



PLANNING COMMISSION

City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE

Tuesday, July 07, 2026

6:00 PM

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by Chair Christopherson.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Jeffrey Johnson, Dirk Schmitz, Karl Rehfuss, Paul Moses, Clara Christopherson, and John Gianoulis

Commissioners absent: Ahmed Maameri

Also present: Ursula Brandt, City Planner; Mitch Forney, Community Development Director; Laurel Deneen, Council Liaison; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Paul Biernet, City resident; Mary Matthews, City resident

1. Overview of Boards and Commission Orientation

Ion noted that the overview of the Boards and Commissions is included in the Agenda Packet and to direct any questions to her. Forney highlighted the regulations with Planning Commissions and noted that Commissioners cannot make a decision prior to the Planning Commission meeting.

2. Election of Planning Commission Officers

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

Gianoulis nominated Christopherson for the Chair of the Planning Commission. Rehfuss seconded the nomination.

Motion by Gianoulis, seconded by Johnson, to elect Christopherson as Chair of the Planning Commission. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Christopherson nominated Gianoulis as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission.

Motion by Christopherson, seconded by Moses, to elect Gianoulis as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Christopherson, seconded by Gianoulis, to elect Moses as Secretary/Treasurer of the Planning Commission. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

APPROVE MINUTES

3. Approval of April 07, 2026, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion by Rehfuß, seconded by Johnson, to approve the minutes from the meeting of April 07, 2026. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. Consideration of a Variance for reduced parking lot setback for 81 38th Ave NE

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

Introduction: Brandt stated that the applicant owns the building at 81 38th Ave and has run a successful business in this location for decades. In 2012, the applicant first asked for a variance to the parking setback to accommodate the addition of a parking lot to the west of the building. The original request (granted through resolution 2012-050) was to allow for a 0.5ft setback from the side property line to accommodate 18ft by 9ft parking spaces and a 24ft drive aisle. The current request is for a 0 ft setback from the side property lines to accommodate an accessible sidewalk leading to the west entrance, along with 18ft by 9ft parking spaces and a 24 ft drive aisle.

Brandt explained that, as noted in 2012, and is still relevant today, a vacation of the California Street right-of-way was conducted in the 1990s. The result of the vacation gave an additional 30 ft of land to the subject property. Upon review of the area, it was discovered that there are some city utilities along the right-of-way, but they are buried deep enough to accommodate the construction of a parking lot.

Brandt noted that the applicant is utilizing the building for office and warehousing. The City Code requires 1 parking space for each 300 sqft of office space and 1 parking space for each 3,000 sqft of warehousing. The building has 1,500 sqft of office and 4,500 sqft of warehouse, requiring 7 parking spaces. Currently, the property utilizes approximately 11 parking spaces along the south side of the building, all of which are legal non-conforming for setbacks, and none are handicap accessible. The applicant would like to accommodate more parking on the property by constructing a 5-space parking lot to the west of the building, which includes one handicap accessible parking space located in front of the main entrance to the building. City Code 9.111(C) requires parking areas to be no closer than 20 ft from the front property line and 5 ft from the side and rear property lines. City Code 9.106(L)(7) prescribes parking spaces to be a minimum of 9 ft wide and 18 ft deep when abutting a curb, and the drive aisle width to access the parking spaces can be no less than 24 ft. To accommodate the new parking lot, the applicant is seeking a variance for the following:

1. Variance to allow for a 0 ft parking lot setback on the west and north property lines and an increased amount of 0 ft setback on the east property line.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Gianoulis asked if railroad tracks were on the west side. Forney replied that the railroad is at the bottom of the hill, and the space to the west is green space. The City owns the west portion of the area.

Brandt added that neighboring properties within 350 feet of the applicant were notified about the public hearing. Several people reached out to staff with questions, but once they understood that additional parking would be included, they were excited about the project.

Schmitz asked if the area to the west is developable. Forney replied that it is not.

Moses asked if there was an environmental study conducted and what the environmental impacts would be. Forney replied that the City does not require an environmental study for a parking lot to be paved. The Engineering Department and stormwater specialist reviewed the application.

Public Hearing Opened.

Christopherson opened the Public Hearing. There were no public comments.

Public Hearing Closed.

Motion by Johnson, seconded by Moses, to close the public hearing. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Johnson, seconded by Schmitz, to waive the reading of the draft Resolution No. 2026-043, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Schmitz, seconded by Reh fuss, to recommend that the City Council approve Resolution No. 2026-043, a Variance allowing a 0 ft parking setback for 81 38th Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

5. Conditional Use Permit and Final Site Plan Approval for a Car Wash at 47th and Central Ave

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

Introduction: Brandt stated in 2003 that the subject property, along with parcels to the north and east, was rezoned to Mixed Use District, with the purpose of promoting development and redevelopment by allowing the mix of at least two different uses and providing flexibility on bulk requirements. The site was previously occupied by a Kmart shopping Center. Also in 2003, the first site plan was reviewed and approved for a residential portion of the district, resulting in the development of Grand Central Commons, which consists of Grand Central Flats, Lofts, and Townhomes.

Brandt noted that in 2008, the Planning Commission reviewed and approved a commercial development consisting of office and commercial space, along with a parking ramp. In 2018, a Hy-Vee convenience store/gas station was proposed and approved for the site. However, none of the approved site plans for the commercial portion of the mixed-use district have been developed.

Brandt explained that the applicant met with the City in May of 2026 to review the requirements to locate a Car Wash on the subject property at the corner of 47th Avenue

and Central Ave. Staff relayed the requirements, including the Public Hearing and the Sound Study, to the applicant, who submitted their proposal for the Crew Car Wash in June of 2026.

Brandt stated the Zoning Ordinance requires the Planning Commission to hold a Public Hearing on the application for the Conditional Use Permit and submit its recommendation to the City Council. The subject property is zoned MXD (Mixed-Use District) in a planned development that consists of Grand Central Flats, Lofts, and Townhomes. The subject property and the property to the north are the last undeveloped parcels in the Mixed-Use District. The Zoning Ordinance 9.112 specifies that Mixed-Use developments shall contain at least two of the following three land use categories: Residential Uses, Commercial Uses, or Institutional Uses. The district currently only has residential uses in the form of townhomes, condominiums, and apartments. Therefore, the last undeveloped parcels must be either commercial or institutional uses. A car wash is permitted, with a conditional use permit, commercial use in the Zoning Ordinance, and is subject to Specific Development Standards 9.107(10) for a car wash. The proposed site plan, as conditioned, shall meet the following specific development standards:

- a) Water from the Car Wash shall not drain across any sidewalk or into any public right-of-way;
- b) Vacuum facilities shall be located in an enclosed structure or located at least 50 feet from any residential property line to avoid noise impacts.
- c) The premises, all adjacent streets, sidewalks and alleys, and all sidewalks and alleys within 100 feet of the use shall be inspected regularly for the purpose of removing litter found thereon.
- d) A sound study is required to determine the overall impact upon the surrounding properties and ensure compliance with performance standards and MPCA sound requirements.
- e) All new car washes must be located on a minimum of one acre of land.

Brandt noted that the submitted site plan illustrates a total of 12 off-street parking stalls. The Zoning Ordinance requires two (2) spaces per bay plus four (4) stacking spaces for the one (1) car wash bay, including one (1) stacking space at the exit. The Zoning Ordinance also specifies that employee parking is only required when the parking requirements are based on employee counts; as such, the parking requirements for car washes are determined by the number of service bays and stacking spaces, not employee counts. However, the proposed plans indicate four (4) employee-designated parking stalls. Appropriately, one off-street parking space on the site has been designated as a disability stall (in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act) along with an access aisle striped with "No Parking". The proposed site plan has more off-street parking than required and has accounted for employee parking needs.

Brandt stated the applicant meets the Tree Preservation and Replanting Standards in 9.106 General Development Standards (M). All trees that exist on the site are considered volunteer weed trees of undesirable and invasive species and are to be removed with the development. The applicant is required to provide one tree for every 50 feet of street

frontage, and the property has 446 feet of frontage for a total of nine (9) trees, a minimum of four (4) trees per one acre of lot coverage standards for a total of 13 trees proposed. Additionally, the applicant is proposing landscaping containing native plantings and pollinator-friendly habitats for the majority of the trees, shrubs, and grasses used. The City Forester is satisfied with the proposed landscaping plan.

Brandt explained that as a condition of approval, the applicant is required to provide a letter of credit or other security as acceptable to the City and shall be deposited with the Zoning Administrator, in an amount equal to 100% of the estimated cost of landscaping and/or screening. The letter of credit or other security, as acceptable to the City, or portions thereof, shall be forfeited to maintain and/or replace materials for a period of time, to include at least two growing seasons. A portion of the letter of credit or other security, as acceptable, may be released after one growing season, as determined by the Zoning Administrator. The property owner shall be responsible for the continued maintenance of landscaping and screening materials to remain in compliance with the requirements of this section. Plant materials that show signs of disease or damage shall be promptly removed and replaced within the next planting season.

Brandt noted that the proposed site is considered part of the Highway District in the City Design Guidelines and is subject to the standards and requirements of that design district. The proposed site plan demonstrates compliance with the design objectives of the Highway District; the building is set back from the street behind a parking lot. The architectural renderings and site plan, as conditioned, show compliance with building configuration, façade and roof treatments, building equipment, drive-through facilities, landscaping, and parking meet the design guidelines. It is conditioned that all windows and doors must also meet the design guidelines to ensure that only 50% of the windows are opaque. Any proposed signage will be subject to the design standards as a condition of approval.

Brandt stated the applicant has provided a Sound Study that analyzed the sound impact that the car wash and vacuum operations will have on the adjacent residential properties and provided mitigations they will use to decrease the sound impact to meet MPCA standards. The applicant is proposing the following mitigation strategies for the vacuums; reduction in the number of vacuums from 10 to 8, placement of the vacuums at the northern extent of the proposed parking lot, vacuum suction will be generated at a single location within the carwash tunnel, vacuum nozzles will be used that have a lower operational noise levels, and an 8 ft by 20 ft brick noise wall will be installed adjacent to the southernmost vacuum unit. The applicant is also proposing the following mitigation strategies to the design of the tunnel: blower units are to be placed inside the tunnel to allow for a 30 ft sound-deadening room adjacent to the tunnel exit, (2) 8 ft tall, 10 ft wide roller doors at each end of the tunnel that will be closed whenever the blower units are active. With the use of the mitigation strategies, the Car Wash will meet the MPCA noise standards.

Recommendation: Staff did not receive any comments from the public and are recommending approval of the site plan and conditional use permit.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Schmitz asked if there would be a roundabout at 47th Avenue. He asked how people would access the car wash. Brandt replied that yes there will be a round about at 47th and Central but the only access point to the site will be from 47th Avenue. Schmitz asked if staff spoke with the applicant about the construction on Central Avenue and the impacts on the business. Brandt replied that staff had a pre-construction meeting with the applicant to inform them about the construction, the timeline, and the requirements for the site.

Schmitz asked if the remaining lot to the north was big enough for development. Brandt replied that it is large enough for development. She noted some topographic issues that a future developer would need to deal with.

Christopherson inquired about the wastewater mitigation system. Civil Engineer for the project, Matt Schwartz, explained that the wash water from the car wash is filtered into different reclaimed system manholes. All the discharged water will go into the sanitary sewer. The manholes get cleaned out on a regular basis so that the debris does not fill up. There are four manholes in the center of the configuration that act as a water reclaim system. The water from the final rinse is discharged into another set of manholes. All of the water from the car wash is being collected inside the tunnel and discharged into the sanitary sewer. There is a trench drain at the end of the car wash for the residual wash water. The trench drain leads to the underground stormwater infiltration system and is treated like the rest of the stormwater on the site.

Gianoulis inquired about the lighting and wondered if the lighting would be a nuisance to the neighborhood. Mr. Schwartz replied that one of the conditions for approval is that the lighting needed to be downlighting. The City has a lighting Code that explains the lighting requirements. The site will not produce more light pollution than a typical street light. Brandt confirmed that the site would meet the City's requirements.

Schmitz asked if the exit was a wall to be driven around. Brandt replied that the wall indicated on the graphic was to depict the flow of traffic. She pointed out a sound wall that is included in the western portion of the site.

Public Hearing Opened.

Christopherson opened the Public Hearing.

Public Hearing Closed.

Paul Biernet, City resident, expressed his concern regarding keeping the integrity of the boulder wall that was intended to be kept throughout the entire apartment development near the site. He asked that the wall not be replaced with a cheap retaining wall. He requested that there be full-time monitoring for noise since there can be long-term health effects. He encouraged the Commissioners to come to the area to see what the lighting is like in the evening because there is a lot of light that comes from across the street. There are three car washes within a quarter mile. He expressed his concern that another car wash

will drive other car washes out of business, and there will be more dilapidated properties. He suggested including more landscaping to help mitigate the sound from echoing up the hill.

Mary Matthews, City resident, noted that there is a bright light through her window from Savers. She added that 47th Avenue is full of parked vehicles, including large trucks. She asked how there would be room for vehicles to line up for a car wash, and if there is a concern about ice on the hill since vehicles will exit onto 47th Avenue. She asked if the parcel went up to Grand Avenue. Forney replied that it goes up to the right-of-way. The seven feet of right-of-way to Grand Avenue is owned by the City. Ms. Matthews explained that the property owners from Central Avenue to Grand Avenue do not maintain the property.

Motion by Johnson, seconded by Rehfuß, to close the public hearing. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Johnson asked why so many trucks were parked on 47th Avenue. Forney replied that it is a Twin Cities-wide issue for commercial vehicles to find parking. He added that it is difficult to enforce because the vehicles typically move within the allotted time.

Schmitz asked if the developer had done a study to determine if they could make a profit even with the other car wash businesses in the area. Forney replied that the developer did a market study.

Motion by Moses, seconded by Rehfuß, to waive the readings of draft Resolution No. 2026-042 and Resolution 2026-PZ02, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Gianoulis, seconded by Rehfuß, to recommend to the City Council approval of Resolution No. 2026-042, a Conditional Use Permit allowing a Car Wash at the anticipated address of 4707 Central Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55408, subject to the conditions stated in the draft resolution. 5 Ayes, 1 Nay. MOTION PASSED. Ayes: Moses, Schmitz, Christopherson, Gianoulis, Rehfuß. Nay: Johnson.

Motion by Moses, seconded by Schmitz, to approve Resolution No. 2026-PZ02, a final Site Plan for a Car Wash at the anticipated address of 4707 Central Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421. 5 Ayes, 1 Nay. MOTION PASSED. Ayes: Moses, Schmitz, Christopherson, Gianoulis, Rehfuß. Nay: Johnson.

OTHER BUSINESS

6. Review Acquisition of 4217 Central Ave NE

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

Introduction: Brandt noted that pursuant to State Statute, Section 462.356, Subdivision 2, the Planning and Zoning Commission (the "Planning Commission") in and for the City is

required to review and determine whether the proposed acquisition of real property by the City's Economic Development Authority (EDA) conforms to the Comprehensive Plan of the City. Therefore, the EDA has requested that the Planning Commission review the acquisition of 4217 Central Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421 (the "Subject Property") to determine if its acquisition conforms to the Comprehensive Plan of the City.

Brandt stated that the EDA has a long-standing practice of acquiring blighted single-family homes to facilitate scattered site redevelopment, and the proposed acquisition of the Subject Property responds to several goals and policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, in Chapter 3: Land Use and Chapter 4: Housing. Below are the specific goals and policies from the Comprehensive Plan that directly and indirectly correlate to the conformity of the proposed acquisition.

Recommendation: Staff recommends the adoption of Resolution 2026-PZ01, as it meets the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and supports Core City Strategies.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Christopherson asked if the property was blighted or in foreclosure. Forney replied that it is a lighted building.

Motion by Reh fuss, seconded by Gianoulis, to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-PZ01, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Johnson, seconded by Schmitz, to adopt Resolution 2026-PZ01, a resolution finding that the acquisition of certain land for redevelopment purposes by the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority is consistent with the City of Columbia Heights' Comprehensive Plan. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Forney provided an update regarding the Medtronic site and noted that they would be moving to the design phase. The 4300 Central Avenue site is moving forward, and the City is working with the MWMO. Johnson asked if staff anticipated that the site would have housing. Forney confirmed that there would be housing and senior housing, and a possibility of other uses for the second phase of the project.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Reh fuss, seconded by Moses, to adjourn the meeting at 6:53 pm. All ayes. MOTION PASSED

Respectfully submitted,

Secretary