

**CITY OF ST. FRANCIS
ST. FRANCIS, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
APRIL 16, 2025**

1. **Call to Order:** The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Dustin Pavek.

2. **Roll Call:** Present were Dean Becker, Deborah Humann, Gail Genin, Dustin Hingos, Marc McMullen, and Dustin Pavek.

Others in attendance: Kate Thunstrom, City Administrator; Jessica Rieland, Community Development Director; Jason Zimmerman, City Planner; and City Council Liaison Kevin Robinson.

3. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair:** Motion by McMullen, second by Becker to re-elect Pavek as Chair. Motion carried 6-0.

Motion by Pavek, second McMullen to elect Humann as Vice Chair. Motion carried 6-0.

4. **Adopt Agenda:** Motion by Genin, second by Becker to approve the agenda. Motion carried 6-0.

5. **Approve Minutes:** Motion by Becker, second by Humann to approve the January 15, 2025 minutes. Motion carried 6-0.

6. **Public Comment:** Community Development Director Reiland shared that she received two public comments via email regarding an item on this evening's agenda. She said these emails will be read if the item comes back for a Public Hearing.

Tina Carrol and Mike Powell, 23045 Ambassador Boulevard, came forward to discuss the apartment proposal. They shared that they have concerns with if this could raise their water bills and who will be responsible for cleaning up their property if trash comes over from the apartment, as they are right next to it and all of the natural barriers are gone. They asked how these apartments would affect the value of their home. They added that they are very concerned with the fact that children who live in the apartment could run through their yard to get to the school. They asked if there is any plan for barriers between these homes and the apartments. They also shared a concern with snow removal and whether the increased snow removal in the area could flood their yard. They noted traffic is also a major concern as it is already difficult to get onto Ambassador Boulevard, and if they put in another 100 apartment units, it will be that much more difficult.

Pavek noted that the apartments will be discussed during their own item later on in the meeting.

7. **Public Hearing:**

None.

8. **Regular Business Items:**

a. Disposition of 23340 Cree Street NW

Reiland reviewed the Staff report in regard to the disposition of 23340 Cree Street NW, the old City Hall building, and asked for the Commission's feedback.

Pavek shared that he does not see an issue with the sale of this property. The Commission agreed.

b. St. Francis Apartments Concept Review

City Planner Zimmerman reviewed the Staff report concerning the concept review for the St. Francis Apartments.

Pavek shared that this is not a Public Hearing, and the Commission will not be voting on anything this evening.

Becker asked about the plan for the third lot in this area. Zimmerman explained that a lot of this parcel is wetland, and this area would be held to collect drainage for now.

Becker asked if there is a traffic study being planned for this area as there have been recent traffic impacts. Zimmerman said he is not aware of any study that has been done; however, they could look at this during the formal application process. Rieland added that if the concept moves forward to the next phase, it would be sent to Anoka County for review, and they would determine if a traffic study is needed.

Becker asked if the City would be responsible for any analysis on the Bridge Street side. Reiland stated that Bridge Street is a County road.

Hingos asked about the timeframe for the second phase of this project. Matt Alexander, Northshore Development Partners, the applicant, shared that their intention is to build the entire project in one phase, as it would be more cost-effective.

Hingos asked if there are plans for any screening from the nearby houses. Mr. Alexander said the screening would be subject to City Code.

Hingos asked when the project would be complete. Mr. Alexander said a build time on a project of this size would be 12 to 14 months. He stated they would like to start the build this summer.

Scott Pechovnik, 23111 Butterfield Drive NW, came forward and shared his concerns with traffic in the area given that Bridge Street is already a very well-travelled road and he sees issues for emergency vehicles in the future. He added that he has concerns that St. Francis could become another Brooklyn Park, and he does not think they need any more high-density housing.

Mary Ottenstroer, 23169 Ambassador Boulevard NW, came forward and shared that her house is near the wetland area, and she is concerned with the runoff. She said her property gets flooded already and she thinks this will make it much worse. She noted this stormwater pond is deep and asked if there would be anything to keep children out of it.

Sandra Schaaf, 22957 Northwest Rum River Boulevard, came forward and asked who owns this land. Rieland shared that the EDA sold the parcel to Northshore Development.

Ms. Schaaf asked who is going to pay for all of the additional infrastructure needs that this development will cause. She said she likes the small-town feel of St. Francis and does not want another apartment building.

Megan Williams, 23040 Butterfield Drive NW, came forward and shared her concerns, including how this complex will fit in this location, as she cannot picture a four-story building fitting in this location. She added that she is also concerned with the turnover of apartment tenants and how they may not have the same outlook on the betterment of the community as homeowners. She said that she does not see this apartment doing any good for the City. She noted that there should be some kind of barrier between the building and the homes if this project moves forward.

Mike Rodger, 2770 232nd Lane NW, came forward and shared that he has done research into Northshore, and he thinks they should be proud to have this developer in St. Francis. He explained that there are issues that the City is currently facing that this development can help with. He said it will give them the opportunity to address things like the water rates. He noted this project is a way for the City to create revenue.

Ms. Carrol asked if they had looked at building townhomes or single-family homes in this area rather than apartments.

Amy Bening, 22983 Kiowa Street NW, came forward and shared that while this building would not directly impact where she lives, she does not want to see this kind of growth in the City. She said she has children who attend St. Francis schools, and she feels like this project would be a safety and security issue. She noted she loves this idea of having Northshore develop in the City, but with a project that fits better.

Danielle Ackerman, 23048 Butterfield Drive NW, came forward and shared that one of the reasons she purchased her home was because of the trees in the area, which have now been removed. She asked if any kind of communication was sent to the homeowners in this area about these trees being removed. She asked if there will be some kind of barrier installed between the existing homes and whatever they build in this area. She shared concerns with traffic and how this project is destroying what makes St. Francis beautiful.

Councilmember Robinson asked for some background information on why the trees were removed. He reiterated that this is not a done deal and is only at the concept plan phase of the process. Rieland explained that the trees were cleared in preparation for the 2025 street projects. She shared that the City owns the two corner lots off of Bridge Street, which currently do not have access, so creating the Woodbine North extension will give access to these two lots. She added that they had previously seen a proposal for townhomes on this lot; however, it did not make economic sense. She noted that this is just the first concept review and this will next be reviewed by the Council at their May 5 meeting. She explained that the developer will be encouraged to listen to any and all feedback provided by the Planning Commission and the Council and make adjustments to their plan before coming back for a site plan review.

Ms. Carrol asked what made the apartment complex more economical than townhomes. Rieland shared that she was not on Staff when this proposal came through so she cannot speak to this from a Staff perspective; however, this size project makes the most financial sense to the developer.

Ms. Carrol said that there are currently two old, historical buildings in the City that are for sale and she is worried that they will be sold and torn down, eliminating the small-town feel of St. Francis.

Mr. Alexander shared that they take into account who will live in their homes that they develop. He said these could be for people who work in St. Francis, and there are no options for them to live in the City otherwise. He stated there is currently a waiting list for the other apartment buildings in the City. He shared that they conducted a market study done for St. Francis, which showed the demand for townhomes. He explained that it would be far more expensive to build townhomes, as the cost per unit to rent would have to be much greater. He reiterated that there is a demand for apartments in the City.

Ms. Ackerman stated she understands why the developer would rather have high-density apartments than lower-density townhomes; however, she believes this is the wrong location for something like this.

Ms. Bening asked about the timeframe for the purchase agreement of this property. Rieland said if this project does not move to the next phase, then the developer would need to cancel the purchase agreement.

Pavek encouraged residents to continue to come to these meetings as well as Council meetings to voice their opinions or concerns. He added that feedback can also be sent via email to Staff. Reiland noted that the meetings are also streamed on YouTube to watch live or after the meeting. She said there is also a vacancy on the Commission, which residents can apply to if they would like to be more involved.

Scott Roop, 23231 Underclift Street, came forward and shared that he is here to learn more about this project and the financial decisions that are driving the need for a project like this based on the water rates. He asked if there is any information they can share on these ideas to bring down the water rates. Rieland shared that there was a Council Work Session that discussed the water rates. Robinson explained that if they consider having some of these larger developments to come into the City, then this would stabilize the water rates for residents.

Mr. Roop said he would rather pay higher water bills than have this apartment building built. Reiland noted that any development like this will have a positive impact on the water rates.

Mr. Roop said he moved to St. Francis from Coon Rapids to get away from the growing population and crime and he does not want to see the same things happen in St. Francis.

9. Planning Commission Discussion:

Hingos asked if there has been any additional discussion with Anoka County on the safety of Highway 47 and potential roundabouts after the most recent fatal accident. Rieland shared that the City is still having discussions with MnDOT on the design of these roundabouts and other traffic controls.

Robinson shared that the City has been awarded a \$7,000,000 grant for these improvements. He added that they also went to the Capitol to ask for additional funding for these projects.

10. Adjournment:

Motion by McMullen, second by Becker, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 6-0

Meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Website Link to Packets and Minutes for the Planning Commission:

<https://www.stfrancismn.org/meetings>

Recorded by: Jenni Wida, City Clerk

DATE APPROVED:

DRAFT