

**CITY OF ST. FRANCIS
ST. FRANCIS, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 17, 2025**

1. **Call to Order:** The Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Vice-Chairman Deborah Humann.
2. **Roll Call:** Present were Dean Becker, Deborah Humann, Gail Genin, Dustin Hingos, and Marc McMullen.

Others in attendance: Jodie Steffes, Community Development Specialist; Beth Richmond, City Planner; and City Council Liaison Kevin Robinson.

3. **Adopt Agenda:** Motion by McMullen, second by Hingos, to approve the amended agenda. Motion carried 5-0.
4. **Approve Minutes:** Motion by Genin, second by Becker, to approve the July 16, 2025, minutes. Motion carried 5-0.
5. **Public Comment:** None

6. **Public Hearing:**
 - a. Rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment

City Planner Richmond reviewed the Staff report in regard to the rezoning and Comprehensive Plan Amendment request for 23671 St. Francis Boulevard NW.

McMullen shared that he will be abstaining from voting on this item as he is a client of the chiropractic office at this site.

Public Hearing was opened at 7:12 p.m.

Cynthia and Brian Opp, the applicants, came forward and shared that they own the commercial building at the southwest corner of Highway 47 and Ambassador Boulevard. She said they have operated their chiropractic business for over 20 years and purchased this building in 2013 to expand their clinic and lease the remaining space. She shared that they are requesting to rezone this property to a B-2 general business zoning so they can be a commercial, multi-tenant site consistent with the original zoning. She explained that this was originally zoned B-3 when they bought the building, and they crafted their plans for the future around this zoning. She shared that during their plans, they were informed that the property had been rezoned to I-1 industrial in 2020. She noted that they could get a medical use only ordinance amendment; however, this would limit them from being able to lease their additional office space to any other retail tenants. She said they have already lost qualified tenants because of this uncertainty. She explained that by allowing a mixed use of tenants, this would strengthen the tax base and stabilize this corner of Highway 47 and Ambassador, while also keeping jobs and services in town.

Michelle Anderson, 22861 Unity Street NW, Bethel, came forward and shared that she is the St. Francis Area Chamber of Commerce President and a local real estate agent. She shared that she has known the Opps for over 20 years, and their business is a staple in the City when it comes to community support and pride. She said she hopes that the Planning Commission takes this impact on the community into account when making its decision.

Public Hearing was closed at 7:18 p.m.

Hingos said he believes this change makes sense. He noted that corner lots are typically more in demand for businesses rather than industrial tenants.

Genin added that she believes it would be a benefit to the City to rezone this property.

McMullen said he has been a client of the Opps for a number of years. He said they are so involved with the community and sponsor almost every event that happens in St. Francis. He stated it would be a disaster to lose such a great business in the City.

Councilmember Robinson asked why this property was originally rezoned. Richmond shared that it was changed during the 2020 Comprehensive Plan re-guiding. She explained that this whole area was rezoned for industrial use. She added that there were public notices sent out as part of the Comprehensive Plan update and rezoning.

Councilmember Robinson shared that the City is very supportive of local businesses and wants to see them succeed.

Motion by Hingos, second by Genin, to recommend approval of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment to re-guide 23671 St. Francis Boulevard NW from Business Park/Light Industrial use to Commercial use with findings as identified by the Commissioners, having minimal impact on infrastructure increases, compatibility with surrounding uses, and aligning with general business use with future roadway expansions. Motion passed 4-0-1 (McMullen abstained).

Motion by Hingos, second by Becker, to recommend approval of the rezoning request to rezone 23671 St. Francis Boulevard NW from I-1 General Industrial to B-2 General Business with the findings as identified by the Commissioners, being consistent with the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Motion passed 4-0-1 (McMullen abstained)

b. Dalton River Villas

Richmond reviewed the Staff report in regard to the Dalton River Villas project. She reviewed each variance request, as well as the request for the preliminary plat and CUP.

Public Hearing was opened at 7:38 p.m.

Juli Murillo, 23539 Ambassador Boulevard, came forward and shared that she was here during the developments across the river. She said that she was told during that process that the bluff would not be touched, yet she has neighbors who have completely cleared the riverbank. She stated that she has called the City and the police about this. She noted that no one is protecting this embankment. She said she has done everything in her power to try to protect this bank, and she has gotten no response. She added that she invited the Mayor to her home this week to show him what has been done in this

area. She asked who is going to be accountable for the riverbank with this project. She said that only adding back two trees per lot for this development does not fit with the area. She added that there are already so many vacant lots in the City that could be developed rather than clearing this area. She shared that one of her neighbors cut down an Ash tree with Emerald ash borer during the summer, and it resulted in a number of her trees dying as well. She asked who would be taking responsibility for what she deals with on a day-to-day basis, with the issues she sees from her neighbors not protecting the riverbank.

Tina Carrol, 23045 Ambassador Boulevard, came forward and shared that she agrees with Ms. Murillo that it is not enough to clear-cut this area and only replace two trees per lot. She noted that this is not preserving the ecosystem. She asked who would be paying to have these trees cut down. She also asked why they need to be 19 homes on this eight-acre parcel rather than having a few homes on larger lots to help preserve the embankment and the trees.

Public Hearing was closed at 7:51 p.m.

Hingos asked about the proper way for residents to raise concerns about clear-cutting in the riverbank area. Richmond explained that she will look into this further. She said the requirements in City Code match the requirements in the State rules as far as clear-cutting goes. She noted that it is her understanding that these rules would be enforced by the DNR. She added that these lots are not proposed to own land down to the riverbank.

Hingos asked how close to the riverbank these property lines will be. Richmond showed the property map, which shows how close the lot lines will be to the riverbank.

McMullen shared that in his experience, property owners do not care where the property line is and will cut down trees that are outside of their property lines if they want.

Becker asked if there would be an area of this property that would be City land. Richmond shared that the Council determined that this land would not be acceptable as parkland, and the applicant said he would retain ownership of this land.

Councilmember Robinson asked if they would be able to add some aerial photos of the foliage in the area before this comes before the Council. Richmond said yes.

Councilmember Robinson asked if the bluff is managed by the DNR. Richmond shared that the DNR is often responsible for what is below the high water line, and the bluff is above this. She said she will be having a conversation with the DNR Area Hydrologist to better understand whose responsibility this would be.

Becker asked if the cost of clearing the trees would be paid by the property owner. Richmond said yes.

Councilmember Robinson asked if it had been an issue before with property owners clearing the foliage along the riverbank, whether or not it was within their property lines. Community Development Specialist Steffes shared that they had an incident several years ago where someone clear-cut their lot; however, when they visited the property, they did not see clear-cutting beyond what the Code had mentioned. She

added that a number of the trees that were removed were diseased and needed to be removed. She shared that they raised this to the DNR, and they were not concerned.

Hingos asked if they would be able to table this request and ask Staff to bring forward more information at an upcoming meeting. He said he would like to wait on making a recommendation until they have heard back from the DNR Hydrologist. Richmond said yes.

Genin noted that while she understands the concern of what has happened in the past, they are being asked to consider the variance requests for setbacks, which are not on the side of the river. She said she believes they should allow Staff to deal with the issues with the trees separately.

Hingos asked if the City has the authority to give a variance for the County highway. Richmond shared that the City can give the variance and added that the County shared with her verbally that they do not have an issue with this request.

McMullen shared that he will not be supporting these recommendations as he would like answers to some of the questions asked this evening before moving forward. He said he would rather see this item tabled for more information.

Hingos said he would like follow-up information from the DNR Hydrologist.

Motion by Hingos, second by Genin, to recommend approval of the lot width, front setback, and impervious surface variances with conditions and findings as presented by Staff. Motion passed 4-1 (McMullen).

Motion by Genin, second by Hingos, to recommend approval of the CUP for construction of a public road within the Urban Rum River Management District with conditions and findings as presented by Staff. Motion passed 4-1 (McMullen).

Motion by Hingos, second by Genin, to recommend approval of the preliminary plat for the Dalton River Villas project with conditions and findings as presented by Staff. Motion passed 4-1 (McMullen).

7. Regular Business Items

None.

8. Planning Commission Discussion

None.

9. Adjournment:

Motion by Becker, second by McMullen, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 5-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Website Link to Packets and Minutes for the Planning Commission:

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

Recorded by: Kate Thunstrom

DATE APPROVED:

DRAFT