Resident Bryan voiced concern for the proposed siding material and would not like to see it. Sondrol read aloud a public comment that was received via email from Christine Dinsel. The comment included statements of disapproval of the project and that it would decrease the open feel of the neighborhood and lower property values. The destruction of the Main Street School on this site would also present troubles with breathing in toxic materials and would be hazardous to people living in the area. Tommy Foster, the builder made comments about the durability being a 50 year warranty and that they install this material on several buildings including high end lake homes on Rush Lake. He mentioned that he could possibly go with a batten board wood siding but prefers the steel. Tommy mentions that they oversized the parking lot for guests and to eliminate the need for nearby street parking. Cich asked Foster what the warranty is for hardie board plank siding. Foster said he believes it is only 20 years for warranty and will crack from impacts and weathering. Schaefer asked what the builder's timeline looks like. Tommy said he would plan to start after approval but hoping as soon as July of this year to get going. Resident Jackie mentioned the traffic study needing updating and the funeral home has several overflow cars during an event and hopes that

this apartment wouldn't create additional congestion. She also voiced concern for school buses not coming to service the apartments due to proximity to the schools. Travis Miles mentioned that there is a busing route in the area. The public hearing was closed by Member Cich at 7:13 P.M.

Planning Commission Discussion:

Member Schaefer mentioned that he believes apartments are appropriate there based on the past use being a school, how it meets zoning, and the site plans not being overcrowded. Schaefer said he did not like the design of the building, and the materials would not meet the current Zone 1 requirements. Cich agreed that the builder needs to reconsider the siding to better fit the neighborhood. Schaeffer asked if Tommy Foster would be willing to change the siding to a lap style to match the neighborhood. Tommy said he will work with city staff to determine what would be best to accommodate the requirements of the Zone 1 building materials to match the look of the neighborhood while still having an aesthetic they are going for. Sondrol mentioned that he would ask the Commissioners to request an extension of the timeline beyond the June 5th date. Cich asked the developer if he would be willing to get the siding issue resolved prior to July 1st. Tommy, the developer agreed. Schaefer made a motion to table this item to the June 3rd Planning Commission Meeting. Otto seconded the motion. The motion to table the item passed unanimously with a 3-0 vote.

- b. Public Hearing to consider requests for a preliminary plat for Cedar Ridge Community and a zoning text amendment to clarify single family homes a permitted use in the R-3 Zoning District

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol presented the request for a text amendment to allow for single family homes in the R-3 Zoning District and preliminary plat approval for the Cedar Ridge Community. The site features 75 single family lots with 3 future lots designated for apartment style buildings (167 total units) on roughly 62 acres. Seven outlots are proposed for commercial development and storm water ponding. Density is proposed at 6.29 units per acre for single family residential and 16.2 units per acre for the apartments. The developer is proposing 2 phases for the development. Sondrol explains that currently single family homes are not permitted in the R-3 residential zoning district based on the permitted uses chart within city code. Sondrol finished the presentation and asked the Planning Commissioners if they had any questions. Member Schaefer asked what phase the apartments would be included within and questioned if they would ever be built. Member Cich asked if the single family homes and apartments would be built simultaneously. Sondrol answered that they are shown on the plat as Phase 1 but have been mostly ghost platted in the development and don't appear to be part of the preliminary plat. Member Schaefer asked if the road cutting through the development would be a part of 381st Street and link up with Tanger Drive and if it is dedicated Right-of-way. Sondrol said that they have included ROW but would need to be addressed to meet the state aid design standards. Cich closed the regular meeting at 7:40 and opened up the public meeting simultaneously.

Public Hearing:

Brandon Tervo, a resident who lives at the corner of 381st Ln and Falcon Ave, opened the public hearing and asked questions regarding buffers on Falcon for the increase in traffic as a result of the added houses in the area. Sondrol responded that typically the city does not install any buffers on adjacent properties for new developments but the plans do show landscaping plantings on the east side of their development along Falcon. Plantings include coniferous and deciduous trees for buffering. Haylee Goulet, a resident who lives on 382nd St, reiterated that traffic would be a concern and that traffic has increased on Falcon. Speeds were also a concern on Falcon with the addition of new homes. Haylee mentions that the sense of privacy and security is crucial for the residents of the Wild Ridge Community. Phil Carlson, a landowner south of the proposed site expresses that single family homes are better than apartments as far as traffic and increased density goes. Emmanuel Kintu, a resident on 381st Ln, speaks about the development happening first in the state, instead of preparing first by installing roads. Widening lanes and turn lanes are essential for new development. Kintu also asked if the goal of the city is to raise tax money through rooftops. Kelly Higbee was also worried about traffic and the tax base in the city. Kelly mentions that taxes in the city are already high and that there should be alternate ways to bring in revenue for the city such as industry. Kelly mentions that the increase in population will create the need for more services such as grocery stores. Brandon Tervo questioned if there were any discussions on the commercial businesses that would be a part of the Phase 3 development. Sondrol answered that the land is privately owned and haven't received any information for the types of businesses that would be located in Phase 3. Tervo asked if the developer has previously developed in North Branch. Sondrol said that they have not developed in North Branch before. Tervo asked the developers to speak on their previous developments that they have completed. Joss Jondahl, the home builder, approached the podium and stated that they have done roughly 8 developments and that in order to get business in the city, they first need rooftops. Josh said that they would be selling off the apartment land and don't have renderings for the design of the commercial or apartment areas on the site yet. Joss said that they build roughly 40 homes per year mostly around the Princeton area. Joss said that they are very hands-on builders and will be doing the roads, excavating and framing. Subcontractors will be as local as possible but will need to use larger contractors for certain projects to keep the prices as low as possible for the homes and end up in the high 300k house range. The builder said that they would also sell lots to other select builders. The builder has about 15 workers to help construct the houses and try to do most of the work in-house. Deb Donley who lives on 381st Ln asked if the state owned the roadway in the development for state aid. Sondrol explained that the extension of Tanger Drive is a city road. Different roads have state aid requirements for certain roads for design and engineering. Deb said that it would be nice if the people in this new community could access their site from Tanger Drive instead of Falcon Ave to minimize traffic. Sondrol said that they would be constructing the roads coming off from Falcon and that the city would request that the Right-of-Way would be platted to ensure that the roadway gets constructed as the commercial area gets developed. Jessica Kintu opposes apartments on the site based on traffic concerns and often sees people crossing Falcon Ave stating that it's dangerous. Jessica is also concerned with the value of their property in Wild Ridge going down due to the added development. Jessica asked how the services in the city would change such as fire and police presence. Haylee Goulet asked if there is any consideration of round a-bouts or additional stop signs on Falcon Ave. Sondrol responded by saying that Falcon Ave is a County roadway and they are the authority. Right and left

turn lanes are planned to be added to access the proposed community. Public Comment was closed by Member Cich at 8:18 P.M.

Planning Commission Discussion:

Member Cich explained that there is a lot to consider with this project, including the zoning, density, the commercial piece and apartments. Member Schaefer said that the site has been zoned R-3 for a long time, but adding the apartments would be the only way to reach the density requirements for this zoning district. Sondrol confirmed by expressing that it is zoned and guided for high density residential and that the site would need to meet the density requirements of a minimum of 6 units per acre of the R-3 district. Schaefer said that he thinks this would be a loophole for the development by using the apartments to satisfy the density requirements. Schaefer asked if the city would be setting precedence if they allowed single family homes in the R-3 district. Sondrol said that the R-3 district as of now allows for a variety of townhouses and apartment style housing and by allowing single family homes in this district, they would still have to meet the minimum density requirements based on the Comprehensive Plan designation. Member Otto questioned if they were to allow for the preliminary plat as presented and the single family homes were being built, whether the apartments would actually come to the site and if it would bring up issues down the road. Otto reiterated that the site would not meet density just with the single family houses and asked Sondrol if there is a timeline that the apartments would need to be constructed. Sondrol said that there can be conditions added that mention the inclusion of the apartments on the site and put certain restrictions on the property. Cich mentions that they are in a predicament if the apartments never come. Sondrol mentioned that if they were to go through with a text amendment, that it would allow for single family homes in all R-3 districts in the city and would essentially make these developments have tight lot widths to meet density requirements. Otto said that townhouses could also be an option instead of apartments in the R-3 District but for this specific development it might get tight to meet the density requirements and lot dimensions. Cich asked the Commissioners and Community Development Director if they wanted to open themselves up to allow for single family homes in the R-3 zoning district. Sondrol responded by saying that there are pros and cons to this, but a PUD could be an alternative option to allow the single family homes in the area while also providing the apartments. The comprehensive plan update will help guide where the city wants to see certain types of development. Cich asks Sondrol if they would be stuck if they went through with the text amendment. Sondrol said that through an ordinance it could be changed back but is looking for community collaboration through the future comprehensive plan amendment to see what the community wants. Cich asked if utilities would be a problem with the apartments. Sondrol confirmed that the utilities in the area were designed for high density. Member Schaefer said that he can't support the text amendment but believes this is a good project. Schaefer said that he believes that the text amendment would be a bad idea for future development. Member Cich said that they are trying to work with businesses and this development is a business, however the text amendment would impact more than originally intended.

Schaefer made a motion to deny the proposed text amendment for Section 66-6 of the city code, to allow for single family homes in the R-3 zoning district. Member Otto seconded that motion. Denial for the text amendment passed 3-0 with a unanimous aye vote.

Findings of Fact include the development not following the guidance of the comprehensive plan if the zoning is not permitted and opening up future developments to only construct single family homes in the R-3 District.

A second vote was taken for the preliminary plat. Schaefer made a motion to deny the preliminary plat and was seconded by Otto. Motion passes 3-0 unanimously.

Findings of fact include the preliminary plat not meeting the zoning district and density requirements.

Recommendation for denial of both the text amendment and preliminary plat will be forwarded to the City Council at the May 13th Meeting.

The public hearing for the text amendment and preliminary plat was closed at 8:45 P.M.

8. REPORTS

a. Comprehensive Plan Update

Sondrol explained that the City Council and Parks Board have begun looking at their sections of the city's comprehensive plan and expressed to have the Planning Commission start to review the comp plan as well. Certain issues with zoning designations and regions should be explored. Sondrol explained that there would be meetings in June and August for the public to express opinions on how the city should be guided and create goals to meet for the future of the city. City Administrator Hill reiterated that Commissioners should reach out to city staff for the parameters of the comp plan and what they would like changed. Hill said that the comprehensive plan was last completed in 2018 and the city has changed tremendously since then, so creating new goals is necessary to guide the city in the right direction.

9. NEXT MEETING – June 3, 2025 – 6:30 PM

a. Upcoming Agenda Items

- i. Falcon and 95 development
- ii. Text Amendments for inconsistency in zoning districts

10. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 P.M.