

MINUTES
CITY OF COLUMBIA HEIGHTS
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
October 07, 2025

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

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioners present: Dirk Schmitz, Karl Rehfuss, Paul Moses, Ahmed Maameri, John Gianoulis, and Livie Powers (Youth Commissioner)

Commissioners absent: Clara Wolfe, Jeffrey Johnson

Also present: Ursula Brandt, City Planner; Sarah LaVoie, Administrative Assistant; Mitch Forney, Community Development Director; Loral Deneen, Council Liaison.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Approval of July 01, 2025, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Motion by Moses, seconded by Rehfuss, to approve the minutes from the meeting of July 01, 2025. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

OTHER BUSINESS

2. Introduction to New City Planner, Ursula Brandt

Introduction: Gianoulis asked City Planner Ursula Brandt to introduce herself. Brandt explained that she started working for the City in September and was previously working at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Minneapolis. Before that, she was a city planner and a housing planner in the Kansas City area, and a city planner in the Peace Corps. She added that she is looking forward to working for the City and working with the Commission.

Forney asked Youth Commissioner Powers to introduce herself. Youth Commissioner Powers explained that she started in June and is excited to be at the Planning Commission meeting.

3. Comprehensive Plan Update Schedule

Introduction: Brandt stated the Comprehensive Plan lays out the city's long-range vision for the future in the areas of land use, transportation, development, housing, water systems, climate, natural systems, and parks and trails, and serves as a guide for the city when making decisions. Every ten years, the Met Council tasks cities in the metro area to update their Comprehensive Plan. Met Council officially released the System Statement for Columbia Heights, which marks the kickoff for the Comprehensive Planning process. We will discuss how the Comprehensive Plan was handled in the past and the proposed timeline for the upcoming Comprehensive Plan.

Brandt explained that the previous Comprehensive Plan was called "Thrive 2024". The prep for the 2040 Comprehensive Plan began in 2016 and 2017. During that time, the City formed a review

committee, created an RFP and hired consultants, and determined the scope of work and planned the process. In 2017 and 2018, the City introduced the process to the committees and the public, held five community engagement events, brought times to committee meetings to review different topics, drafted a plan review, and submitted the plan to the Met Council.

Brandt reviewed the proposed schedule for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan. The planning process would begin in 2026 with a kick-off to create the plan update subcommittee, which would work with the consultants throughout the process. In the spring of 2026, the consultants would be selected. In the summer of 2026, there would be a kickoff with the consultants and a workshop with the subcommittee. Throughout the fall of 2026, the public engagement activities would begin, and staff would work with the subcommittee on each element to run throughout the process. In 2027, the first draft of the plan would be available for staff, commissions, and the Council to review, and the plan would be posted for adjacent and affected communities to review. In 2028, the plan would be submitted for preliminary review by the Met Council, the Planning Commission, and the City Council would review the final draft, and the plan would be approved by the Council in the summer or fall. The final due date is December 31, 2028.

Forney explained that the Comprehensive Plan drives everything that the Planning Commission does. There will be a lot of Planning Commission involvement in the creation of the plan.

Gianoulis asked if the Planning Commission would be working directly with the subcommittee. Forney replied that staff would need to look into it since none of the current staff were working for the City during the time the previous plan was created.

4. Review Purchase of 4510 Taylor Street NE

Introduction: Brandt stated, 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 4510 Taylor Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421 (the "Subject Property") to determine if its acquisition conforms to the Comprehensive Plan of the City.

Brandt explained 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. She reviewed the specific goals and policies from the Comprehensive Plan that directly and indirectly correlate to the conformity of the proposed acquisition.

Recommendation: Brandt stated that staff recommends moving to adopt Resolution 2025-PZ01, a resolution finding that the proposed acquisition of certain land for redevelopment purposes by the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority is consistent with the City of Columbia Heights' Comprehensive Plan.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Reh fuss mentioned that the Agenda Packet says there will be redevelopment and asked what they would be. Forney replied that the EDA intends to demolish the structure. The redevelopment will be a residential use.

Maameri asked if the City owned similar single-family homes. Forney replied that the City does. The majority of the properties that the EDA has purchased have been commercial lots that are along Central Avenue. The EDA has shifted the focus to get some of the single-family lots that are non-conforming along Central Avenue.

Maameri asked if the goal in acquiring single-family homes was to have affordable housing. Forney replied that an ADU does not need to be affordable housing, but it is possible that it could be used for affordable housing, and there could be a partnership with Habitat for Humanity.

Schmitz asked if there was anyone occupying the property. Forney replied that there is not. The Fire Department will use the building for training before it is demolished. The EDA works with Better Futures to salvage some of the building materials for reuse.

Moses asked what happened to the house. Forney replied that pipes burst in the winter, which caused flooding in the house. The renters moved out without telling the property owner, which is why the pipes burst because no one was keeping the heat on. Mold got into the house, and there are holes in the house, causing critters to get into the house.

Maameri asked if one of the plans for the property was to demolish the house, rebuild a residential home, and then sell it. Forney replied that it depends on where the EDA would like to go with the project. Typically, the City would not build the project and would sell the lot on a bid process that is open to any housing developer to build a house to the specs that the EDA determines. For example, if the EDA desires an ADU, the EDA could determine how many bedrooms and square footage. A development agreement would be included.

Powers asked what the EDA and ADU are and what power they have with the Comprehensive Plan. Forney replied that the EDA is another Commission called the Economic Development Authority. The EDA and Planning Commission are required by law and are regulated by State law. The EDA has its own levying authority for economic development purposes within the City. The City used to have an HRA, which is a Housing Redevelopment Authority. The City collapsed the HRA and gave all powers of housing and housing redevelopment to the EDA. The ADU is an Accessory Dwelling Unit, which is an additional unit on a property that can be rented. The owner must be the occupant of one of the units.

Maameri mentioned that not many people would want to purchase a property that needs to be torn down. He asked if the City was helping the process by purchasing the property, demolishing it so that more people would want to build on the property. Forney agreed.

Motion by Maameri, seconded by Moses, to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-PZ01, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by Schmitz, seconded by Rehfuss, to adopt Resolution 2025-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.

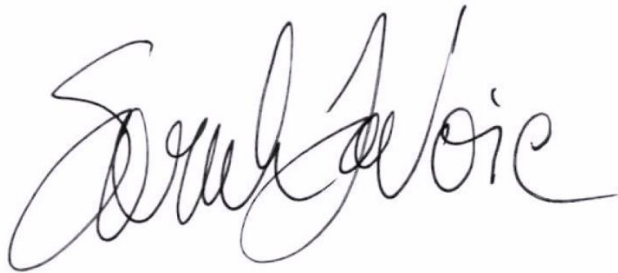
Forney mentioned that there would be a variance for the Planning Commission to review during the next meeting. The Medtronic site is still moving forward and will kick back up in January.

Forney mentioned that the City would be reissuing bonds and reloading funds for the Rainbow site. The City Manager met with Alatus to discuss how to adjust the site to get the project moving forward.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Moses, seconded by Rehfuss, to adjourn the meeting at 6:25 pm. All ayes. MOTION PASSED

Respectfully submitted,



Sarah LaVoie, Administrative Assistant