



PLANNING COMMISSION

AGENDA SECTION	PUBLIC HEARING
MEETING DATE	JULY 1, 2025

ITEM:	Shoreland Overlay District Variance to exceed the 35% impervious surface lot coverage to allow for the construction of a multi-phased redevelopment project at 800 53rd Avenue NE.	
DEPARTMENT:	Community Development	BY/DATE: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director, 06/26/25 Rita Trapp and Kendra Ellner, HKGi Consulting Planners, 06/26/2025

CASE NUMBER: 2025-PZ04

APPLICANT: Kaas Wilson Architects on behalf of Lincoln Avenue Communities

DEVELOPMENT: Medtronic Redevelopment

LOCATION: 800 53rd Avenue NE (northern edge of municipal boundary with Fridley along Sullivan Lake Park)

REQUEST: Shoreland Variance

PREPARED BY: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director
Rita Trapp and Kendra Ellner, HKGi Consulting Planners, 06/25/2025

INTRODUCTION:
Kaas Wilson Architects, on behalf of Lincoln Avenue Communities, has submitted a shoreland variance application to exceed the 35% impervious surface lot coverage limit. This request is part of the multi-phase Medtronic redevelopment project, located at the 11.74-acre vacant Medtronic corporate campus abutting Sullivan Lake. The entire property is located within the Shoreland Overlay District as it is within 1,000 feet of the lake. The proposed plans and preliminary plat show an impervious surface coverage exceeding the maximum allowed under the City’s shoreland regulations. Therefore, a variance is required to permit the impervious surface beyond the 35% threshold.

The proposed project includes demolishing the existing Medtronic building and redeveloping the site into a multi-phased project entailing 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-unit market-rate apartments, 58 townhomes, and associated park and infrastructure improvements as well as multi-modal transportation facilities. The property is still owned by Medtronic, but under a purchase agreement with the applicant/developer. The Planning Commission has reviewed, and recommended for approval with conditions, the Preliminary Plat, Planned Unit Development - Mixed Use Development, and Easement Vacation. Additional project information can be found in the June 3, 2025 Planning Commission staff report.

Shoreland Variance

The current Shoreland Overlay District Ordinance, last amended in 2008, is intended to guide the development along shoreland of public waters. An overlay buffer is applied on property within 1,000 feet of a designated waterway, as determined by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Since the proposed project’s

property is abutting Sullivan Lake, which is designated as a General Development Lake, development must follow the standards of the shoreland overlay district, including the maximum amount of impervious surface.

Currently, the site consists of the former 135,000 square foot Medtronic building and an 812-stall bituminous parking lot. According to the project's development plans, there is currently 54% of impervious surface coverage, which is approximately 296,208 square feet or 6.8 acres. It is important to note that the Medtronic site was built in 1979 with no stormwater treatment. As this was before the current DNR regulations were adopted, the property is nonconforming.

The proposed project includes a multi-phase, full site redevelopment with several new buildings and reconfigured parking and circulation. The proposal increases the existing impervious surface on the property from 54% to 67.7%. A lot-by-lot impervious surface breakdown is attached. Although the project will be phased, processing one shoreland variance permit will allow for a streamlined approval process and construction timeline. In order to meet the City requirements, the project must receive approval of the shoreland variance and ensure proper stormwater management. As part of the recent approval, the applicant has demonstrated adequate stormwater management utilizing various infiltration features for the site.

As there is currently no existing treatment on-site, the proposed improvements will reduce runoff volumes and improve water quality. In addition, the applicant will also meet the MPCA's NPDES stormwater permit requirements. It is projected that the stormwater features will be installed in the initial construction phases with the affordable housing project.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Shoreland Variance

Due to the size and complexity of the project, the shoreland variance requires two tiers of review criteria for City review and consideration. The first tier are the City's standard variance criteria and the second tier are the shoreland overlay district variance requirements.

Below are the provisions from Section 9.104 (G) outlining the City's standard variance findings of fact that are required before granting a variance.

- (a) Because of the particular physical surroundings, or the shape, configuration, topography, or other conditions of the specific parcel of land involved, strict adherence to the provisions of this article would cause practical difficulties in conforming to the zoning ordinance. The applicant, however, is proposing to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance.

Staff Comment: The applicant is proposing to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance through a unique development proposal that offers higher quality land usage and amenities that follows the intent of the Comprehensive Plan and city-generated concepts for the site. The approval of a shoreland variance will allow for the construction of the project as proposed.

- (b) The conditions upon which the variance is based are unique to the specific parcel of land involved and are generally not applicable to other properties within the same zoning classification.

Staff Comment: The existing property is a relatively large site that has been vacated and not able to be sold to a new commercial user. The proposed development, as outlined in the preliminary plat and development plans,

represents an efficient and beneficial use of the land, aligning with the highest and best use principles while also addressing key community needs.

Importantly, the proposed impervious surfaces will be situated over 200 feet from Sullivan Lake, with Sullivan Lake Park serving as a natural buffer. The developer has committed to parkland improvements that will help mitigate runoff and prevent erosion, thereby protecting the lake's ecological health.

Additionally, the City Engineer has approved the schematic design, and city staff are coordinating with the DNR and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization to address any additional stormwater concerns. The development will incorporate new stormwater filtration systems, which is an improvement over the current site, which lacks any such infrastructure. Given that Central Avenue currently has no stormwater filtration, incremental improvements on sites between Central Avenue and Sullivan Lake will contribute positively to the area's environmental management.

- (c) The practical difficulties are caused by the provisions of this article and have not been created by any person currently having a legal interest in the property.

Staff Comment: The site presents practical challenges, notably that it currently exceeds the Shoreland District's impervious surface limit of 35%, with existing coverage at approximately 54% and no stormwater treatment in place. While the proposed development will result in a modest increase in impervious surface, it will also incorporate enhanced stormwater management features. These improvements are designed to offset the net increase in hard cover by promoting better water quality and providing added environmental and recreational benefits for the City.

- (d) The granting of the variance is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Comprehensive Plan.

Staff Comment: The Comprehensive Plan supports the redevelopment of this site. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan supports a mixed-use development and transit-oriented development which is implemented through this proposal.

- (e) The granting of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare or materially injurious to the enjoyment, use, development or value of property or improvements in the vicinity.

Staff Comment: Granting the shoreland variance would not be detrimental to the public welfare or materially injurious to the enjoyment, use, development or value of property in the vicinity. The project is will improve the land usage of the site by providing a mix of buildings and use types, as well as amenities, increasing the value of property and amenities in the city.

As part of the second tier of review criteria, the City may establish reasonable conditions that are deemed necessary to mitigate adverse impacts directly associated with granting of the variance and to protect neighboring properties. Since the variance is related to the Shoreland Overlay District, Staff are recommending that the additional conditions set forth in the Overlay District Section 9.114 (C) shall apply. The provisions below outline the additional review criteria that must be met in order for the City to grant a variance in the shoreland and exceed impervious surface. They are as follows:

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- (i) All structures, additions or expansions shall meet setback and other requirements of this code.
 - (ii) The lot shall be served with municipal sewer and water.
 - (iii) The lot shall provide for the collection and treatment of stormwater in compliance with Chapter 9 of the city code if determined that the site improvements will result in increased runoff directly entering a public water. All development plans shall require review and approval by the City Engineer and the underlying watershed district.
 - (iv) Measures will be taken for the treatment of stormwater runoff and/or prevention of stormwater from directly entering a public water. The measures may include, but not limited to the following:
 - A. Appurtenances as sedimentation basins, debris basins, desilting basins, or silt traps.
 - B. Installation of debris guards and microsilt basins on store sewer inlets.
 - C. Use where practical, oil skimming devices or sump catch basins.
 - D. Direct drainage away from the lake and into pervious, grassed yards through site grading, use of gutters and down spouts.
 - E. Construction of sidewalks of partially pervious raised materials such as decking, which has natural earth or other pervious material beneath or between the planking.
 - F. Use grading and construction techniques that encourage rapid infiltration, such as sand and gravel under impervious materials with adjacent infiltration swales graded to lead into them.
 - G. Install berms, water bars, or terraces, which temporarily detain water before dispersing it into the pervious area.

Staff Comment: The proposed project is meeting setback requirements and being processed as Planned Unit Development. The current estimated setback distance from Sullivan Lakes Ordinary High-Water Level is 180.8 feet. Which city code only requires a setback of 50 ft. The initial review of the project has been recommended for approval, demonstrating that other requirements have been met or are undergoing separate reviews. The site is currently served by municipal sewer and water. The proposed development will also provide utility improvements to expand the capacity and accommodate additional demand and add stormwater management.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

The applicants are seeking approval of a shoreland variance to allow the impervious surface to be greater than the 35% maximum allowed in order 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-unit 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 acquisition of parkland to accommodate the project. Staff is recommending approval of the project with the conditions outlined below:

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the shoreland variance as presented subject to the conditions outline below:

1. The applicant shall adhere to all stormwater requirements and permitting required by state and local codes, permits, licenses and inspections will be met and in full compliance.

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S):

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-058, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to recommend that the City Council approve Resolution 2025-058, a resolution approving a Shoreland Variance for the property located at 800 53rd Avenue NE in the City of Columbia Heights, MN

ATTACHMENT(S):

Resolution 2025-058, Shoreland Variance

Shoreland Variance Applicant Narrative

Redevelopment Storm Sewer Plans C4-2

Ordinary High Water Level Survey

Development Area Exhibit of the Lot-by Lot Impervious Surface Breakdown

Public Notice to Newspaper

Public Comments