



PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

AGENDA SECTION	PUBLIC HEARING
MEETING DATE	AUGUST 5, 2026

ITEM:	Zoning Ordinance Amendments to Chapter 9 – Land Use: 9.106 General Development Standards 9.107 Specific Development Standards	
<i>Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner</i>		
DEPARTMENT: Community Development		BY/DATE: Ursula Brandt, City Planner/ June 15, 2026
CORE CITY STRATEGIES: <i>(please indicate areas that apply by adding an "X" in front of the selected text below)</i> X Community that Grows with Purpose and Equity X Engaged, Effective and Forward-Thinking _ High Quality Public Spaces _ Resilient and Prosperous Economy _ Safe, Accessible and Built for Everyone _ Inclusive and Connected Community		

CASE NUMBER: 2026-PZ07

APPLICANT: The City of Columbia Heights

LOCATION: Citywide

BACKGROUND

Community Development staff are bringing forward for the Planning Commission's consideration a zoning text amendment to allow State-Licensed Residential Care Facilities as a conditional use within the Central Business (CBD) District. Because this request has the potential to influence future land use and redevelopment opportunities throughout the City's downtown, staff believe it is important to first provide background on the City's long-term vision for the Central Business District and the planning policies that have guided the evolution of the district. This context will assist the Planning Commission in evaluating the proposed amendment against the City's Comprehensive Plan and the required Findings of Fact for a zoning text amendment.

Over the past several years, the City has partnered with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) on the redevelopment of Central Avenue. During the community visioning process, residents expressed a strong desire to narrow Central Avenue within the Central Business District to create a more identifiable and welcoming downtown corridor for Columbia Heights. MnDOT incorporated this community vision into the redevelopment plans, which also include enhanced streetscape improvements and multi-use trails extending throughout the downtown area and connecting surrounding neighborhoods to the city's core.

Through the Central Avenue redevelopment and the ongoing update of the City's Comprehensive Plan, the City and community are working together to strengthen the Central Business District as a vibrant, pedestrian oriented destination. Building on its existing mix of commercial uses that generate activity, including

restaurants, retail shops, and a destination theater, the vision is to create a dynamic downtown that attracts residents and visitors while supporting continued economic growth and investment.

4000 Central is located in the heart of Columbia Heights' designated Central Business District and downtown. For many years, 4000 Central served as office and clinic space for Fairview Medical, contributing significantly to downtown foot traffic and daily activity. In 2020, the Fairview Clinic closed, and the property has remained vacant.

CURRENT STATUS

Zoning Considerations

The applicant purchased the building in early 2026 and proposed the use of an in-patient drug treatment facility on 2 floors of the building along with an out-patient facility on another level of the building.

9.103 of the City Zoning Code classifies drug treatment facilities as:

“Residential Care Facilities” with the definition “A licensed public or private facility, which, for gain or otherwise, regularly provides one or more dependents with 24-hour-a-day substitute for the care, food, lodging, training, supervision, rehabilitation, and treatment they need, but which for any reason cannot be furnished in the dependent’s own home. The term includes facilities that are licensed by the Minnesota Department of Health, foster homes, residential treatment facilities, maternity shelters, group homes, schools for challenged children, and homes for battered children or spouses. Such term shall not include any facility eligible for licensure by the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Residential care facilities serving six or fewer dependents are considered permitted uses in all residential zoning districts where single family residences are permitted subject to the same regulations.”

The Limited Business District is the only commercial district where Residential Care Facilities are a conditionally allowed use.

The applicant is proposing a text amendment to the City Code to allow Residential Care Facilities in the Central Business District as an allowed use with a conditional use permit, as well as proposing a change to the specific development standards pertaining to residential care facilities.

Applicant’s Proposed Text Amendment

9.106 General Development Standards

Table of Uses

1. COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL ZONING DISTRICTS					
A = Accessory Use C = Conditional Use P = Permitted Use PUD = Planned Unit Development Numbers indicate additional conditions for approval of use which can be found in City Code 9.107 Specific Development Standards (C)					
ZONING DISTRICTS	LB: LIMITED BUSINESS	GB: GENERAL BUSINESS	CBD: CENTRAL BUSINESS	I-1: LIGHT INDUSTRIAL	I-2: GENERAL INDUSTRIAL
USE CLASSIFICATION					
State licensed residential care facility. (36)	C		C		

9.107 Specific Development Standards

(36) Residential Care Facility

(d) On-site services shall be for residents of the facility only, except where the facility is located within a multi-story commercial structure and maintains distinct separation (architecturally or by schedule) between residential and non-residential clients.

Analysis of Zoning Ordinance Amendment and Required Findings of Fact

Section 9.104 (F) of the Zoning Ordinance outlines findings of fact that must be satisfied in order for the City to grant approval for a zoning amendment. The findings are as follows:

(a) The amendment is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

The City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan envisions the Central Avenue corridor, particularly the area around 40th Avenue and Central Avenue, as the community's primary commercial and civic destination. The Plan emphasizes "creating a unified downtown central business district that serves as a focal point for the City". The subject site is designated Central Business District (CBD)

"The CBD, Central Business District provides for the development and redevelopment of the established downtown core, including a mix of retail, financial, office, service and entertainment uses. Residential units are allowed within this district when located above a first-floor commercial use."

It further identifies this intersection as an Area of Opportunity, with a guiding principle for redevelopment of the area to "encourage uses that will attract people and enliven this central point of entertainment and commerce."

While residential care facilities and drug treatment centers provide important community services, they are generally institutional or residential in nature rather than destination-oriented commercial uses. Their primary function is to provide treatment, housing, and support for residents or patients, rather than to generate pedestrian activity, retail spending, or public engagement that contributes to a vibrant downtown environment.

Unlike restaurants, retail establishments, entertainment venues, offices, or mixed-use developments, a residential treatment facility typically serves a limited resident population and receives relatively few visitors from the broader community. As a result, it may not significantly contribute to the street-level activity, consumer traffic, or economic vitality that the Comprehensive Plan seeks to foster along the Central Avenue corridor.

Because land within the Central Business District is limited, using a prominent site in a designated Area of Opportunity for an institutional residential use would reduce opportunities for commercial, mixed-use, and entertainment-oriented development that more directly supports the Comprehensive Plan's goal of enhancing the image and economic vitality of the Central Avenue Corridor. For these reasons, City staff finds the proposed zoning text amendment is inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan's land use goals and vision for the Central Business District.

(b) The amendment is in the public interest and is not solely for the benefit of a single property owner.

The zoning text amendment would allow residential care facilities in the entirety of the Central Business District and therefore would not solely benefit a single property owner.

(c) *Where the amendment is to change the zoning classification of a particular property, the existing use of the property and the zoning classification of property within the general area of the property in question are compatible with the proposed zoning classification.*

The amendment is not to change the zoning classification of a particular property.

(d) *Where the amendment is to change the zoning classification of a particular property, there has been a change in the character or trend of development in the general area of the property in question, which has taken place since such property was placed in its current zoning classification.*

The amendment is not to change the zoning classification of a particular property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends denial of the amendment to the Zoning Code because: 1) it is indirect conflict with the Comprehensive Plan 2) does not fit the vision of the downtown district and 3) does not meet the Findings of Fact that are required by Section 9.104(F) as specified above.

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S):
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of draft Ordinance No. 1727, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to recommend that the City Council deny draft Ordinance No. 1727, an ordinance amending Chapter 9 (Land Use) of the City Code to amend Sections 9.106, General Development Standards, and 9.107, Specific Development Standards.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Ordinance 1727
2. Affidavit of Public Hearing Notice
3. Applicant Narrative
4. Statement from the CEO