
TO: St. Francis Planning Commission
FROM: Beth Richmond, Planner
SUBJECT: Educational Facility Zoning Ordinance Amendment
DATE: 12-13-2023 for 12-20-2023 meeting
APPLICANT: ISD #15 St. Francis (Chris Lindquist)
LOCATION: 22978 Butterfield Drive NW (PID: 32-34-24-34-0064)
COMP PLAN: Public
ZONING: B-1 Central Business

OVERVIEW

The City has received a request from ISD #15 to amend the City's Zoning Code to allow educational facilities within the B-1 zoning district. In response to recent changes in legislation, the school district is proposing to move its Transition 15 (T15) program to the existing building at 22978 Butterfield Drive NW. The T15 program is a post high school special education transition program which provides young adults ages 18-22 training in life skills, job training, job readiness, and potential employment. Additional information about the T15 program can be found in the applicant's submittal materials, attached. The building at 22978 Butterfield Drive NW has sufficient space to meet the increase in the student population that will occur beginning in September 2024 as a result of the changes in legislation.



REVIEW PROCEDURE

60-Day Land Use Application Review Process

Pursuant to Minnesota State Statutes Section 15.99, local government agencies are required to approve or deny land use requests within 60 days. Within the 60-day period, an automatic extension of no more than 60 days can be obtained by providing the applicant written notice containing the reason for the extension and specifying how much additional time is needed. The deadline for the land use request is January 6, 2023.

Public Hearing

City Code Section 10-31-03 requires that a public hearing for review of the zoning ordinance amendment request be held by the Planning Commission. The public hearing notice was published in the Anoka County Union Herald on December 8, 2023.

ANALYSIS

Zoning

The site is currently zoned B-1 Central Business. The B-1 District is intended to serve as the city's downtown district, with an emphasis on publicly-accessible active uses and pedestrian facilities. A mix of commercial, residential, and civic uses are permitted in the B-1 District.

The City has done extensive work on creating plans and designing City Code to direct Bridge Street toward a central business district. The work includes, but is not limited to, the St. Francis Forward Plan, 2040 Comprehensive Plan, Bridge Street Design Guidelines, and section 10-44-05 of the City Code. The central business district is intended as the place where goods and services can be provided and the uses contribute to a lively and vibrant commercial corridor.

In the City's existing code, schools are allowed in the RR, R-1, and R-2 zoning districts. Schools tend to be allowed in residential and/or institutional districts rather than commercial districts due to several factors. These may include conflicts between school children and the impacts of commercial uses (traffic, noise, etc.) and differing hours of operation. In this case, the B-1 district is intended to support active uses which contribute strongly to commerce in the area. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission discuss whether an educational facility would meet this intent.

Any use within the B-1 District must meet the district's design standards which were created to promote a walkable, pedestrian-friendly atmosphere along Bridge Street. These standards follow the Bridge Street Design Guidelines that were created for the corridor in 2019. One of these standards requires that at least 70% of the ground floor frontage for buildings on Bridge Street be used for a commercial purpose. This applies to the first 30 feet behind the building façade. The applicant has indicated plans to incorporate a public-facing coffee shop and school merchandise store in the foyer area of this building as part of the T15 program, however, this would not be operational for at least a year after move-in.

Staff also notes that the proposed amendment would apply to the B-1 District as a whole. There are additional lots within the B-1 District which could be used as an educational facility if this amendment is approved.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff asks the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing for the requested ordinance amendment and provide a recommendation to the City Council. If the Planning Commission is prepared to move forward with a recommendation, Staff suggests one of the following two options:

1. Recommend denial. If Commissioners find that an educational facility does not meet the intent of the B-1 district or the district’s standards, then the use should not be allowed.
2. Recommend approval of the amendment and allow educational facilities in the B-1 district as an interim use. This would give the City the opportunity to review each proposed educational facility and set parameters for how long the facility would be able to operate within the B-1 district. The interim use designation would allow educational facilities as a temporary use while preserving the land for commercial uses in the future.

If Commissioners feel that additional information is needed to make a decision, Commissioners may table the request to the next meeting and provide direction as to the information needed from Staff and/or the applicant.

ATTACHMENTS

- Applicant Submittals