
Planning commission meeting and study session

The St. Louis Park Planning Commission is meeting in person at St. Louis Park City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd. Members of the public can attend the planning commission meeting in person or watch the regular meeting by webstream at www.parktv.org and on local cable (Comcast SD channel 14 and HD channel 798). Visit bit.ly/slppcagendas to view the agenda and reports.

You can provide comment on agenda items in person at the meeting or by emailing your comments to info@stlouispark.org by noon the day of the meeting. Comments must be related to an item on the meeting agenda.

Agenda

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

1. Call to order – roll call
2. Approval of minutes – June 17, 2026
3. Hearing
4. Other Business
 - 4a. Election of officers
 - 4b. Review and approve planning commission and board of zoning and appeals (BOZA) purpose statements
5. Communications
6. Adjournment

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

1. Comprehensive Planning 101

Future scheduled meeting/event dates:

July 15, 2026 – planning commission study session

August 5, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting

August 19, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting

September 2, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting

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1. Call to order – 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Members present: Jim Beneke, Mia Divecha, Matt Eckholm, John Flanagan, Sylvie Hyman, Tess Machalek, Sarah Strain

Members absent: Tom Weber

Staff present: Laura Chamberlain, Katelyn Champoux, Gary Morrison

Guest: Jeff Miller, HKGi

2. Approval of Minutes – March 25, 2026 regular and study session, April 8, 2026 and May 6, 2026.

It was moved by Commissioner Beneke, seconded by Commissioner Hyman to approve the March 26, 2026, April 8, 2026 and May 6, 2026 minutes. The motion passed 6-0.

3. Hearing

3a. Title: Comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance and zoning map amendment – Phase 2
Case No: 26-03-ZA, 26-04-CP

Mr. Morrison and Ms. Champoux presented the three related elements of Phase 2 of the zoning code update. Mr. Morrison noted that a single public hearing would cover all three elements: the comprehensive plan amendment, the zoning ordinance text amendment, and the zoning map amendment.

Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Ms. Champoux presented the proposed comprehensive plan amendment, characterizing it as a cleanup amendment intended to close policy gaps rather than alter policy decisions from prior phases. The amendment proposes three changes: adjusting the descriptions and minimum densities for the medium density residential and high density residential land use designations; changing the future land use of a 4.4-acre parcel at 8800 Highway 7 from commercial to high density residential; and updating applicable land use tables to reflect these changes.

Ms. Champoux explained that the density adjustment was necessary because the minimum lot area required by the zoning code for certain residential uses did not meet the minimum density requirement of the associated land use designations, creating a gap between the comprehensive plan and the zoning code. The proposed change reduces the low end of the density range for medium and high density residential designations to preserve the flexibility in housing types intended by Phase 1.

Regarding the 8800 Highway 7 parcel, Ms. Champoux described it as a 4.4-acre site located in the southwest corner of the city adjacent to Minnehaha Creek. The proposed land use change from commercial to high density residential is intended to accommodate an affordable housing development consisting of a seven-story apartment building with approximately 208 units reserved for households earning between 30% and 80% of area median income. A neighborhood meeting was held by the developer on March 3, 2026. If approved, staff anticipated minimal city approvals would be required beyond standard permitting, though a variance or two may be sought.

Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment

Mr. Morrison provided an overview of the Phase 2 zoning ordinance text amendment. He noted that Phase 1, adopted in March 2025, had established new neighborhood districts, associated uses and dimensional standards, and a new table format. Phase 2 builds on that foundation without proposing changes to uses or dimensional standards from Phase 1.

A key structural change is the reorganization of the ordinance from 6 articles to 10 with the goal of simplifying navigation and reducing redundancy. Highlights of the new structure include: a dedicated neighborhood districts article (Article 3); a consolidated use-specific standards article (Article 7), eliminating the repetition of conditions across individual zoning districts; a development standards article (Article 8) consolidating parking, landscaping, architectural standards, lighting, and signage; and a procedures article (Article 9) covering conditional use permits, variances, planned unit developments, and similar processes.

Mr. Morrison described the consolidation of nine non-residential zoning districts into seven, with notable changes including the removal of the office-only and business park districts, and the conversion of the C-1 district to MU-1 and the MX-1 district to MU-2. He emphasized that existing regulations from the C-1 district—including height, yards, and buffer yards established following a study of the Excelsior Boulevard corridor—would be carried forward into MU-1. He also noted that density and height bonuses would be permitted by conditional use permit in the MU-2, MU-3, and B-1 districts, but not in MU-1, in recognition of the established character along Excelsior Blvd.

On parking, Mr. Morrison described the consolidation of two existing parking tables into one and the extension of MX-2/Walker Lake parking standards—whereby any allowed use may occupy any existing building without regard to parking minimums—across all three mixed-use districts. He clarified this flexibility applies to existing buildings only; new construction and additions would still be subject to minimum parking requirements and could not remove existing required parking spaces. Additionally, parking minimums would be eliminated entirely within the Historic Walker Lake overlay district, including for new construction.

Other notable amendments include: moving mural regulations from the signage section to architectural standards to better distinguish murals from signage; introducing regulations allowing temporary window security screening for businesses; a proposed modification to the visibility triangle standard, measuring from property lines rather than curb lines to produce a more site-specific and less burdensome standard; allowing all restaurants, wherever located in

the city, to serve alcohol and to maintain a separate bar area; and permitting food trucks at residential properties for up to six days per calendar year for special events.

Zoning Map Amendment

Mr. Morrison described the zoning map amendment as largely a straightforward translation of existing districts to their new equivalents. He highlighted two notable changes beyond simple renaming. The first was the rezoning of 8800 Highway 7 from C-2 to N-4 to align with the proposed comprehensive plan amendment. The second involved approximately five properties on the south side of Excelsior Boulevard immediately east of Miracle Mile, which are proposed to be rezoned from C-1 to MU-2 given their size and character being more consistent with the larger Miracle Mile properties than with the smaller parcels further east along the corridor.

Mr. Morrison noted that outreach over the past year included door-to-door business notification, targeted emails, two citywide and business-specific surveys, two open houses, and multiple planning commission and city council study sessions. He outlined the anticipated schedule: a recommendation from the planning commission would proceed to the city council on July 20, 2026 for all three elements, with a second reading of the text and map amendments on August 3, 2026, publication of the ordinance on August 13, 2026, and the ordinance taking effect on August 28, 2026.

Commissioner Hyman asked Mr. Morrison to elaborate on the proposed visibility triangle change. Mr. Morrison explained that the current 50-foot triangle, measured from the curb line, often cuts disproportionately into residential front yards and does not account well for modern street features such as curb bump-outs. The proposed approach would measure from property lines, which are fixed and unaffected by street design changes, resulting in a smaller but more appropriately calibrated triangle. He noted that controlled intersections with stoplights may warrant a smaller triangle, and that coordination with the city's engineering department was ongoing.

Commissioner Beneke asked whether the rezoning of properties adjacent to Miracle Mile to MU-2 would result in a situation unique to that corridor given the residential properties directly behind. Mr. Morrison confirmed similar adjacencies exist elsewhere in the city, citing Texus-Tonka and the Cedar Lake-Louisiana intersection as examples, and noted that MU2 already allows the same mixed-use building types as the former C2 district.

Commissioner Divecha referenced a discussion from the March 25, 2026 study session regarding potential mismatches between height and density bonuses and asked whether that issue had been resolved. Mr. Morrison confirmed it had been reviewed and addressed, noting it primarily required clarification in the language.

Public Hearing

Chair Flanagan opened the public hearing and asked speakers to limit comments to three minutes.

Jonathan Sulman, resident, expressed general support for the clarified sport court regulations, noting a recent neighborhood dispute had highlighted the need for clearer standards. He also addressed parking, expressing his desire to see continued reductions in minimum parking requirements to free up land from asphalt, allow for more permeable surfaces, and support multiple modes of transportation.

Ian Thomas, resident, offered detailed comments opposing the retention of parking minimums. He argued that parking mandates are inconsistent with the city's strategic priorities around walking, biking, and transit; that they add substantial costs to housing development—ranging from \$5,000–\$10,000 per surface space to \$25,000–\$50,000 per structured space—and are thus contrary to affordability goals; and that they contribute to automobile dependence and carbon emissions. He cited survey results in which 65% of respondents favored reducing or eliminating parking minimums in neighborhood commercial zones and 82% felt existing parking was sufficient or excessive. He urged the commission to take a proactive role in designing the parameters of the parking study identified in the 2026 work plan. In addition to speaking at the public hearing, Mr. Thomas submitted comments by email which were provided to the commissioners at the time of the meeting. His written comments are included in the minutes as Attachment 1.

Alex Caldron, resident and pediatrician, echoed support for reducing parking minimums and connected the issue to children's health. He cited concerns about heat island effects from asphalt, reduced outdoor play opportunities, air quality impacts, and the broader benefits of reducing car dependence for access to essential services and general community health. He concluded by noting that reducing parking minimums aligns with all five of the city's strategic goals.

Luke Van Santen, a resident of Minnetonka and member of the West Metro Active Transportation Alliance, urged the commission to support approaches that reduce automobile dependence, including removing parking minimums or, at minimum, conducting a full parking study before finalizing ordinance changes. He cited automobile transportation as the leading source of greenhouse gases in Minnesota.

Tim Goldencrown, resident, raised a concern regarding a vacant former parking lot behind his neighborhood near Park Tavern, which he understood was in a mixed-use zoning district. He requested that the commission consider whether the site might be more appropriately designated as a neighborhood residential district, given that the surrounding area is characterized by homes and families.

Chair Flanagan closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Divecha asked whether staff could obtain the address of the property raised by Mr. Goldencrown for further review. Ms. Chamberlain indicated she believed the property to be 3301 Gorham Avenue, a former municipal parking lot that the city had retired as no longer needed. She explained the city had not yet undertaken any analysis regarding sale or future development of the site, and that if a development proposal came forward, there would be public engagement at that time. Mr. Morrison added that any change in zoning for that

property would also require a comprehensive plan amendment and proper notification, which had not occurred as part of the current process. Commissioner Eckholm noted that the property, as a former MX-2 site now proposed as MU-1, appeared appropriately designated in context with the Walker Lake area, and that any future development proposal would provide an opportunity to revisit the question. The commission agreed that no change to the property's designation could be made at this meeting, but that the matter could be revisited if a development application came forward.

Commissioner Strain expressed appreciation for the public comments and affirmed that the commission had discussed parking extensively in study sessions. She noted that evaluating parking minimums was already included on the 2026 work plan and expressed her support for approaching the issue with appropriate rigor rather than rushing changes in either direction.

Commissioner Eckholm thanked community members for attending and acknowledged the significance of the 2040 Comprehensive Plan as the foundation guiding current zoning decisions. He encouraged residents to engage in the upcoming 2050 Comprehensive Plan process, noting that the values expressed in that document would directly shape future land use decisions. He also recognized and thanked city staff and consultants for the substantial work completed across both phases of the zoning code update, and highlighted as a meaningful achievement the reorganization of auto-oriented uses into specific districts, limiting their expansion into areas intended to prioritize walking, biking, and transit.

Commissioner Divecha noted that while parking progress may feel incremental, the commission had made substantive steps, including expanding the Walker Lake parking flexibility to all mixed-use districts and removing parking minimums for new construction in the historic Walker Lake Overlay. She also highlighted improvements to pedestrian-oriented design standards as an important complement to parking reform.

Commissioner Hyman thanked the public for their continued engagement and raised a question regarding the bicycle parking conversion language, specifically the permit requirement for converting a required vehicle space to bicycle parking. Mr. Morrison explained that the administrative permit process was adopted to ensure racks meet standards to safely secure the bike, and that the city preferred an upfront approval process over reliance on enforcement. Commissioner Hyman asked for clarification that the provision permitting a minimum of one converted space still applied even where 5% of required spaces would be a fraction of one space, which Mr. Morrison confirmed was the intent of the language. Commissioner Hyman expressed measured satisfaction with the progress made in this phase while reiterating her view that more could be done.

Commissioner Beneke offered closing remarks affirming the commission's accomplishments in Phase 2. Youth Commissioner Machalek thanked the attendees who provided public comment and clarified for the record that, as a non-voting member, any abstention from voting should not be interpreted as a protest.

Chair Flanagan closed discussion by thanking community members for attending and giving up their time, echoing enthusiasm for the upcoming parking study, and highlighting the expansion

of the Walker Lake use-flexibility standard to all mixed-use districts as a meaningful change that could unlock adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

It was moved by Commissioner Divecha, seconded by Commissioner Eckholm, to approve the Comprehensive Plan, zoning ordinance and zoning map amendments. The motion passed 6-0.

5. Communications

Ms. Chamberlain noted that this was Commissioner Hyman's final meeting and recognized her contributions to the commission. Chair Flanagan and Commissioner Eckholm each expressed appreciation for Commissioner Hyman's advocacy, particularly on parking minimums, and her willingness to challenge consensus when warranted.

Future scheduled meeting/event dates:

- July 1, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting and study session
- July 15, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting
- August 5, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting
- August 19, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting

6. Adjournment – 7:09 p.m.

Laura Chamberlain, liaison

John Flanagan, chair member

These minutes were created with the assistance of a generative AI transcript service, then edited by a staff person.

FW: Comments for June 17th Planning Commission Public Hearing on Zoning Ordinance

From info@stlouisparkmn.gov <info@stlouisparkmn.gov>

Date Wed 6/17/2026 8:03 AM

To SLP BuildingandEnergy Customer Applications <inspections@stlouisparkmn.gov>; Angela Nelson <anelson@stlouisparkmn.gov>

Tami Strohmeyer

Customer Service Representative | City of St. Louis Park

5005 Minnetonka Blvd, St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Office: 952.928.1360

tstrohmeyer@stlouisparkmn.gov

Experience LIFE in the Park.

From: Ian Thomas <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Tuesday, June 16, 2026 12:42 PM

To: info@stlouisparkmn.gov

Subject: Comments for June 17th Planning Commission Public Hearing on Zoning Ordinance

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Thank you for all your volunteer time and hard work – representing the people of St. Louis Park in planning decisions and making policy recommendations to the City Council. My comments relate to “parking minimums” in the proposed zoning code update, phase 2.

First of all, I want to point out that these outdated, unnecessary, and harmful requirements are incompatible with the City’s vision and strategic priorities:

- By mandating a specific number of parking spaces for every building, they encourage sprawl, push destinations further apart, make driving unavoidable for most journeys, create an unsafe and unpleasant walking environment, and fuel a self-perpetuating cycle of automobile dependence – the exact opposite of *“Safe infrastructure that connects people and places with an emphasis on walking, biking and transit.”*
- Second, since the land, materials, and labor cost of surface parking is \$5,000–\$10,000 per space, rising to \$25,000–\$50,000 per space in an underground garage, the requirement to provide one space per bedroom adds hundreds of dollars to the monthly rent, thereby undermining our goal of *“a range of quality, affordable and attainable housing options”* – developers should be free to offer apartments to low-car and no-car families without a financial penalty.
- Lastly, by increasing the community’s dependence on automobiles, we drive up transportation-related carbon emissions, making a joke of our claims of *“climate leadership.”*

The arguments in favor of parking minimums lie somewhere between very weak and non-existent. In general, they betray a strong cultural bias in favor of motorists and against pedestrians and transit users,

despite the fact that one-third of all Americans do not drive a car. In discussing concerns with City staff, an apartment development in Knollwood was cited, which provided insufficient spaces such that the lot is full every night and a few people have to risk parking in an adjacent lot with a sign that says “Unauthorized cars will be towed” or find street parking up to a quarter of a mile away. Compare this minor inconvenience with the magnitude, severity, and impact of the systemic, long-term, citywide problems caused by keeping parking mandates – the ugly landscapes, the economic impact on our most vulnerable neighbors, and the safety, health, and environmental harms caused by locking in “car culture.” A more general concern is that, without parking mandates, developers will intentionally under-build parking, forcing residents to park on nearby streets in single-family neighborhoods. Not only is this argument specious (developers have no incentive for inconveniencing their tenants and have access to sophisticated models for predicting parking demand), but it also relies on the false assumption that certain residents can dictate who is allowed to park on the public streets in their neighborhood. And then there is the fear that St. Louis Park voters will rise up against any parking reform effort. In fact, the opposite is true, as demonstrated in [a survey the City administered last year](#) supposedly to guide development of this new zoning code. In the survey, 65% of respondents said they want to reduce or eliminate minimum parking requirements in Neighborhood Commercial Node/Corridor zones, and 82% indicated there is already enough or too much parking available. There were similar results for other zoning districts.

With all this in mind, it is very disappointing – especially, at a time when hundreds of progressive communities across the country (including Minneapolis and St. Paul) are eliminating parking mandates – that St. Louis Park’s proposed zoning code update, phase 2 retains them everywhere except the Walker-Lake area, and makes just a few tepid reductions in other districts. Even more alarming is the lack of objective analysis that went into these recommendations, which appear to be quite arbitrary – apparently, no parking utilization studies were conducted to evaluate how the existing requirements are working out (although we are all aware of vast, empty parking lots in many areas).

During your January 21 Study Session, City staff presented three options – to re-open discussion of parking requirements and delay approval of the zoning code update, to conduct a comprehensive parking study as part of your 2026 work plan and then recommend amendments to the ordinance, or to hold off on any changes until the 2050 comprehensive plan update which would mean there would be no realistic impact for 5-10 years. I recall you agreed on the “middle” option, and I encourage you all to take a proactive and “hands-on” role in designing the parameters of the 2026 parking study.

Sincerely,

Ian Thomas

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St. Louis Park

4b. Review and approve planning commission and BOZA purpose statements

Recommended action: Staff recommend the planning commission and board of zoning appeals (BOZA) approve the purpose statements for City of St. Louis Park documents.

Policy consideration: Do the updated purpose statements accurately reflect the purpose of the planning commission and BOZA?

Summary: The City of St. Louis Park encourages residents to share their talents and perspectives by serving on a board or commission. The city has eleven boards and commissions, and each has its own webpage, bylaws, and other guiding documents. The city council has asked staff to review and update the purpose statement for every board and commission so that it accurately reflects the role of each. All board and commission liaisons were asked to review and update the purpose statements with input from the administration department.

Planning Commission:

Current purpose statement: The Planning Commission advises the City Council on land use, zoning, comprehensive planning, and community development. It maintains the City's comprehensive plan, studies zoning and subdivision regulations, and reviews applications for zoning amendments, special permits, and plats. Through recommendations, annual reports, and work plans, the commission supports informed decision-making and ensures long-range development aligns with community goals and legal requirements.

Recommended updated purpose statement: The Planning Commission advises the City Council on land use, zoning, comprehensive planning, and community development. It reviews the City's comprehensive plan, zoning and subdivision regulations, and applications for zoning amendments, conditional use permits, and plats. The commission promotes the orderly, efficient, and sustainable growth of the city in accordance with community goals and legal requirements.

Board of Zoning Appeals:

Current purpose statement: The Board of Zoning Appeals assists the city council by deciding variances and appeals. Appeals relate to zoning administrator decisions, interpretations of the zoning ordinance, and of permits staff issued, and other matters related to the zoning ordinance. It conducts hearings, discusses the matter, then makes a final determination. By communicating its findings and submitting annual reports, the board supports transparent, consistent, and community-responsive land-use decision-making.

Recommended updated purpose statement:

The Board of Zoning Appeals helps make sure zoning laws are applied fairly while allowing reasonable use of property. It reviews appeals when someone disagrees with a zoning decision or needs clarification on how a rule applies. The board may grant variances when practical difficulties prevent a property from being used in a typical way, as long as the change fits the surrounding area. It does not change zoning laws but applies them to individual situations in a balanced and consistent way.

Prepared by: Laura Chamberlain, Senior Planner

Reviewed by: Jennifer Monson, Planning & Economic Development Manager

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1 Comprehensive Planning 101

Discussion:

St. Louis Park is starting a multi-year process of updating the city's comprehensive plan. This study session will introduce comprehensive planning to the planning commission, providing an overview of the process, the current 2040 comprehensive plan and the proposed approach to the 2050 comprehensive plan.

All local jurisdictions are statutorily required to update their comprehensive plan every 10 years. Cities located within the 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area are also required to comply with regional development framework set by the Metropolitan Council (Met Council). The Met Council updates this regional development framework guide every 10 years. The recently updated regional development framework (Imagine 2050) can be found online at [Met Council's Local Planning Handbook website](#). This website also provides information about local requirements, training materials, and resources on how cities can get the most out of their plans. Some features of the website planning commissioners might find particularly interesting include the [newly developed Housing Tool](#), which visualizes information on housing stock and affordability by community.

During the study session the commission will look at the topics within the city's [2040 Comprehensive Plan](#) and examine how these have shaped city decision-making since 2018.

Finally, the commission will discuss how Vision 4.0 and the city's new strategic priorities will impact St. Louis Park's approach to the 2050 comprehensive plan, engagement processes, and implementation expectations.

Prepared by: Laura Chamberlain, Senior Planner

Reviewed by: Jennifer Monson, Planning & Economic Development Manager