

**MINUTES**  
**CITY OF COLUMBIA HEIGHTS**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING**  
**June 03, 2025**

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

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Commissioners present: Jeffrey Johnson, Dirk Schmitz, Karl Reh fuss, Clara Wolfe, Ahmed Maameri, and John Gianoulis

Commissioners absent: Paul Moses

Also present: Andrew Boucher, City Planner; Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Sarah LaVoie, Administrative Assistant; Mitch Forney, Community Development Coordinator; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Laurel Deneen, Council Liaison.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**1. Approval of April 01, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes**

*Motion by Schmitz, seconded by Reh fuss, to approve the minutes from the meeting of April 01, 2025. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**2. Speaking at Board and Commission Guidelines and Form**

Introduction: Ion updated the Commission on the Public Hearing process. She noted that there is a sign-in form for residents or people who are interested in speaking on the topic. Staff can help the Commission introduce people to the podium. Overall, the Commission is in charge of the hearing. There are guidelines provided to the Commission if a Public Hearing needs to be postponed, suspended, or recessed.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

**3. Consideration of a Preliminary Plat; Planned Unit Development; Easement Vacations to allow for the construction of a multi-phased redevelopment at 800 53rd Avenue NE, including two 6-story, 132-unit affordable multifamily buildings, a mixed-use building with 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, and a range of 150-175 market-rate apartments, 58 townhomes, and associated park and infrastructure improvements.**

Introduction: Boucher stated that Kaas Wilson Architects, on behalf of Lincoln Avenue Communities, has applied for a Preliminary Plat; Planned Unit Development; and Easement Vacations for the property located at 800 53rd Avenue, the site of the vacant Medtronic corporate campus, which would be demolished as part of this request. The property is owned by Medtronic, but under a purchase agreement with the applicant/developer.

Boucher explained that a multi-phased redevelopment is proposed, including two 6-story, 132-unit affordable multifamily buildings, a mixed-use building with 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, and a range of 150-175 market-rate apartments, 58 townhomes, and associated park and infrastructure improvements, as well as multi-modal transportation facilities. In addition, Sullivan Lake is identified as an impaired water body, and the described project scope meets the threshold test identified in MN Rules 4410.4300 Mandatory Environmental Assessment Worksheet Categories, Subpart 19D: 250 unattached units or 375 attached units in a city within the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area that has adopted a comprehensive plan under Minnesota Statutes, section 473.859.

Boucher noted that the site is zoned GB, General Business District, with the R-4 Multiple Family Residential District zoning district examined as it is most similar to the type of uses being proposed, compared to what the applicant is proposing. The site is adjacent to the City of Fridley and General Business zoned commercial properties to the north and east; the site has Parks and Open Space zoning to the west in the form of Sullivan Lake Park and residential districts such as R-2A, R-2B, and R-3 (One/Two Family Residential, Built-as-Duplex, and Limited Multiple Family Residential) with townhome developments to the west and south. Additionally, there is R-1 (Single-Family Residential) with more dense districts R-2A, R-2B, and R-3 south of the subject property.

Boucher mentioned that the applicant is proposing to subdivide the existing lot into four separate parcels based on the phasing of the development, with the latter phases being platted and sold to interested developers. The first two phases include the two 132 affordable multifamily apartment buildings, starting with the southern building as the first phase, the northern building as the second phase, and the third phase including the 58 townhome units. The fourth phase includes the mixed-use building containing 150-175 market-rate multifamily units and 12,000 sq. ft. of speculative commercial space.

Boucher stated in late 2022, Medtronic vacated and listed their Columbia Heights campus, located at 800 53rd Avenue NE, for sale. The City hired the consultant, HKGi, who prepared the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan, to conduct community outreach and provide guidance on potential parameters for redevelopment of the site. The entire 11.74-acre site is fully within the Shoreland Overlay District and zoned GB-General Business, which allows for a variety of commercial uses but does not include provisions to allow residential development.

Boucher explained that HKGi organized an internal meeting with City staff in October 2023 to discuss potential redevelopment parameters and historic site/area conditions before holding a Joint Session of the Planning Commission and City Council, along with city staff, on November 16, 2023. The Joint Session allowed for some consensus to be reached regarding the core land use and design elements that have been established thus far. These core elements include the following:

1. Consider lower-density housing near Sullivan Lake and higher-density housing away from the lake towards 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Central Avenue (townhomes → high-density residential), with six stories being the maximum for the higher-density residential, including parking. A minimum of 400 units for the apartments is acknowledged, with a targeted density range between 450-600 units, and commercial activity is limited by visibility from the street.
2. Public accessibility to the lake edge is a priority, and there is a desire to invite activity to the

- water feature/lake; stormwater features incorporated into the street do a good job of integrating public and private spaces and were received extremely positively.
3. Improving multi-modal transportation was repeatedly cited as the site provides opportunities to incorporate transit facilities with the upcoming BRT F Line and provide connections east-west along 52nd Avenue to expand pedestrian and bicycling facilities.
  4. Expansion and/or reimagining of Sullivan Lake Park to have some degree of public gathering amenity, such as seating areas or other pedestrian-scale amenities incorporated with the water/stormwater features and public art components. Needs for updated facilities and parking more in alignment with the types of programming desired were discussed.
  5. Improving the environmental condition of Sullivan Lake Park as an impaired water body is explicitly identified as a priority.

Boucher noted that the land use and design frameworks were refined into two concepts using the responses from the Joint Session, which were presented to the public at an Open House engagement event held on January 9, 2024. The event was extremely well attended and served as the beginning of a two-week online public engagement period from January 9<sup>th</sup> through January 24<sup>th</sup>, where community members provided feedback on the concepts presented.

Boucher stated the amendment was approved by the Metropolitan Council regarding the 11.74-acre property from Commercial to Transit Oriented Development (TOD) land use with an increase in the maximum density for TOD from 25-50 units per acre to 25-65 units per acre as well as a change in the percentage use from 70% residential/30% commercial to 85% residential/15% commercial to accommodate future development. This framework and the associated comments received are reflected in the proposed application(s), showing a multi-phased redevelopment with a density range on the lower side for the multifamily buildings and a midpoint density range for the townhomes between the totals described in the preferred concept. Also included is the desired 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space and associated park and infrastructure improvements, as well as multi-modal transportation facilities that will be required as part of the PUD.

Boucher stated the site is currently zoned GB, General Business District, and the applicant is proposing to rezone the site to Planned Unit Development (PUD). The Planned Unit Development District will allow the applicant areas of flexibility within the following areas as defined by City Code 9.113 (C): building heights, placement, design and materials, setbacks, landscaping, parking stall design, public spaces and art, densities, and the overall use of the property.

Boucher mentioned that after the amendment was approved, the Comprehensive Plan guides this area for Transit Oriented Development, which seeks to develop properties to have a mix of residential, retail, and office. Transit-oriented development also seeks to include pedestrian-friendly access and design. In review of the site and building plans for this project, pedestrian and bicycle facilities are not shown, and it is expected that any proposed facilities to identify and close connectivity gaps that are identified in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan or related city plans. A schematic-level landscaping plan has been provided, and defined park improvements will be required for the proposal to be consistent with the goals of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Boucher explained that the subject property is currently located in the General Business District,

which does not allow for residential uses. The proposed plan is to rezone the site to Planned Unit Development District. The R-4 and GB Districts are subject to setback standards, while the PUD district is not. Setbacks of properties in the PUD district are subject to Staff review and Council approval. The first two apartment buildings are in the center of the subject property, share zero-lot lines, and show a building control joint connecting the two structures, resulting in the proposed setbacks described. The parking lots about the property line of the future phases of the development but are separated. In review of the proposed setbacks. Staff have identified that the project will need flexibility with regard to setting the minimum multi-family front yard setback to 10 feet, and setting the multi-family parking setbacks to 0 feet.

Boucher noted the property is currently 11.74 acres, and the applicant is proposing to acquire 7,147 sq. ft. or .16 acres of City parkland. There is also a roadway easement (53rd Avenue NE) which is 38,623 sq. ft. or 0.89 acres, utility and trail easements that account for 51,922 sq. ft. or 1.19 acres, and a combined total buildable property area of 454,752 sq. ft. or 10.44 acres. City Zoning Ordinance requires a minimum lot area for Multiple Family Residential District (R-4) zoning of 10,000 square feet for a multi-family dwelling, and a minimum lot width of 70 feet. The proposed lot area for Lot 1 is 1.81 acres, and the proposed lot width is 511.67 feet; Lot 2 is 1.74 acres and 512.46 feet wide; Lot 3 is 2.47 acres with a lot width of 383.84 feet; and Lot 4 is 5.61 acres with a width of 576. The proposed lot areas and lot widths meet the minimum dimensions for the proposed use. The proposed lot areas and lot widths meet the minimum dimensions for the R-4 Zoning District. The proposed plat shows an impervious surface coverage exceeding the maximum for the Shoreland Overlay District. A Variance will be required to exceed the 35% impervious surface maximum in the Shoreland Overlay District and must be provided to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a condition of approval.

Boucher stated the proposed site plan shows four phases with the first two including two L-shaped apartment buildings both containing 134 units with surface and underground parking; the third phase containing 58 townhouses with tuck-under garages and standalone as well as shared driveways; and the last phase, a mixed-use building containing 12,000 square foot of commercial space (the specific use will have defined parking requirements) and 150-175 market-rate apartment units with underground and surface parking shared between the uses which will be an expectation in the development agreement., but will have a specific calculation and other requirements once an end-user is found. The project will provide approximately 675 parking spaces: 250 stalls at grade and 425 underground parking spaces. Each of the townhome units will have two garage stalls and 2 driveway parking spaces.

Boucher explained that in the first two phases, the applicant is proposing two multifamily buildings identical in layout and unit mix. City Code 9.106 General Development Standards (L) Off-street parking and loading (10) establishes off-street parking requirements for the allowed uses within the city. Residential uses have off-street parking requirements, including two enclosed spaces (garages) per single-family and townhome, but that count is different for multifamily buildings, and depending on the unit type. One-bedroom units are required to provide one enclosed parking space (garage); two or more bedroom units are required to provide two total spaces per unit, with one of those being enclosed. The Council, at its discretion, may reduce the minimum required parking to not less than 1.5 parking spaces per unit for multifamily structures with seven or more

units, after consideration of factors including but not limited to the present or future availability of transit services, shared parking, pedestrian orientation, and occupancy characteristics, which is also the intent of the Transit Oriented Development designation.

Boucher noted that for the first two phases, the applicant is proposing 268 multifamily units with the unit type counts above. Based on that configuration, the applicant is required to provide a minimum of 134 enclosed spaces per building and 82 surface spaces for a total of 270 enclosed spaces and 164 surface spaces totaling 434 stalls between the two buildings or a parking ratio of 1.6 stalls per 1 unit for both buildings and meet the minimum of not less than 1.5 parking spaces. There should be a determination on whether parking is included in the rental pricing, and if that is desired, then it should be considered as part of the development agreement.

Boucher mentioned the third phase includes 58 townhouses showing two-car garages with driveways capable of parking two passenger vehicles. The applicant is required to provide two parking spaces per townhome unit, and both of them must be enclosed. This configuration meets the minimum required.

Boucher stated the last phase includes a mixed-use building with a range of approximately 150-175 market-rate apartment units and a 12,000 sq. ft. speculative commercial space. Because the commercial space is without a defined end user, the space is speculative and numerous commercial uses in the city are held to the 1 per 300 sq. ft. gross floor area standard, so that is what is being used to estimate the commercial parking requirement with the understanding that when a defined end user is identified, those parking calculations could change depending on the type of use. Market-rate apartment units are considered to have more amenities, including enclosed parking; multifamily units are required to provide at least one enclosed parking space per unit, regardless of the unit type, not to decrease the parking ratio below 1.5 spaces (total) per unit, which is the minimum standard.

Boucher explained that City Code 9.106 (L)(6)(g) and (h) identify provisions allow to allow joint parking between multi-use structures and proof of parking showing that the anticipated parking demand will be met if the future potential use may generate additional parking needs. As part of the PUD, the City can accept the amount of parking provided for the first three phases of residential development with the understanding that the specific unit count breakdown and definition of the commercial space will require further parking requirements. The parking spaces vary in size from nine feet by twenty feet to a compact size of nine feet by eighteen feet and eight feet six inches by eighteen feet. Most of the spaces for residents are undersized. As part of the PUD, the City can accept the undersized parking for resident spots. Drive aisle depths are noted on the plans at 24 feet in width. This is consistent with the City's requirements for drive aisle depths.

Boucher stated that the applicant has prepared a draft of the traffic impact study required as part of the mandatory Environmental Assessment Worksheet, which is attached for review. The study reviewed existing conditions within the study area to establish current traffic conditions and determine impacts associated with traffic volumes, observed transportation characteristics, and analyzed crash history, as well as interaction capacity. Average daily traffic (ADT) volumes were provided by MnDOT or estimated based on the data collected. Two (2) historical turning movement

counts from March 2024 and October 2024 were utilized for the University (Hwy 47) and 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue intersection.

Boucher noted vehicular intersection turning movement and pedestrian/bicycle counts were collected at the following locations on Wednesday, April 9, 2025, from 7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m. at each location, as well as 13-hour counts (6 a.m. – 7 p.m. as indicated\* for the following locations:

- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and University Avenue (Hwy 47)\*
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Monroe Street NE
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and West Site/Target access\*
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and East Site/Target access\*
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and US Bank access
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Discount Tire/West Starbucks access
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Bank of America/East Starbucks access
- 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Central Avenue (Hwy 65)\*

Boucher mentioned that the roadways observed are described as follows:

- **University Avenue (Hwy 47)** is a 4-lane divided minor arterial roadway with left- and right-turn lanes containing no multimodal facilities, except for transit stops at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue intersection, and 50 mph speed limits.
- **Central Avenue (Hwy 65)** is generally a 4-lane divided minor arterial roadway with left- and right-turn lanes containing a multiuse trail along the west side of the roadway north of 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, and sidewalk along both sides of the roadway south of 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue with a transit stop in the southwest quadrant of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue intersection. The speed limit is 40 mph.
- **53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue** is generally a 2-lane undivided major collector roadway west of the Target access with limited turn lanes and a 2-lane divided roadway east of the Target access with dedicated turn lanes. There is a multi-use trail along the south side of the roadway and a sidewalk along the north side. Metro Transit Route 10 serves 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue in 30-minute increments throughout most of the day. The speed limit is 30 mph, and the roadway was recently reconstructed in 2023.

Boucher stated that all other study roadways are 2-lane undivided local facilities or commercial driveways with limited turn lanes and/or multimodal facilities. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue intersections at University Avenue (Hwy 47) and Central Avenue (Hwy 65) are signalized, while the other intersections have two-way stop controls, with a median U-turn/partial roundabout located along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between the west and east Target driveways. MnDOT has expressed a willingness to incorporate roadway changes with this project to improve the traffic situation as well as pedestrian and bicyclist facilities.

Boucher explained that after a review of five years of crash history (Jan. 2020 – Dec. 2024) using data from MnDOT, there were a total of 29 crashes reported along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between University and Central during the review period. None of the crashes were defined as “severe” (fatal or serious injury), with most of the reported crashes occurring between Monroe and Central, primarily prior to the reconstruction. Since the 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue was reconstructed, there have been five (5) reported crashes, or 2.5 crashes per year.

Boucher noted intersection capacity was evaluated using methods outlined in Highway Capacity Manual, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition to model observed traffic operations and identify key metrics such as Level of Service (LOS) and queues using collected traffic, pedestrian, and bicyclist volumes, traffic controls, peaking characteristics, and driver behavior factors to quantify how an intersection is operating. Intersections are graded from LOS A to F, corresponding to the average delay per vehicle values shown below. LOS A–D is generally considered acceptable, with A indicating the best traffic operation and F indicating demand exceeds capacity.

Boucher mentioned that at side-street stop-controlled intersections, emphasis is given to providing an estimate for the level of service of these approaches in one of two ways.

1. Consideration is given to the overall intersection LOS, the total number of vehicles entering compared to the capability of the intersection to support the volumes.
2. It is important to consider the delay on the minor approach as the mainline does not have to stop; most delays are attributed to the side-street approaches.

Boucher noted it is also understood that it is typical of intersections with higher mainline traffic volumes to experience high levels of delay (poor levels of service) on the side-street approaches, but an acceptable overall intersection level of service during peak hour conditions. All study intersections and approaches generally operate at an acceptable LOS D or better during typical weekday a.m. and p.m. peak hours. The eastbound approaches of 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue at both University (Hwy 47) and Central Avenue (Hwy 65) operate near the LOS D/E threshold during the p.m. peak hour, although these operations are relatively common and don't typically require mitigation. However, peak westbound queues along 53<sup>rd</sup> from University (Hwy 47) can extend approximately 300' during the p.m. peak hour (or approximately 10 – 15 vehicles) and require one (1) signal cycle length. Otherwise, no other existing intersection capacity issues are identified in the study area.

Boucher stated that the traffic conditions were modeled on no-build conditions and the conditions proposed in the redevelopment, in comparison to the full extent of the peak demands that occurred during Medtronic's use as a corporate office building. It is necessary to examine the prior use versus the current vacant lot to understand the traffic implications.

Boucher reviewed the proposed redevelopment trip generation. The trip generation estimate was created using the ITE Trip Generation Manual, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, and includes trips for typical weekday a.m. and p.m. peak hours, as well as daily. The previous use as a 144,000 sq. ft. office building with approximately 605 parking spaces generated an estimated 1,560 daily trips (780 in/780 out) with an estimated 7:30 – 8:30 a.m. peak hour generating 219 trips (193 in/26 out) and 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. peak hour generating 207 trips (35 in/172 out), which coincides with the peak hours of the adjacent roadways.

Boucher noted in consideration of the proposed redevelopment, a 10% multi-use reduction is only applied to the retail portion to account for residents that are expected to patronize the retail use as well as a 5% modal reduction is applied to all trips to account for people utilizing different modes of transportation such as a transit, walk, or bike trips as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) project. The commercial space is considered speculative retail for the purposes of the trip generation summary and may require further analysis depending on the end user if it changes to a

use other than retail.

Boucher explained the proposed redevelopment is estimated to generate 3,000 daily (1,500 in / 1,500 out) trips with an estimated generation of 239 a.m. peak hour trips (66 in / 173 out) and 282 p.m. peak hour trips (165 in / 117 out), but anticipating a overall lower peak demand considering the fixed hours of the previous office building and the differences in peak trips generated by residential uses.

Boucher stated results of the no-build and build conditions of the proposed redevelopment indicate that all intersections and approaches will generally continue to operate at a LOS D or better during peak a.m. and p.m. hours. Overall changes in operations based on no build and build conditions range from about 2 to 4 seconds without any changes to the existing signal timing provided by MnDOT. Westbound queues along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from University Avenue (Hwy 47) are expected to increase by approximately 50' to 75' during the peak periods (2 – 4 vehicles) because of the proposed redevelopment. These queues are expected to increase from 300' to approximately 375' – 400' during the p.m. peak hour, with minor queuing expected at a couple of site access approaches.

Boucher noted left- and/or right-turn lanes along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue at the west site access or a right-turn lane along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue at the east site access could reduce potential conflicts, but do not appear to provide much operational benefit and could result in increased vehicle speeds and/or longer pedestrian crossing distances. Since the adjacent roadway network can support the proposed redevelopment, no additional infrastructure changes are required to maintain the current intersection capacity. The applicant is strongly encouraged to coordinate with MnDOT to identify opportunities to improve the traffic and safety conditions, including potential changes to roundabouts.

Boucher stated that the recommendations regarding the site plan identified the following items that should be considered:

- Locate signage and landscaping to avoid creating any sight distance issues.
- Provide multimodal connections throughout the site to ensure connectivity with existing and proposed facilities adjacent to the site.
- Review truck maneuverability to limit potential internal circulation conflicts. Align the northern east-west driveway aisles between the northwest townhomes and the multifamily apartments to reduce potential conflicts between movements.
- Preserve the ability to connect the proposed redevelopment with an extension of 52<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

Boucher explained the site will be served by two existing entrances on the south side of 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NE. These accesses will be configured to Public Works/Engineering specifications and incorporating as much feedback from the MN Department of Transportation on any restrictions with turns. There are no proposed city streets within the project area. Internal access will be private drive lanes. There is no proposed connected access to the east or south.

Boucher indicated that the Fire Department included review comments that the dead ends for the

townhomes cannot be greater than 300 feet; otherwise, a turnaround is required. The street width meets the minimum width required to accommodate a fire apparatus with the parking spaces included.

Boucher stated Minnesota Department of Transportation provided review comments on how this development's proposed access aligns with the Central Avenue reconstruction in 2028. MNDOT requests that the applicant continue to work with area engineer Chris Bower to incorporate opportunities to improve traffic mobility and multimodal user safety. The intention is to construct a multilane roundabout at the intersection of MN 65 and 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue with a single eastbound lane on 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The eastbound approach is forecasted to operate at Level of Service D in the PM peak, but while that is an improvement over the LOS E experienced at the signal today, the eastbound intersection approach is nearing capacity based upon existing traffic volumes. MNDOT recommends examining the feasibility of upsizing the roundabout at 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to handle future traffic growth and incorporating any development-related traffic information into the reconstruction design by the end of July 2025.

Boucher explained that the intersection of MN 47 and 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue operates at LOS F today and it is MNDOT's perspective that so long as there is a traffic signal at this intersection, it will continue to operate at a LOS F. Without eastbound or westbound turn lanes, the signal functions poorly, and there is no ability to add these lanes without serious impacts to adjacent properties. MNDOT is considering a roundabout at this intersection after modeling shows that it would operate at LOS A with current traffic volumes, but that would not occur until at least 2030. The developer is expected to coordinate with Metro Transit to accommodate the future F-Line BRT into the project area.

Boucher stated the City approved a Complete Streets Policy in January 2025 to require public and private development projects to identify the users of a project area and what mode they use to travel, whether the area has identified conflict points or is referenced in a citywide plan, if there is a language spoken other than English, and the presence of transit facilities along the project area or significant destinations where connectivity caps can be closed. The expectation is to improve connectivity for pedestrian and bicycle access where feasible and practical.

Boucher explained MN65/Central Avenue is identified as a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) Corridor, and has several transit routes in operation, including plans for Metro Transit to introduce a new Bus Rapid Transit Route F along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Both intersections at MN 65/Central and 52nd have Level 1 (top) scores on the Priority Areas Walking Study (PAWS), combined with the area being designated as Transit Oriented Development, there is anticipated to be considerable pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Boucher noted there is an existing trail running along the south side of the property that outlets into the Total Health parking lot, near Highway 65 and 52nd Avenue. If there is a desire for the trail to connect to Highway 65, then additional coordination will be required with the cities of Columbia Heights and Fridley, developer, and MNDOT to build a trail extension with a MNDOT 2028 construction project, but does face challenging grades that would have to be accommodated in the development plans. MNDOT has also identified the need for a safe and comfortable crossing of

Highway 65, which could include countermeasures such as a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon, high-visibility crosswalks, and pedestrian-level lighting. The development will be required to provide sidewalks or shared-use paths/trails to provide access to the townhomes and multifamily buildings and connectivity to Sullivan Lake Park. Prioritizing and emphasizing multimodal connections throughout the site to ensure connectivity with existing and proposed facilities adjacent to the site as part of the park improvements. These are expectations that will be included in the development agreement.

Boucher mentioned the proposed plat will not include a park dedication. Instead, the applicants will make a financial contribution and/or build out amenities from the master plan that was approved for Sullivan Lake Park to satisfy this requirement, which will be included in the development contract. The site will include enhancements to the Sullivan Lake public park on the west side of the property (labeled "Park" on the plans). The improvements to the park will be reflective of the master planning that the Parks and Recreation Commission approved. The residential area of the L-shaped buildings will include private patios and tot lots, and a courtyard/amenity space above the enclosed garage spaces. The project is anticipated to include 15,600 sq. ft. of trails and walk as well as 212,306 sq. ft. of common open/green space. The park improvements will be defined as part of the physical development contract as required by the PUD process.

Boucher stated there are no commercial uses in need of loading/unloading or receiving large deliveries being proposed at this time, which would require compliance with the City Code's off-street loading requirements. Any nonresidential use that receives or distributes materials or merchandise by trucks or similar vehicles and has a gross floor area of 5,000 sq. ft. is subject to off-street loading requirements. When the commercial space has a defined end user, that tenant will be required to meet dimensional standards for loading berths, location, and access by designating a loading zone. The applicant should consider identifying specific loading and unloading areas for residents moving in or out as part of the development agreement.

Boucher noted that the proposed landscaping plan shows a total of 112 trees, including a mix of deciduous trees, evergreen trees, and ornamental trees. The tree sizes and diameters will meet the City's requirements once soil volumes are provided. The remaining area on the site will be covered with mulch, stormwater seed mixture, and turf sod. IF mechanical screening is to be placed on the roof, it shall comply with the City's requirements for screening as a condition of approval. Trash handling areas are shown for the two L-shaped buildings just outside the parking garage. Turning diagrams have been provided showing that a truck can make the necessary maneuvers. If the trash is not located within the underground parking garage, then the trash and/or recycling collection areas shall be enclosed on at least three sides by an opaque screening wall or fence no less than six feet in height with the open side of the enclosure not facing any public street or the front yard of any adjacent property as a condition of approval.

Boucher stated the site is served by existing utilities but will need to have utility capacity increased to accommodate additional demand. Existing utilities, such as water main, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and small utilities such as electric lines, natural gas, and communication lines, will be removed as necessary to accommodate the new project. The project will include the extension and

installation of utilities to serve the site. Watermain will be extended from the existing watermain within 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to the south into the project site, providing water service. The water main will connect back to the water main within 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, providing a looped system through the site. As an option, the water main could connect to the existing water main in the far southwest corner of the site, which currently serves the Parkside Village residential site. This would provide an additional looped connection.

Boucher explained Sanitary sewer will be extended into the site from the existing sanitary sewer in the south portion of the site. It appears that all of the surrounding sanitary sewer lines flow to an existing lift station just off the southwest corner of the site. Other utilities such as electric, gas, and communication cables will also be installed. The applicant has provided a utility plan that shows new water-main, sanitary, and sewer connections upsized that will run through the subject property and adjacent properties, Central Avenue, before extending and looping into 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to serve the building. The utility plan does not show how electrical and gas lines will be connected to the building; detailed plans will be required once a building permit has been applied for. Utility construction for phase 1 is estimated to last several months, with the building construction to last one and a half to two years.

Boucher mentioned that the previous use of the site with an office building and large parking lot has set a commercial use precedence on this site. The large, hard-surfaced areas provided little green space for stormwater treatment. In fact, much of the surface parking lot runoff drains directly to Sullivan Lake with little to no treatment. Stormwater management is required for the development. The stormwater management plan shows three proposed underground infiltration storage vaults and an infiltration/filtration basin to increase the amount of volume control and retention necessary to contain runoff onsite with no increase in the total amounts of phosphorus and suspended solid states. There is currently no existing treatment on-site, so the proposed rates will improve from the existing rates, reducing runoff volumes and improving water quality. Proposed stormwater features include grates, ponding areas, outlet control structures that provide pre-treatment, skimming for floatables and oils, and dead storage volumes for settleable solids.

Boucher stated the Metropolitan Council has a Climate Vulnerability Assessment tool, which shows a flood risk on the existing site, mainly within the existing stormwater pond area located in the southeast portion of the site. However, the FEMA flood map shows the site to be outside the 100-year flood zone. Flood risks from Sullivan Lake are minimal. Flooding impacts within the proposed development can be mitigated by stormwater management and building elevations, including setting the elevations above the 100-year high water levels of adjacent ponds. The ponds contain overflows which outlet to sedimentation basins prior to flowing offsite, should higher rainfall events occur, with green spaces and landscaping offering additional opportunity for pretreatment.

Boucher explained as required by the NPDES permit, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) is required. The SWPPP will describe the nature of the construction activity; address the potential for sediment and pollutant discharges from the site; identify personnel to oversee implementation; identify the permanent stormwater management system; and identify inspection and maintenance practices. The Erosion Control Plan will implement best management practices (BMPs) such as minimizing disturbed areas, perimeter silt fence, redundant silt fence along

wetlands, temporary sediment ponds, erosion blankets, and re-establish vegetation within seven days of grading completion. The project is not anticipated to negatively affect downstream water bodies.

Boucher noted storm sewer will collect runoff from the site. The runoff will be treated per the city and watershed requirements. The applicant is recommended to collaborate with the Mississippi Watershed Organization and MnDOT as applicable and feasible. Additional stormwater requirements will be guided by the MPCA's NPDES stormwater permit requirements, including the following requirements:

- The first one inch of runoff from any new impervious surface is required to be infiltrated or filtered on-site.
- Stormwater runoff rates are required to be limited to be equal to or less than the existing conditions.
- Water quality treatment methods will be included to reduce pollutant loads such as phosphorus, nitrogen, and total suspended solids in runoff.

Boucher stated the applicant has provided examples of the options for the exterior elevations of the building, including but not limited to glass, brick, cast stone, fiber cement, and metal, as well as potential color pallets and roofing types intended to show the general materials. The expectation is that a high architectural quality is provided to add to the value of the neighborhood. Architectural drawings will be required to show the proposed signage. As a condition of approval, the signage on the building shall comply with the standards of Section 9.106 of the Zoning Ordinance. The applicants are proposing a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 2.8 for Lot 1, 2.3 for Lot 2, and 3.3 for Lot 3. This is a unit of measurement used to measure the amount of square footage in a building compared to the overall site. The Comprehensive Plan Amendment removed the Floor Area Ratio for transit-oriented design areas in the City. The floor area ratios as presented are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Goals.

Boucher explained that the applicant is required to submit a photometric plan that complies with City Code, showing that the exterior lighting proposed provides ample parking lot lighting for residents and does not emit light onto adjacent properties. The MN DNR recommends following the Minnesota Department of Transportation-approved products for luminaires, which limit the upright rating to zero and a nominal color temperature below 2700k. The applicant intends to integrate MnDOT-recommended products to the extent possible, conscious of the change in nighttime light with the Project.

Boucher stated that a noise study was conducted for the project, identifying the existing noise levels/sources in the area, nearby sensitive receptors, conformance to state noise standards, and quality of life to make recommendations on measures to minimize or mitigate the effects of noise. The primary source of noise comes from traffic on Central Avenue (MN TH 65) east of the project, but separated by a row of commercial buildings and grade changes.

Boucher noted that in Minnesota, nighttime (10 pm – 7 am) noise level standards for traffic are 55 decibels, and the model predicts a traffic noise level of 56 decibels at the east end of the apartment buildings at the 2nd and 4th floor levels. Traffic to the north is slowed by a roundabout just west of

the project and the signalized interaction with Central Avenue, reducing speeds below the 35 mph used in the model, so the noise levels from 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue are below the 55-decibel level. Noise from nearby commercial rooftop equipment will impact the upper floors at the east end of the apartment buildings about 5-6 decibels above the standard limits.

Boucher mentioned the proposed buildings must comply with the Minnesota Residential Noise Standards, which are most critical for the 6:00-7:00 am “nighttime” period. The nighttime standards are L10 55 dBA and L50 50 dBA. Proposed building wall construction and window treatments are possible remedies to meet the noise level standards. Providing a 30 dBA reduction through building walls will comply with the noise standards. A typical window-to-wall area of 40%, 6-inch stud walls with 3-pcf insulation, and STC 28-rated windows should provide a 30 dBA exterior to interior noise reduction. This should be verified by the Architect upon building design as a condition of approval. The adjacent residential area to the south will be exposed to construction noise from demolition and removals, site grading equipment, and building construction. Construction noise will be temporary, and construction times will be limited to allowable times as established by the city, typically between the hours of 7:00 am and 7:00 pm, Monday through Friday, as a condition of approval.

Boucher reviewed the density per acre proposed, 49 units per acre, compared to other projects. It should be noted that units-per-acre is a different measurement from floor area ratio. The recent redevelopment of the City Hall at 3989 Central Avenue NE is included as a comparison. Both L-shaped buildings are anticipated to be identical configurations and unit counts/types. The market rate is the last phase and includes an anticipated unit count of 150-175. The commercial is speculative and will depend on the developer and market interest in the space. A Comprehensive Plan Amendment would be required to remove the commercial space if the last phase were to deviate from the 85% Residential/15% Commercial guiding. 49 units per acre fall in line with the target residential density for urban centers adjacent to highways and transit ways identified in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment. The project site is well within a half-mile radius of Central Avenue NE, which aims for 40-75+ units per acre under transit-oriented development guidelines. The development on 40th & Central has a much higher density calculation, but is also immediately adjacent to a highway. By this comparison, this proposed project has a lower density calculation. Staff has also completed a bedroom analysis of the first two phases of the site since the apartment complex will offer four different types of rental units.

Boucher stated that the first two phases of the site will have a total of 682 bedrooms. The townhomes will include enclosed garages and driveway spaces, whereas the mixed-use market-rate is anticipated to share surface parking with the commercial space and primarily be enclosed parking spaces underground. As noted earlier in this report, the site will have 434 parking spaces for residents. This equates to 1.57 parking spaces per bedroom. Staff feel that this is an acceptable amount of parking for the residents, as some of the larger units will not need one parking space per bedroom. For example, a three-bedroom apartment may include two adults and two children; thus, only two parking spaces are needed.

Boucher noted that as part of the PUD approval, a neighborhood meeting is required as part of the process. The City hosted the neighborhood meeting on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, at the Public Library in

Columbia Heights with a virtual option that experienced technical difficulties. Staff contacted those who tried to participate virtually and received the comments, which are attached in the Agenda Packet. The meeting was well attended and included members of the immediate neighborhood, as well as members of the Planning Commission and City Council. The applicant presented the project to attendees and answered questions regarding the proposal. Staff heard concerns related to increased traffic and density, parking, environmental and park conditions, and drainage. Staff noted that traffic is not projected to increase a detrimental amount, and that the proposed density is in line with what is guided for transit-oriented development. Staff also noted that this project will actually help alleviate the drainage issues in the area and offer unique opportunities for stormwater and multi-modal transportation improvements. Notifications went out to surrounding property owners within 350 feet of the subject site as well as the entirety of the townhome developments adjacent to the property. The signup sheet, mailer and mailing list, and list of the comments received are attached in the Agenda Packet.

Boucher noted that staff received four written comments from residents within the project mailing range and a few phone calls from residents outside of that range. Boucher read the following comments:

- Ann Pineault – 762 Parkside Lane expressed concerns that the issues with traffic and parking on Gould and Peters could spill over to this new development without adequate parking. She also noted issues with the density, lack of green space, environmental and traffic concerns, along with a lack of adherence to development contracts.
- Kris Junker – 793 Parkside Lane expressed disappointment in being unable to participate in the virtual portion of the neighborhood meeting; staff reached out to the resident to provide the information that was presented in the meeting and to set up a one-to-one follow-up if it was necessary.
- Rebecca Wratkowski – 687 Sullivan Drive NE expressed concern about the scope of development with specifics regarding the water table and flow risks, parking, traffic, public transit, and safety related to Central and 53<sup>rd</sup>, and desires for a less intense use as well as explicit concern over flooding.
- Tracy Severson – 4118 Monroe Street expressed concern over the density, traffic, and transit capacity, infrastructure needs, and safety concerns related to traffic and multimodal users.

Boucher reviewed the preliminary plat findings of facts. Section 9.104 (L) of the Zoning Ordinance outlines three conditions that must be met in order for the City to grant a Preliminary Plat. They are as follows:

- a) The proposed Preliminary Plat conforms to the requirements of City Code Section 9.116 [Subdivision Ordinance].

*Staff Comment:* In review of the preliminary plat that was submitted, Staff finds that the preliminary plat generally conforms to the City's Subdivision Ordinance for a Planned Unit Development. The applicant is compliant in this regard.

- b) The proposed subdivision is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Staff Comment: The Comprehensive Plan supports the redevelopment of this site. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan supports mixed-use development and transit-oriented development on this site. The proposed Subdivision is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's goals.

- c) The proposed subdivision contains a parcel and land subdivision layout that is consistent with good planning and site engineering design principles.

Staff Comment: Staff has reviewed the proposed subdivision plan and feels that the parcel and land layout are consistent with these principles. Further, the site plan reduces the number of parcels on this site, as well as removing old easements. The project proposes to improve the area storm stormwater management conditions by creating treatment opportunities and improving stormwater storage capacity that currently exists on the development site.

Boucher reviewed the Planned Unit Development district plan findings of fact. The zoning ordinance contains the following four findings that must be satisfied before the City Council can approve the PUD District Plan at a City Council Meeting:

- a) The PUD District plan conforms to all applicable requirements of this article [Section 9.113, PUD District].

Staff Comment: In review of Section 9.113, Staff finds that the application is consistent with the City's requirements.

- b) The PUD District plan is consistent with the applicable provisions of the comprehensive plan.

Staff Comment: The Comprehensive Plan has this area targeted for redevelopment to a transit-oriented development project. The proposed PUD is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's goals.

- c) The PUD District plan is consistent with any applicable area plan.

Staff Comment: The area plan (as noted in the Comprehensive Plan) marks this area and other sites in the area for redevelopment. The PUD is consistent with the area plan.

- d) The PUD District plan minimizes any adverse impacts on property in the immediate vicinity and the public right-of-way.

Staff Comment: The site will utilize underground and at-grade parking to prevent on-street parking on 53rd and Central Avenue. The PUD District Plan minimizes any adverse impacts on property in the immediate vicinity and the public right-of-way.

Boucher reviewed the rezoning to PUD findings of fact. The zoning ordinance contains the following four findings that must be satisfied before the City Council can approve rezoning to

PUD, Planned Unit Development District, at a City Council meeting:

- a) The amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Staff comment: The amendment is consistent with the applicable provisions of the Comprehensive Plan.

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

Staff comment: The amendment is in the public interest and not solely for the benefit of 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 the property within the general area of the property in question are compatible with the proposed zoning classification.

Staff comment: The amendment is compatible with existing land uses and zoning classifications in the general area.

- 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.

Staff comment: The amendment reflects changes in development trends in the general area.

Boucher provided the Commission with a summary of the project. The applicants are seeking approval of a preliminary; easement vacations; and a rezoning to PUD, Planned Unit Development District, to construct two new 6-story, 132-unit affordable multifamily buildings, a mixed-use building with 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, and a range of 150-175 market-rate apartments, 58 townhomes, and associated park and infrastructure improvements as well as multi-modal transportation facilities. The project will include the demolition of a vacant office building and the acquisition of parkland to accommodate the project. The applicants are proposing to construct 443 new apartment units that range from one to four bedrooms, 58 townhomes, and 12,000 sq. ft. of commercial space. The site will utilize underground parking and surface parking to accommodate users of the commercial space and apartment residences.

Recommendation: Boucher stated staff recommends approval of the Preliminary Plat as presented, subject to the conditions outlined below:

1. All required state and local codes, permits, licenses, and inspections will be met and in full compliance.
2. The applicant shall be responsible for the cost of filing and recording written easements with the Anoka County Recorder's Office.
3. An approved Preliminary Plat shall be valid for a period of one year from the date of the

- approval. In the event that a Final Plat is not presented for approval within this time period, the Preliminary Plat will become void.
4. The applicant shall enter into a Developer's Agreement with the City. Said documentation shall be reviewed by the City Attorney.

Boucher stated that staff recommends approval of the Easement Vacations as presented, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall be responsible for providing legal descriptions of all easements that are subject to be created. Said descriptions are subject to review by the City Attorney.
2. The applicant shall be responsible for recording the easement vacation with the Anoka County Recorder's Office.

Boucher stated that staff recommends approval of the PUD with the following conditions:

1. The property owner and the City will enter into a development contract governing site improvements, and shall be executed by the property owner and the City within 60 days of the PUD approval prior to the issuance of a building permit.
2. The mixed-use building containing the commercial space and 150-175 market-rate apartment units will provide underground and surface parking shared between the uses as a condition of approval, but will have a specific calculation and other requirements once an end-user is found. Any loading and unloading shall not be allowed on 53rd Avenue NE.
3. Developer shall provide financial guarantee in the form of an irrevocable letter of credit for landscaping and public improvements, including multimodal connections through the site to ensure connectivity to existing and proposed facilities. The guarantee amount is to be determined by the City Engineer.
4. The City Engineer, Watershed District, and MnDOT shall review and approve the site grading and stormwater management plans. All stormwater best management practices (BMPs) shall have designated drainage and utility easements recorded with the Final Plat or as a separate document with Anoka County.
5. The developer shall enter into a stormwater maintenance and management agreement with the City, to be prepared by the City Attorney.
6. The site utility plans shall be subject to review and final approval by the City Engineer and the Fire Chief.
7. Developer shall pay park dedication fees as outlined in the City Code.
8. Developer will provide record plans or as-built drawings to the City following project completion.
9. Align the northern east-west driveway aisles between the northwest townhomes and the multifamily apartments to reduce potential conflicts between movements.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Gianoulis asked if the impact on traffic was negligible. President of TC2 Matt Pacyna explained that they were asked to conduct the traffic study for the proposed development. He noted that the impact on traffic was not negligible, and it remains within industry standards for an acceptable level of service and operations.

Maameri asked to clarify the findings that the overall changes in operations based on no-build and build conditions range from two to four seconds without any changes to the existing signal timing provided by MnDOT. Mr. Pacyna explained that trip generation will be dispersed more since half of the cars will go east and half will go west.

Maameri noted that the highway is east of the proposed project and did not believe it would be half of the cars going east or west. He asked if the trip distribution was currently 50/50. Mr. Pacyna replied that it was close to 50/50 today.

Wolfe asked Mr. Pacyna to comment on the access to the potential new development. She asked if the western access would feed directly to the roundabout or if adjustments would be needed. Mr. Pacyna replied that the proposed east access would be a right-in, right-out configuration. The west access would align with the western Target access. The roundabout is between the two access points, so there would not be much of a change.

Maameri noted that one of the figures showed a one-way in and out and asked for clarification. Forney replied that the western access point would be to either turn left or right, and the eastern access point would be to turn right.

Johnson asked Mr. Pacyna how he thought the traffic flow into the newly developed area compared to the strip mall on Central Avenue. He mentioned the intersection at the strip mall, and the parking is awful. He expressed his concern that the traffic and parking would be congested in the newly developed area. Mr. Pacyna replied that the improvements that were implemented with medians along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue have improved safety along the corridor. Having right-in, right-out access points is good access management because it reduces conflicts and increases safety. Forney added that MnDOT has identified the intersection as a major issue and is working with the businesses in the area to create a plan to make the intersection better.

Schmitz asked if there could be a southern access point. Forney replied that the area south of the proposed project is privately owned. It would be up to the property owners if there could be a southern access point.

Wolfe asked Mr. Pacyna what could be done to increase safety for pedestrians at the intersection of Central Avenue and 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue who are trying to get to Target or Starbucks. Mr. Pacyna replied that during the 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue reconstruction project, there was an enhanced crossing that was implemented. The east Target access is a safe crossing. If pedestrian traffic increases, it is possible to implement additional crossing signs that light up.

Johnson asked what other projects and developments Kaas Wilson Architects have done. Vice President & Regional Development Partner with Lincoln Avenue Community, Kyle Brassler, explained that they are the developers on the project. He explained that Kaas Wilson Architects developed dozens of multi-family communities around the metro area. Johnson asked if there was a previous project that Kaas Wilson Architects had done that would model the proposed project. Mr. Brassler mentioned that there are a number in Minneapolis, but none of them would look exactly like the one in Columbia Heights.

Wolfe asked what the expectations would be from the City and the developers if phases three and four faltered. Mr. Brassier explained that they are in partnership with a couple of different groups. Ultimately, they would like to filter it down to one additional market-rate developer to do the building along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and have one group do the townhomes. He reviewed the ideal schedule. Construction will most likely begin next summer. The goal is to start the two “L” shape buildings together, but since the projects are funded with State funds, it is based on the State’s timing and resources. The buildings take about 18 months to build. The townhome development group is ready to begin. The wild card will be the market-rate development adjacent to 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. Realistically, construction could begin in 2026 and end in 2028. He added that they are prepared for one of the phases to fall out during a negotiation.

Maameri asked for a timeline for the demolition. Mr. Brassier replied that there will be a demolition of the building and the parking lot. It will occur during the first phase of the project. Demolition will occur for several months but is included in the 18 months for the entire project.

Schmitz asked if the townhomes would be designed by a different company and architects. Mr. Brassier replied that they would be. Schmitz asked if it would be possible to have some type of ground-floor living units for people who have trouble with stairways. Mr. Brassier replied that it is possible. The current site plan is based on a walk-up with stairs because it would accommodate the density of the site.

Forney reviewed the timeline for the project. The environmental assessment worksheet has been submitted for a 30-day review period and then will go to the Council to review the comments. The Council will approve the final PUD process. Moving forward, the developers will be coming to the Planning Commission for additional site plan approvals and building permits. A variance for the project will be processed by the Planning Commission during the next meeting. A bond application will be presented to the Council. The bond will be just for the project development and will apply to the State for the tax-exempt bonds.

#### Public Hearing Opened.

Teresa Carson, City resident, asked if the Planning Commission was the committee that would be discussing the changes to Sullivan Park. Forney replied that it is not, and it would be the Parks Commission that would be discussing the changes. Ms. Carson asked if the walking paths would still be circular around Lake Sullivan. Forney replied that the path would remain around the lake. Ms. Carson expressed her concern about Sullivan Park being small and that there would be more people coming into the park from the development. She wondered how the park would accommodate all of the new people coming in. She added that the park hours are until 11:00 pm. Forney explained that the park dedication and funds from the development help pay for improvements. He noted that the City could look into the park hours and potentially make small changes. Ms. Carson expressed her concern about parking because the streets are already filled with people parking on the streets. Forney noted that the proposed parking is above what the City has as a zoning standard.

Anne Pineault, City resident, expressed her concern about the density of the project. A lot of the area around the proposed development is residential, and it does not have nearly the number of people that will be coming into the development. She asked the City to consider reducing the density. She noted that the developers would be owning the infrastructure. She asked if the City would maintain the containment vaults. Forney replied that the stormwater would be a management plan between the City and the developer. The water and utilities would be City owners. Ms. Pino recommended that the City own the sewer. She asked that the City be mindful of how the street being put in would affect the lake. She added that when a bus is making stops, it backs up traffic. With the development coming, it will add many more cars to the traffic. She asked that the City continue to communicate with residents. She noted she would like to see the developer's plans for noise abatement, dust, garbage, etc. There are some community members who have discussed putting up a large fence.

Michelle Barasque, City resident, expressed her gratitude that something would happen with the water quality at Sullivan Lake. She expressed concern regarding the traffic and density. She added that pedestrian traffic is already a challenge. She hoped that there would be additional attention to the pedestrian corridor along 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. She asked if there was a plan in place so that the project would not be ongoing for four years as a construction site. She asked if the area could still look attractive if the project was delayed.

Sandra Davidson, City resident, stated that what she has taken away from the previous meetings is that the project is a done deal. She added that in previous meetings, it was discussed that there was a purchase agreement with the developer, but it was contingent on whether the project met the City's code. Currently, the City's codes would not allow the building to be built. She explained that it does not make sense to her that the City's Codes are being changed in order to allow the project. She expressed her understanding that Medtronic can sell the building to whoever they want to. However, codes have been put in place for a reason. She explained she has lived in the City for a long time and has seen many projects in the City that have not been done well due to a lack of follow-through or foresight. She gave an example of 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue and mentioned that there were supposed to be beautiful condos. She added that the Rainbow site has been a disaster. She provided an example of the townhouses that were built on 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and how phase one went without a hitch, and the townhomes were sold within a month. During the second phase, the project went through three bankruptcies, and the project sat there until the City stepped in. She noted that she needs the security that the project will be completed and will be done accurately. She mentioned that she had the same question about being able to see previous projects from the architects to see if any projects have fallen through. She reached out to the architecture company and was told that they would follow up with her, but it never happened. She expressed her concern that there is no proof of the building. Columbia Heights has a density consensus of 5,000 people per square mile, which is considered the high side of a good density amount. The City currently has 6,448 people per square mile. The City is overpopulated compared to surrounding cities. She expressed her concerns regarding parking on the street and stated that she would like to see no parking signs on 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue and St. Timothy's Church. She noted that the City has explained that there would be 134 units, but not how many people the building would hold. She noted that there

are 682 bedrooms that would be included in the project. There will be 675 parking spots, which could be an additional 675 drivers.

Loren Tranberg, City resident, expressed his concern regarding parking and the number of units and vehicles. He mentioned that Medtronic staged their release of people in order to slow down traffic. He added that if the units are intended for families, the cars will not be compact. He encouraged the City to see how many vehicles would be traveling and at what times. He stated that it is way too many people in a smaller area, and it would cause too much traffic. Forney clarified that the City Zoning Code considers a normal parking stall at 9 by 20 feet. The project is proposing 9 by 18 feet, which is still a normal size stall. However, the 9 by 18-foot stall is considered compact even though it still fits most vehicles.

Ann Scamman, City resident, mentioned that Sullivan Park is a great park and should be a highlight of the community. She expressed her surprise that the City would consider a project as big as it is because it is not a community; it is a quick way to turn a profit. She explained that she used to manage an apartment building and noted that a three-bedroom apartment averages 6-10 people because people have their families stay with them. There are usually four to five cars to a three-unit apartment. She added that the density of the project is ridiculous. According to the Met Council, Columbia Heights is considered an Urban Center, which means that the City exceeds the density proposals. The impact of the proposed apartment building will increase the need for the Police and Fire Departments. On average, the response time for a fire department should be under five minutes. She noted that buildings that have one entrance and one exit make it harder to get onto the site and take more time. She mentioned that she would like to see more parking provided because she does not want to see parking on the streets. She asked that the residents be considered. She agreed that something needs to happen at the Medtronic site, but the proposed project is not it. The project takes away green space from the residents. She added that many residents would be comfortable with a few townhomes that are ground-level for aging residents and are lower density.

Karen Smith explained that she works in the St. Timothy Lutheran Church building. She explained that she is the administrator for the Montessori school in the church. She noted that the school uses the church space and the playground but also takes walks around Lake Sullivan. She added that it has been a big part of the community. She noted that the park is already overwhelmed. She agreed that the park needs redesigning. She wondered if the City would put money into redesigning the park now, and then, when the project is complete, put money into the park again to redo the work. Losing Sullivan Lake Park would be a big thing for the community. She stated she could not believe anyone would say that the project would not affect traffic on 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. She explained that she no longer goes shopping on 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue because the intersection has been narrowed at University Avenue, and it can easily get blocked up. She noted that something needs to be done so that traffic does not get blocked going west. She agreed with the previous comments regarding density. She asked that the City not put something on the Medtronic site that would hurt the environment. She asked if the City was taking away the park system behind the businesses that the church donated to the City. Forney replied that they were not taking that away.

Sarah Rickby, City resident, noted that the meeting was listed as an application for the Planning

Unit Development and a vacation of easements. She mentioned that she did not hear much about the easements that would be vacated. She stated that staff clarified that there would not be changes to the path going around Sullivan Lake. She expressed concern about the path going from St. Timothy Lutheran Church to the east side of the lake, towards Central Avenue. She asked if that path would be maintained. Forney explained that through the center of the site, there is a parcel of land that the City has a utility easement, which is the portion that is being vacated. The City is giving up the right to the parcel so the developer can develop it. As part of the Central Avenue redevelopment, the stormwater piping will be replaced in order to add filtration, which will affect the pathways in the area. The paths will be restored after the project. The goal is to make the paths more walkable and have more connectivity to the businesses.

Carson, expressed concern about flooding. She asked not to rely on the power grid to keep their building water-tight and structurally sound. She mentioned that the City Code allows for this. She added that she would like to see the project done with minimal environmental impact.

Walter Horishnik, City resident, asked to reconsider the height of the master plan due to density concerns. He suggested capping the building off at four stories. He added that the proposed townhomes should be eliminated or the number of them should be reduced so that there is more green space between the lake and the building. He agreed with the previous comments regarding the amount of density in the City. He explained that the increase in density will add strain to the Fire and Police Department and will increase the use of the park. He asked that the Commission research the developer and architect more because the follow-through has not been good on previous projects.

George Fix, City resident, asked if the proposed townhouses would be facing the park. Forney replied that the back would face the park. Mr. Fix asked how far away the proposed townhomes would be from the path coming from 53<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to Central Avenue. Forney replied that the townhome setback is to the property line. There is no setback to the path. Mr. Fix asked if the parcel the City owns would narrow the amount of parkland between the path and the edge of the park when the parcel is sold to the developer. Forney replied that it would not narrow the park area, and it would not impact the path on the west side of the parcel. The proposed project will be further from the path than the current Medtronic building.

Public Hearing Closed.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Forney recommended that community members visit the City's website for additional information about the project. He noted that staff will post the EAW and will be collecting comments on the environmental assessment worksheet.

Maameri noted that there is a plot of land north of the proposed development that is near the parking lot of Target. He asked if there was a plan to use the plot of land to alleviate some of the residents' concerns. He wondered if it could become a bus terminal or additional parking. Forney replied that it is not being discussed with the developer since it is not a part of the project. Staff have been discussing a bus stop location so that it does not block the roundabout.

Councilmember Deneen noted that the F line will be coming through, and they will need to build new infrastructure for a stop there. She added it would make sense to engage with Metro Transit at that time to see if there could be better access there. Boucher noted that staff have engaged with Metro Transit during the development review process. It will be an expectation that the City incorporates the F line facilities into the project.

*Motion by Gianoulis, seconded by Rehfuss, to waive the reading of the draft Ordinance No. 1716, PUD District #2025-01, Rezoning of Property; draft Resolution No. 2025-043 PUD District Plan for #2025-01; draft Resolution No 2025-044, Preliminary and final Plat Approval; and draft Resolutions No 2025-045 Easement Vacations, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

*Motion by Johnson, seconded by Rehfuss, to positively recommend City Council approval of the Ordinance Amendment No. 1716, subject to the conditions of approval. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

*Motion by Schmitz, seconded by Rehfuss, to positively recommend City Council approval of the PUD District Plan Resolution No. 2025-043 as presented, subject to the conditions of approval. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

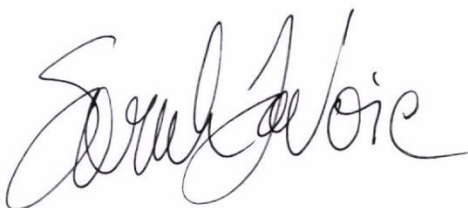
*Motion by Maameri, seconded by Rehfuss, to positively recommend City Council approval of the Preliminary Plat Resolution No. 2025-044 as presented, subject to the conditions of approval. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

*Motion by Rehfuss, seconded by Johnson, to positively recommend City Council approval of the easement vacations Resolution No. 2025-045 as presented, subject to the conditions of approval. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

*Motion by Rehfuss, seconded by Wolfe, to adjourn the meeting at 8:34 pm. All ayes. MOTION PASSED*

Respectfully submitted,



— Sarah LaVoie, Administrative Assistant —