

PLAN COMMISSION MINUTES

May 26th, 2026

The Plan Commission meeting met at 4pm in the council chambers with the following members present: Mayor Robert Stocks, Alderperson Ken Berg, Tom Levi, Melissa Lampe, Nick Krueger, City Engineer Andrew Beyer & Zoning Administrator Brian Zirbes.

Others in attendance: Sonja Kruesel of Vandewalle & Associates, Stephanie Broere & John Katsch.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor called the meeting to order at 4:12pm

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. **Review and take action: Plan Commission minutes dated May 11, 2026** Krueger noted that the minutes did not reflect that fact he was in attendance virtually and wanted that change made. Motion by Krueger, seconded by Lampe to approve the minutes as amended above, which was then passed unanimously.

3. BUSINESS

A. **Review and Discuss Zoning Ordinance Proposed Sign Code — Vandewalle**

Sonja was present to discuss further the zoning code rewrite and specifically sign code proposed changes. She noted there are 11 articles within the zoning code to review and alter potentially but today's meeting is addressing Article 9 related to signage content & format. Changes as needed are aimed at achieving content neutrality where possible to satisfy a 2015 Supreme Court case known as Reed v. Gilbert. Sonja commented we can regulate time or duration, manner and place but due to this court ruling, municipalities have less discretion to deny Conditional Use Permit request from applicants. Therefore, CUPs will be less common going forward. Sonja noted our city did a major sign code alteration around 2016, so Watertown's sign code is quite content neutral in its present form. She commented that sign types are grouped into categories with examples such as pylon signs, drive thru signs, permanent plat signs, roof signs and wall signs where CUPs have been used to customize requirements the city wanted from applicants in order to approve these different types of signage within our city.

Pylon signs are currently prohibited except for in the Hwy 26 Pylon Sign Allowance Area.

Existing signs are grandfathered but no new such signs allowed is the suggested verbiage. Krueger stated he is okay with a CUP for exceptions to the rule. Billboards are also prohibited currently but existing examples in the city are allowed. Geography or place is the main type of regulation applied to billboards. No new billboards beyond the two currently in place at 38 Stimpson St & 940 W Main Street would be permitted. Yard signs not allowed in right of way areas within city but permitted on private property and without limitation on the number for residential properties. On the time regulation criteria, for political signs, 30 days before the election and 10 days after the election would be appropriate and typical for a restriction we could put into effect. The Board was okay with off premises advertising signs being allowed on private property but discussed a 30 day limitation for duration of time but no consensus. On electronic message center signs, they are not allowed within 100 ft of any residential zoned property. Consensus was for allowing an existing internally illuminated sign to be changed to an EMC. Beyer stated he was in favor of current policy for EMC signage and Krueger agreed. New projecting signs are prohibited but we have several existing including Mullens, Phil's Pizza, etc yet blade and suspended signs are allowed, with Pine Hill, the Chamber of Commerce & Chandler House Bakery as three examples. Maintenance to these type of signs is allowed but replacement would not be permitted. Blade signs are limited to 14' to 16 sq ft, depending on the zoning district they are in. Sign permits are required in each case.

Marquee signs are allowed in commercial districts and downtown currently, but with a restriction of up to 200 sq ft in size. Inside window signage and advertising is allowed without restriction and that was viewed as appropriate so no changes suggested. Electronic TV signage and advertising was viewed as a concern needing some regulation through wordsmithing in the sign ordinance language.

Berg noted that sandwich board signs are restricted to downtown area but he sees them on South Church Street and other parts of city. He feels they are appropriate for businesses to promote special events and should be allowed citywide as long as not in the right of way. Consensus appeared to be there for this slight change. Sonja pointed out pylon height allowance beyond 35' would need to come to Plan Commission for review but many of the other sign permits would typically be administered by city staff. She noted sign permits would be turned around for approval or denial within say 14 days or about that while the length of time or duration would be extended for up to one year as to its expiration date. Sonja said the goal with our changes is to have more predictable standard regulation so CUPs would be infrequent.

4. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn at 5:01 pm was made by Lampe, seconded by Levi and approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted, Alderperson Ken Berg

All materials discussed at this meeting can be found at:

https://files-backend.assets.thrillshare.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/5330/Cow/128ba8ae-63fc-4f89-8e66-b4e5a56026ba/May-26%2C-2026-Plan-Commission-Meeting-Packet.pdf?disposition=inline