

City of Plymouth Plan Commission

OFFICIAL MINUTES

March 6, 2025

Mayor Pohlman called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM on March 6, 2025. The following members were present: Jane Meyer, Jeremy Schellin, Ron Nicolaus, John Wyatt, and Justin Schmitz. Following members excused: Greg Hildebrand Also present: City Administrator/Utilities Manager Tim Blakeslee, Assistant City Administrator/Community Development Director Jack Johnston, Fire Chief Ryan Pafford.

Alderman present but not acting in official capacity: John Binder, Mike Penkwitz, John Nelson

1.) Approval of Minutes from February 6, 2025: Motion was made by Schellin/ Nicolaus to approve the minutes. Upon the call of the roll, all voted aye. Motion carried.

2.) Public Hearing: A public hearing to take comment on a conditional use permit application for the following:

- a. 2831 Eastern Avenue, Plankview Green Development, LLC (dba North Town Partners) regarding the construction of two multi-family dwellings of 54 and 51 units each for residents aged 55 and over in the R-6 High Density Multi-Family Residential District as allowed through Conditional Use Permit per PMC 13-1-28(c)(4). North Town Partners/Merklein (enclosure)**

The public hearing was declared open by Mayor Pohlman.

Assistant City Administrator Johnston provided a staff report to the Commission. North Town Partners, formerly Van Horn Development, has submitted a conditional use permit and site plan review application for a new 55+ and over multi-family residential development. The project site is located directly south of Scooter's Coffee, Jimmy John's, and Advance Auto Parts and would have access off of a shared driveway south of the Eastern Avenue and Carr Road intersection.

The property originally existed as two distinct parcels which have since been merged into one parcel. In order to prepare the site for the project, the applicant sought a rezone and comprehensive plan amendment for both parcels in late 2024 and early 2025 to obtain R-6 zoning on both parcels as R-6 is the only residential zoning district that allows the number of residential units they are requesting. Both parcels also needed consistent zoning to be merged. The final rezone and comprehensive plan amendment was approved at the Common Council meeting on January 14, 2025. This allows the applicants to move forward with a site plan and conditional use permit review for this project.

The applicants have indicated that the project will be completed in phases, with the initial development (Phase 1) consisting of two three-story multi-family residential buildings. Building one will contain 54 units and building two will contain 51 units. The third residential building located on the property's north side is not included in Phase 1 of the development plan. In order to construct the second phase of the project, the applicants will have to come back to the Plan Commission for an

additional site plan review, a TID amendment, and a conditional use permit amendment.

Commissioner Wyatt expressed concerns with the current road configuration of Eastern Avenue as motorists facing west on Eastern Avenue attempting to turn left into the development could cause queueing concerns. Commissioner Schellin asked if the SCEDC development was considered as part of the traffic impact analysis and if crosswalks would be added so residents could traverse on the north side of Eastern Avenue. John Nelson asked if any consideration to better aligning the intersection with the driveway access would be considered. Administrator Blakeslee explained that road geometry concerns would likely be addressed in the developer's agreement and the SCEDC project was not included in the TIA analysis as it is not an approved project as this point.

Mayor Pohlman and Commissioner Wyatt requested information and confirmation on stormwater. Devin Winter from Excel Engineering was present to address those questions. Administrator Blakeslee also reported the stormwater plan was reviewed by Director of Public Works/City Engineer Austin and met City requirements and approved the plan.

Mayor Pohlman and Commissioner Schellin asked about completion date of phase 1 and the estimated start of phase 2. Chris Merklein from North Town Partners provided an estimation that they would like to be complete with phase 1 by summer of 2026 and hope to break ground on phase 2 in 2027 should phase 1 prove to be successful like their market analysis indicates it will be.

John Nelson asked if the units would be rentals or owner occupied. Mr. Merklein responded that they would be rental units. Ron Nicolaus requested some confirmation on emergency vehicle access. Fire Chief Pafford noted that submitted site plan satisfies emergency vehicle requirements with the installation of the hammerhead on the south side of the site.

Mayor Pohlman then declared the public hearing closed.

3.) Conditional Use Permit Seeking Approval: 2831 Eastern Avenue, Plankview Green Development, LLC (dba North Town Partners) regarding the construction of two multi-family dwellings of 54 and 51 units each for residents aged 55 and over in the R-6 High Density Multi-Family Residential District as allowed through Conditional Use Permit per PMC 13-1-28(c)(4). North Town Partners/Merklein (enclosure)

This item continues from item #2a. Commissioner Schellin asked if the parking lot was overbuilt or if the parking requirements hindered the applicant's development of the site. Administrator Blakeslee noted that R-6 was a new zoning designation and when crafting it the parking requirements was reduced from 2 parking spaces per residential unit to 1.5 in order to be more accommodating to development. Mr. Merklein responded that the parking requirements did not hinder the development. Staff also noted much of the parking is underground and not visible from outside.

Assistant City Administrator Johnston directed the Plan Commission and applicant to the draft conditions of the conditional use permit provided in the packet materials. Staff asked if the applicant had time to review the draft conditions and had any concerns. The applicants indicated that they had no concerns.

Motion was made by Schellin/Wyatt to approve a conditional use permit for North Town Partners with the conditions as included the packet materials. Upon the call of the roll, all voted aye. Motion carried.

4.) Plan Seeking Approval; 2831 Eastern Avenue, Plankview Green Development, LLC (dba North Town Partners) regarding proposed site plan improvements and construction of two multi-family dwellings of 54 and 51 units each for residents aged 55 and over. North Town Partners/Merklein (enclosure)

This item continues from item #2a and #3. Assistant City Administrator Johnston requested the Plan Commission approve the site plan as presented.

Motion was made by Wyatt/Nicolaus to approve the site plan for North Town Partners as presented. Upon the call of the roll, all voted aye. Motion carried.

5.) Ordinance Amendment Seeking Recommendation: Modifications of Section 13-1-103 and Section 13-1-106 regarding wall sign height restrictions and ground signs in multi-family residential districts. Johnston (enclosure)

In November 2024, the City of Plymouth Board of Appeals reviewed a variance request from Sargento to place signage higher than what is allowed by City code on their upcoming LAG building renovation project. While the signage was tastefully designed, state law requires a variance to meet a three-part test to be approved:

- The variance is needed due to an unnecessary hardship caused by zoning.
- A unique property feature is present that created the hardship.
- The variance is not contrary to the public interest.

The request to allow signage higher than permitted by code was denied by the Board of Appeals because it did not meet the three-part test. The bar for achieving a variance is intentionally set high under state law to limit variances to cases of true hardship caused by the zoning code.

Staff discussed this provision of code with the Committee of the Whole at their meeting on January 28, 2025. The Committee's recommendation at that time was to loosen the restriction on sign height placement so long as any ordinance change did not increase the actual size of signage allowed.

13-1-106, Signage in Multi-Family Residential Districts - Staff also discovered that current code language does not explicitly allow ground signage in multi-family residential districts, despite it being already in place for many developments in the City. Examples of this include Songbird Pond Assisted Living, Hunter's Ridge Apartments, and Pleasant View Townhomes, among others. With the Wangard project already being built, and the likelihood of other multi-family residential developments coming to Plymouth, staff would like to right-size the ordinance to allow ground signage for larger multi-family residential developments to follow what has already been historically allowed.

Assistant City Administrator Johnston explained that staff researched nearby communities to see how they regulate wall sign height. Research indicated that most similar communities do not regulate wall sign height and if they do an exception can be granted by the Common Council. Staff's ultimate recommendation was to eliminate this portion of the code. Johnston noted the draft ordinance included in the packet would restrict wall signs to be placed lower than the roof line and roof signs are already prohibited by code. As the City already regulates building height maximums, staff did not feel as though

regulating wall sign placements was necessary. Plan Commission discussed this request and agreed it did not need to be regulated in the ordinance.

In regards to ground signs in multi-family residential districts, Mayor Pohlman requested the ordinance be crafted in order to restrict ground signage to larger multi-family districts, not duplexes or quadplexes. Johnston reported the draft ordinance as written would only allow ground signage in multi-family properties with at least 12 units. This would restrict ground signage to the largest R-4 development allowed by code and the newly created R-6 district.

Motion was made by Schellin/Nicolaus to recommend approval of ordinance related to modifications of Section 13-1-103 and Section 13-1-106 regarding wall sign height restrictions and ground signs in multi-family residential districts. Upon the call of the roll, all voted aye. Motion carried.

**6.) Communication – Letters, E-mails, or reports Related to the Plan Commission
(Chairman, Secretary, Plan Commission Members, City of Plymouth
Staff/Alderspersons)**

Administrator Blakeslee reported that framing for the Wangard project was going up with hopes to open the first building for occupancy by August of 2025. Assistant City Administrator Johnston reported there would be a Plan Commission meeting in April with new business items.

Motion was made by Schelling/Schmitz to adjourn the meeting at 6:48 pm. A unanimous aye vote was cast. Motion carried.