

**Minnetonka Planning Commission
Minutes**

Nov. 17, 2022

1. Call to Order

Chair Sewall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Commissioners Powers, Waterman, Henry and Sewall were present. Banks, Hanson and Maxwell were absent.

Staff members present: Assistant City Planner Susan Thomas.

3. Approval of Agenda

Powers moved, second by Henry, to approve the agenda as submitted with the postponement of Item 8A at the request of the applicant.

Powers, Waterman, Henry and Sewall voted yes. Banks, Hanson and Maxwell were absent. Motion carried.

4. Approval of Minutes: Nov. 3, 2022

Waterman moved, second by Henry, to approve the Nov. 3, 2022 meeting minutes as submitted.

Powers, Waterman, Henry and Sewall voted yes. Banks, Hanson and Maxwell were absent. Motion carried.

5. Report from Staff

Thomas briefed the commission on land use applications considered by the city council at its meeting of Nov. 14, 2022:

- Adopted a resolution approving items for The Social Kitchen and Libations restaurant that will be located in Macy's.
- Adopted an amendment to the solar energy ordinance.
- Adopted a resolution approving the final plat of Commings Homestead Second Addition, a two-lot subdivision on Sparrow Road.

The next planning commission meeting is scheduled to be held Dec. 1, 2022.

6. Report from Planning Commission Members

Powers appreciated the recognition given to city staff and their family members who are veterans.

Chair Sewall appreciated everyone who worked on the election. He has always had a positive experience when voting in Minnetonka.

7. Public Hearings: Consent Agenda

No item was removed from the consent agenda for discussion or separate action.

Henry moved, second by Powers, to approve the item listed on the consent agenda as recommended in the respective staff report as follows:

A. Conditional use permit for an educational use within an existing religious institution at 4600 Shady Oak Road.

Recommend that the city council adopt the resolution approving a conditional use permit for an educational use within an existing religious institution at 4600 Shady Oak Road.

Powers, Waterman, Henry and Sewall voted yes. Banks, Hanson and Maxwell were absent. Motion carried and the item on the consent agenda was approved as submitted.

8. Public Hearings

A. Amendment to the sign plan for West Ridge Market.

Powers moved, second by Waterman, to postpone review of the item until the planning commission meeting scheduled to be held Dec. 1, 2022.

Powers, Waterman, Henry and Sewall voted yes. Banks, Hanson and Maxwell were absent. Motion carried.

9. Other Business

A. Concept plan review for Walser Kia at 15700 Wayzata Blvd.

Chair Sewall introduced the proposal and called for the staff report.

Thomas reported. She recommended commissioners provide feedback on key topics identified in the staff report and any other land-use-related items that commissioners deem appropriate. This discussion is intended to assist the applicant in the preparation of more detailed development plans.

David Phillips, architect representing the Walser Automotive Group, applicant, stated that:

- The leases have all been coordinated to expire this December and allow redevelopment of the property.

- He provided a presentation with the current view from I-394. The building is 60 years old and is located on two lots.
- The existing billboard and building would be removed.
- The proposed development would double or triple the current value of the property.
- The new building would have a lot of glass on the south side. There would be a delivery area on the west side, service entrance on the east side and service occurring on the west side.
- The site plan outlined the potential buildable area. The applicant would like to confine the building to the front. Customer parking would be located in front of the building.
- The current building is 28,000 square feet. The proposed building would have a smaller footprint and would not be as large as the area outlined on the proposed site plan. The footprint on the proposal would be pulled back on the east side.
- KIA is an up-and-coming brand. The vehicles are highly desirable. All of the dealerships have a quality standard.
- The proposed building would have a partial second floor to use for storage and possibly a break room.
- The building would be very attractive.
- The elevation of the parking lot would remain lower than the building to keep headlights buffered naturally by the grade.
- The proposal would meet all wetland setbacks, stormwater requirements and floodplain access regulations.
- He spoke with the neighbor who lives north of the property. A buffer would be provided on the north side. The neighbor likes the concept of the driveway having a lower elevation to prevent headlights from leaving the site.
- He was available for questions.

Henry asked if a parking ramp to house the vehicles had been considered. Mr. Phillips answered that there would not be enough room on the site to build a ramp. A higher structure would also have more of an impact on the neighbors who reside on the north side. Henry noted that an enclosed ramp would prevent headlights from leaving the ramp. Mr. Phillips stated that it had been considered. The ramp would need to be three stories tall and have three sides open to meet ventilation requirements.

Powers asked how many vehicles could be located in the back parking lot. Mr. Phillips estimated 340 vehicles. He explained that Walser has a test-drive policy that requires sales people to accompany shoppers during a test drive and would be required to travel on I-394 instead of through a residential neighborhood; no vehicle alarms would be allowed to be utilized on site; there are no speakers on site; and vehicles would be brought to the front by a salesperson for a test drive.

Powers liked the parking lot being at a lower elevation to prevent headlights from leaving the site. Mr. Phillips stated that stormwater treatment requirements would be met.

Waterman asked for the hours of operation. Mr. Phillips answered that dealerships typically close at 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 6 p.m. on Friday and Saturday; and are closed on Sundays. Customers usually know what vehicle they are interested in and the salesperson will have brought it inside from the back parking lot to be warm and more inviting. There will be natural screening created by the elevation change and coniferous trees planted on the north side. There are currently not a lot of trees.

Chair Sewall asked if the parking lot needs to be as large as it is proposed. Mr. Phillips answered affirmatively. In order for the business to have the sales volume needed to pay the bills of the new dealership, there needs to be room for 340 vehicles to provide 50 employee parking stalls, 150 new-vehicle stalls and stalls for used vehicles. It is the sufficient size.

The public hearing was opened. No testimony was submitted and the hearing was closed.

Waterman stated that:

- The land use is logical for the area.
- There is a natural bridge around the wetland.
- The site is surrounded by auto dealers. It would not be too close to residential housing.
- The proposal would not intensify the use of the property.
- He would miss a lot of the existing retail. The site is 60 years old and it would be good to redevelop the property.
- He likes the design of the building and the use of glass. He would be comfortable increasing the size of the second floor.
- He is curious to see if all regulations would be met if a formal application is submitted including those regarding impervious surface, tree removal and light shed onto neighboring properties.
- The proposed use and design make sense.

Henry stated that:

- The location makes sense from a clustering point of view to make it easier for a customer shopping for vehicles.
- He will miss the existing businesses, but he hopes they will relocate nearby.
- He was glad the applicant is addressing the screening concerns of the neighbor on the north side. Planting coniferous trees would be a great step.
- He likes the design of the building. It would look modern and welcoming.

- He did not like the frosted glass on the second floor.
- He suggested a design element be utilized to connect the drive between the front of the dealership and the back if needed to make setback requirements.
- The concept plan is a good start.
- He encouraged the applicant to keep talking with the neighbors.

Powers stated that:

- He likes the proposal's location on I-394.
- He encouraged the neighbors to speak up.
- He supports the elevation on the north being lower to prevent headlights from leaving the site and coniferous trees being planted to provide an additional buffer.
- He looks forward to seeing an application for the concept plan.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- He felt that the concept plan is a good use of the land.
- The design is fine.
- The key to success would be buffering which seems doable.
- He felt a reasonable encroachment to connect the front with the back parking lot would be acceptable while protecting the natural resources as much as possible.
- He supports street lights that focus down instead of past the property.
- The proposal is reasonable.
- The building is fine.

Henry encouraged solar panels be located on the roof.

B. Concept plan review for Greco Minnetonka at 15409 Wayzata Blvd.

Chair Sewall introduced the proposal and called for the staff report.

Thomas reported. She recommended commissioners provide feedback on key topics identified in the staff report and any other land-use-related items that commissioners deem appropriate. This discussion is intended to assist the applicant in the preparation of more detailed development plans.

Josh Branstad, of Greco Development, applicant, stated that:

- He provided a presentation with completed and ongoing projects done by Greco Development.
- The proposal would have 120 units of assisted living and 70 to 80 units of independent living. The concept is continuity of care.

- The applicant originally presented three concept plans to the neighbors. The first concept would have rehabilitated the existing building into a religious-based charter school; the second would have redeveloped the site into 70 to 80 units of townhomes; and the third is the current concept plan being reviewed.
- The current concept plan would reutilize the existing building. There would need to be a substantial investment to get the building up to code requirements.
- He provided renderings to show the elements that could be incorporated into the building exteriors and unit interiors. The project would be high quality.
- He was looking forward to capturing feedback from neighbors and commissioners.

Henry asked if the school would still be an option. Mr. Branstad explained that the school would not generate enough revenue for the level of investment needed to bring the building up to code and would not be the highest quality of redevelopment for the site. The townhomes would bring the highest level of quality. The independent and assisted living option would be a close number two.

Henry confirmed with Mr. Branstad that viability, height of the buildings and increased traffic were the chief concerns expressed by neighbors. Mr. Branstad stated that the stories of the independent-living building could be stepped back so there would be two stories visible in the front and three stories visible in the back. The site is surrounded by large trees.

Waterman asked if there would be enough parking. Mr. Branstad explained that there would be one stall per bedroom. There would be approximately 84 stalls underground and an additional 26 stalls on the surface. There would be approximately three staff on site for independent living. The previous facility had 200 rooms.

Chair Sewall asked if an option more dense than the townhomes had been considered. Mr. Branstad answered affirmatively. It would be the easiest approach to remove the existing building. There would need to be 300 to 400 apartment units on the six-acre site to fund the redevelopment.

In response to Chair Sewall's question, Mr. Branstad answered that moving the independent living building so that it would not abut the neighbors could be considered.

The public hearing was opened.

Robert Britain, 1527 Clarendon Drive, stated that:

- The master guide plan and current zoning should not be changed.

- Rezoning the property for a multi-family, high-density use would not be appropriate for the site.
- There are enough assisted living and independent living facilities for seniors.
- The current use of the property should be maintained. It should be an institutional use.
- The property is surrounded by a residential neighborhood.
- The previous skilled nursing facility had little traffic, but the parking area was full.
- He was worried the site would be used for general apartments in the future.

Greg Greffin, 1539 Clare Lane, stated that:

- The current parking lot was previously a wetland and landfill.
- Listening to the pounding of pylons to construct underground parking would be hard to endure.
- Wetland preservation should be a concern for this proposal.
- The site has a limited buildable area.
- He wants to keep the property the way it is.
- Clare Lane is a narrow street and cannot support a lot of traffic.
- He requested that the proposal be denied.

No additional testimony was submitted and the hearing was closed.

Thomas explained that a wetland delineation would be required to be completed and submitted with a formal application.

Waterman stated that:

- The site is beautiful. He had anticipated that it would be redeveloped.
- He likes that the concept plan would reuse the existing building.
- He agrees that Clare Lane is quite narrow and Clarendon Drive already handles a lot of traffic.
- He likes that the applicant would like the building to fit within the fabric of the neighborhood.
- He thought the site may need more parking than provided in the concept plan.
- He likes the idea of possibly reorienting the assisted living building.
- He thought a school would create similar traffic problems to a church. He thought the concept plan would have less traffic than a school, so it may be a smart use of the space.
- He struggled with the height of the independent living building. It was not a breaking point for him, but he understood that is an issue for neighbors.
- He is thrilled that the existing facility may be repurposed.

Powers stated that:

- He likes the idea of following the theme of Hillcrest to assist seniors in need of something.
- He was confused on what to do with the site.
- He understood how expensive it would be to redevelop the property.
- The neighbors must be respected.
- He encouraged the applicant to continue with the proposal by submitting a formal application.

Henry stated that:

- He appreciates the speakers.
- He likes the concept plan's reuse of the existing building. He agreed that it would be a low-profile building.
- The photos of examples used for the assisted living building did it an injustice by showing high, gabled roofs. He would like to see what the applicant created in Champlin with flat roofs and a modern design. That could help ease some of the uncertainty of the neighbors.
- He agreed with changing the layout of the independent living building.
- The concept plan would be an appropriate use of the space and allow a transition for a person to move from a single-family house to independent living and then assisted living. This concept plan tries hard to be holistic in nature.
- He felt a three-story building would be too tall.
- This is the best use of the site in terms of the least amount of traffic it would generate.
- He encouraged the applicant to submit a formal application. The concept plan is on the right track.
- He encouraged the applicant to continue to work with neighbors.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- This is a hard site to develop.
- He would like to see the wing along the single-family homes side moved to where the community garden is located.
- He likes that the existing building would remain.
- Changes need to be made to the design of the independent living building so it would be less impactful on neighbors.
- He encouraged a lot of community engagement.
- The land use is appropriate.

This item is scheduled to be reviewed by the city council at its meeting on Nov. 28, 2022.

10. Adjournment

Powers moved, second by Waterman, to adjourn the meeting at 8 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

By:

Lois T. Mason
Planning Secretary