



PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA SECTION	PUBLIC HEARING
MEETING DATE	MARCH 3, 2026

ITEM:	Comprehensive Plan Amendment for 4300 Central Avenue from Commercial and Park to Transit Oriented Development	
<i>Presented by: Ursula Brandt, City Planner</i>		
DEPARTMENT: Community Development	BY/DATE: Ursula Brandt, City Planner 03/02/2026 Rita Trapp and Kendra Ellner, HKGi Consulting Planners, 02/25/2026	

CASE NUMBER: 2026-PZ02
APPLICANT: The City of Columbia Heights
DEVELOPMENT: N/A
LOCATION: 4300 Central Avenue NE
REQUEST: Comprehensive Plan Amendment
PREPARED BY: Ursula Brandt, City Planner
 Rita Trapp and Kendra Ellner, HKGi Consulting Planners, 02/25/2026

BACKGROUND:

The City of Columbia Heights is initiating a Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the property located at 4300 Central Avenue NE. The proposed amendment would reguide the site from “Commercial” and “Park” to “Transit Oriented Development.” The 13-acre property is currently vacant other than a stormwater pond to the west. Over the years concepts that are being explored for the site have included a mix of commercial and residential uses. However, the current guidance of “Commercial” does not allow for any residential uses of the site. The intent of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment is for the future land use designation to facilitate potential redevelopment of mixed-use on the site. The stormwater pond is included in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment as it may be relocated as part of a development project.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT STATUS - SITE CONTEXT:

From the late 2000s through the early 2010s, this property operated as a shopping center and was home to a variety of businesses over the years, including the last establishments being: Rainbow Foods, Slumberland, Ace Hardware, Dollar Tree, and Meineke Car Care. By 2015, the property had fallen into disrepair and was not well maintained, leading many of the businesses to close.

In 2016, the site was purchased by Hy-Vee. The City worked closely with Hy-Vee’s development team to create a framework for a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to support redevelopment; however, ultimately no project moved forward.

In 2021, the property was sold to the developer Alatus, who proceeded to demolish the remaining structures and clean up the site to prepare it for future redevelopment. The City utilized the Tax Increment Financing

(TIF) framework previously developed with Hy-Vee to begin mortgage-bond structuring and contract negotiations with Alatus.

Since then, Alatus has been evaluating a range of mixed-use development concepts for the site. The concepts have considered incorporating apartments, commercial-uses, single-family homes, and townhomes or rowhouses. At this time, there are no formal plans or upcoming development applications. The future project is also expected to address stormwater, sewer, sidewalk, and roadway improvements as there are major infrastructure improvements needed in the surrounding neighborhood. When a formal redevelopment proposal comes forward it will likely require a rezoning and additional land-use approvals. Updating the Comprehensive Plan future land use guidance is an essential first step to enabling a viable redevelopment pathway.

Comprehensive Plan Amendment Request

The City's current 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the eastern portion of this property for "Commercial", limiting the site only for nonresidential uses such as retail, office, and service-oriented businesses. To make future mixed-use redevelopment possible, the City is proactively initiating this land-use guidance change to "Transit Oriented Development". The proposal to reguide the site as "Transit Oriented Development" will allow significantly greater flexibility for the opportunity for both residential and commercial uses.

Areas guided as TOD have an expected mix of uses of 85% residential and 15% commercial and a density of 25 to 65 units per acre. The site is well-suited for a reguidance to a TOD designation, as several properties along the Central Avenue corridor are already guided similarly. In addition, the corridor is slated for a major MnDOT-led reconstruction project proposed for 2028, which may include the planned F-Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route. These factors combined with evolving market conditions, and the property's long-term vacancy provide the support for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Providing greater land-use flexibility will help facilitate redevelopment, strengthen the City's tax base, and introduce new residential and commercial activity.

Forecast Amendment and Subsequent Technical Changes

The land use change may necessitate technical changes related to wastewater, trip generation, and other key plan elements. These tables spread throughout the plan will be updated and associated implementation measures identified based on the impacts. Any necessary improvements will be development driven or completed in conjunction with other planned infrastructure improvements.

Public Involvement

City Community Development Staff along with HKGi held a neighborhood meeting on February 18, 2026 at 5:30 pm at the library to share the proposed amendment to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. There were around 10 participants that attended the presentation and there was an opportunity to join the meeting online to ask questions. The following questions and concerns raised from the neighborhood meeting are summarized below:

- Concerns regarding necessary improvements and maintenance to the on-site stormwater pond, surrounding neighborhood flooding, and infrastructure issues that are requested to be heavily considered as part of future development proposals.
- Clarification on the details for the Transit Oriented Development designation.
- Concerns about the size and quantity of apartment units.

- Concerns about increase in traffic and access management onto Central Avenue especially if apartments are proposed.

Subsequent to the meeting, a two-question public survey, the neighborhood meeting presentation, and Planning Commission public hearing information were made available on the City's website; along with an informational post on the City's Facebook page. While the Facebook post generated more than 250 comments, as of February 25, 2026, only 46 responses have been received on the survey.

Overall, many respondents expressed concerns about the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment allowing residential uses on the site. A common sentiment has been that the City already has a sufficient number of apartment developments, and that additional apartments would worsen traffic patterns. The preference is for maintaining the property as a commercial use, particularly for a grocery store, indoor recreation, or other retail-focused uses.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Staff acknowledge the concerns raised by the community and have been carefully evaluating potential impacts. If the property were to retain its commercial future land use designation, it may remain undeveloped for several more years, as the market does not currently support stand-alone nonresidential uses without the density provided by adjacent residential. There is a well-documented housing shortage in the Twin Cities, and the concepts have focused on incorporating a mix of housing types to help meet the community's diverse housing needs.

This site is well-positioned for increased residential density, given its planned transit access and location within an already walkable corridor. These factors make the proposed redevelopment a strong fit for the area and could help facilitate a more viable project in the near term. Additionally, the development would address both onsite and surrounding neighborhood infrastructure needs.

In order for the City to amend its Comprehensive Plan, a public hearing is required to be held by the Planning Commission and a recommendation forwarded to the Council. The plan must also be submitted to affected jurisdictions including adjacent communities, school districts, watershed commissions, county and state agencies. These agencies are to be allowed to review the amendment and provide comment prior to the City submitting the plan to the Metropolitan Council. Following review by the City Council, the plan amendments are submitted to the Metropolitan Council for review of its compatibility and conformity with the regional system plans. Upon a favorable review by the Metropolitan Council, the City Council puts the amendment into effect.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of this Comprehensive Plan Amendment to reguide the properties at 4300 Central Avenue NE from the current future land use of Commercial and Park to Transit Oriented Development.

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S):

MOTION: Motion to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-018, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to recommend the adoption of Resolution 2026-018, a resolution for City Council approval of the proposed land use designation of the properties at 4300 Central Avenue to Transit Oriented Development.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Resolution No. 2026-018, Comprehensive Plan Amendment for 4300 Central Avenue
2. Future Land Use Existing and Proposed Map Change
3. Affidavit of Public Hearing Notice
4. Survey Comments
5. Email Comments