

Planning commission

Members present: Jim Beneke, Matt Eckholm, Sylvie Hyman, Jan Youngquist, Tom Weber,
John Flanagan, Estella Hughes (youth member)

Members absent: Mia Divecha

Staff present: Laura Chamberlain

Guests: Julia Spencer, Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMHC)
Eden Spencer, Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMHC)
Scotte Wende, Lunning Wende Associates, Inc.
Brenda Lano, Homes within Reach

- 1. Call to order – roll call.**
- 2. Approval of minutes – Jan. 8 & 15, 2025.**

Chair pro tem Eckholm noted on page 7 should read, "...is there any greater risk to the process of the zoning amendment..."

It was moved by Commissioner Weber, seconded by Commissioner Youngquist, to approve the Jan. 8 and 15, 2025, minutes with one amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

- 3. Hearings.**
- 3a. Title:** Minnetonka Boulevard twin homes plat and planned unit development
Location: 5639, 5643, 5647, and 5707 Minnetonka Blvd.
Applicant: Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation
Case No: 24-24-S, 24-25-PUD

Ms. Chamberlain presented the report.

Commissioner Beneke asked about parking and the driveway, with no parking allowed on Minnetonka Boulevard. Ms. Chamberlain stated the design provides for the garages to be accessed in the alley, with individual driveways for each unit. She stated there is enough space behind the garage for one car to park as well as full circulation. She added there is no additional parking proposed and no on-street parking on Minnetonka Boulevard, and requirements only require two parking spaces per unit.

Commissioner Weber asked if there are 13 heritage trees on the site. Ms. Chamberlain stated the application came in prior to the heritage tree ordinance being in effect. She added the fee in lieu is based on 2024 requirements which look at significant trees, not heritage trees, it's possible that 1 or 2 trees are considered heritage trees under today's ordinance.

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Commissioner Weber asked if a tree is diseased, it will still be removed, and it does not depend on the size of the tree. Ms. Chamberlain stated yes, that is correct. She added the tree ordinance only considers healthy trees and if diseased or dead or not a species listed, then it is removed.

Commissioner Hyman asked about the \$6000 park and trail dedication and the fee in lieu. Ms. Chamberlain stated in general the subdivision ordinance says when any property is subdivided and developed, the city requires that parkland be set aside in the same way as right-of-way for internal streets. She stated because city parks are built out today, there is very little need for parkland on a subdivision, so the fee in lieu is for payment into the park fund, and to be only used for expansion or new equipment for parks and not maintenance of existing parks.

Commissioner Hyman asked if a mixed-use development was considered as it is a noisy area. Ms. Chamberlain stated the history of this site was for individual lots that had single homes on them, that the city obtained and demolished and with the intention of doing homeowner redevelopment with that missing middle density. She added ground floor commercial was not considered for that site.

Commissioner Hyman noted the map shows an area south of the site that is completely clear of trees. She stated there is a parking lot there and asked if that is heavily used. She asked if these homes could have been pushed back further, and the parking lot area used instead for these homes. Ms. Chamberlain stated it is hard to tell but there is a significant grade difference from Minnetonka Boulevard to the parking lot. She added the parking lot is owned by the Colonial Apartments which are to the east of the project site, and it is heavily used by the residents there. She stated in collaboration with the developer, the setbacks were looked at on Minnetonka Boulevard and they do far exceed the city's requirements, with the intention of creating a buffer.

Commissioner Weber noted the city has direction on lots the city owns, and stated these lots are used to meet the codes. He stated this seems to be the first example of living up to the updated zoning codes. Ms. Chamberlain stated when it became evident, staff saw this as a project to meet those requirements and the intention in acquiring these properties by the EDA was to find affordable home ownership priorities, the council prioritized that, and this project meets those priorities.

Commissioner Weber asked if this is the first significant use of the land trust model. Ms. Chamberlain stated yes at least in St. Louis Park.

Chair pro tem Eckholm opened the public hearing.

Julia Spencer, Greater Minneapolis Housing Corporation, stated they hope to meet the missing middle with this project and hope it will be a valuable resource for people who want to live in the area. She stated it meets the constraints of the site and meets the city goals regarding the land trust model.

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Brenda Lano, Director of Homes within Reach, stated land trust is not new to St. Louis Park with 25 homes in the portfolio currently. She stated they have helped 31 families achieve ownership through resales and stated St. Louis Park has been a great partner with 2 homes per year through CDBG funds. She stated Ms. Olson in housing authority has reached out to homeowners about selling their homes to the Homes within Reach program.

Commissioner Weber asked Ms. Lano for details on the workings of the land trust model. She explained that it is strictly a homeownership program and not rent-to-own. She stated home buyers must be income qualified at 45-85% AMI. She added land trust is a non-profit community-based organization, and they own the land to benefit the community and they hold it in perpetuity, and it is a shared-equity model. She stated there is an application process and a scoring model with priorities for St. Louis Park workforce for the first opportunity for home ownership.

Commissioner Weber stated then that Homes within Reach owns the land and the people own the house. He added if a potential homeowner does not have to buy the land, which can make it more affordable. Ms. Lano stated yes.

Chair pro tem Eckholm closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Beneke stated he loves this project and is proud of the city for pursuing it, as it is a prototype of what can be done. He thanked Homes Within Reach and stated he likes the whole idea in general.

Chair pro tem Eckholm added one of the nice things about the proposal is it is the first look at what the city envisions we could see more of in St. Louis Park. He added with density we typically think about the 5-floor apartment building but noted this is a 100% increase of homes on the original site, and that does not have to be scary or change the community. He stated it can be a neighborhood feel, and a home ownership opportunity and he likes this is a good preview of what people can expect.

Chair pro tem Eckholm stated he supports this and stated also that Chair Divecha notified him that she too supports this project.

Commissioner Hyman stated her only negative is the proximity of the project to Minnetonka Boulevard and she is concerned about the heaviness of traffic there. She stated she is excited about the reconstruction of Minnetonka Boulevard in 2028 and plans to be involved in that but still has concerns for the safety of families with children who live there. She loves this is happening but stated this project is so close to Minnetonka Boulevard and Highway 100 makes her very nervous.

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Commissioner Youngquist stated new construction for missing middle and affordable homeownership are two difficult nuts to crack and this project does it and she wholeheartedly will support it.

Commissioner Flanagan agreed and stated housing density can be increased with this project and with an opportunity to own and he is excited about this.

It was moved by Commissioner Weber, seconded by Commissioner Flanagan, to approve the preliminary and final plan of Minnetonka Boulevard twin homes addition, subject to conditions; and the preliminary and final plat of planned unit development, subject to conditions as presented by staff.

The motion passed 6-0 (Chair Divecha was absent and youth member does not vote).

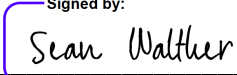
4. Other Business – none.

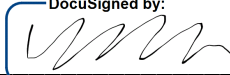
5. Communications.

The following future scheduled meetings were noted:

- February 19, 2025 – Planning Commission study session
- March 12, 2025 – Planning Commission regular meeting
- March 19, 2025 – Planning Commission regular meeting
- April 2, 2025 – Planning Commission regular meeting

6. Adjournment – 6:31 p.m.

Signed by:

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Sean Walther, liaison

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Mia Divecha, chair member