

**Minnetonka Planning Commission  
Minutes**

**May 4, 2022**

**1. Call to Order**

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

**2. Roll Call**

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

Staff members present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, City Planner Loren Gordon, Assistant City Planner Susan Thomas, Senior Planner Ashley Cauley, Planner Drew Ingalson and Natural Resources Sarah Middleton.

**3. Approval of Agenda:** The agenda was approved as submitted.

**4. Approval of Minutes:** April 20, 2023

***Banks moved, second by Henry, to approve the April 20, 2023 meeting minutes as submitted.***

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

**5. Report from Staff**

Gordon briefed the commission on land use applications considered by the city council at its meeting on May 1, 2023:

- Adopted an ordinance amending the city code regarding parking and loading requirements.
- Introduced an ordinance and referred it to the planning commission regarding items concerning Walser Kia at 15700 Wayzata Blvd.
- Introduced an ordinance and referred it to the planning commission regarding items concerning Ridgewood Ponds at 18116 Ridgewood Road and an adjacent unaddressed parcel.

The next planning commission meeting is scheduled to be held on May 18, 2023.

**6. Report from Planning Commission Members:** None

**7. Public Hearings: Consent Agenda**

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

*Hanson moved, second by Banks, to approve the items listed on the consent agenda as recommended in the respective staff reports as follows:*

- A. Expansion permits to increase the height of the existing house and to construct a garage addition at 6008 Eden Prairie Road.**

Adopt the resolution approving the request.

- B. Site and building plan review for a pre-manufactured building at 14901 Minnetonka Industrial Road.**

Adopt the resolution approving the final site and building plans for a satellite building at 14901 Minnetonka Industrial Road.

*Henry, Maxwell, Banks, Hanson and Sewall voted yes. Powers and Waterman were absent. The motion carried and the items on the consent agenda were approved as submitted.*

Chair Sewall stated that an appeal of the planning commission's decision must be made in writing to the planning division within ten days.

## **8. Public Hearings**

- A. Expansion permit for Glen Lake Elementary parking lot reconfiguration at 4801 Woodridge Road.**

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

Ingvalson reported. He recommended approval of the application based on the findings and subject to the conditions listed in the staff report.

Kevin Newman, facilities director of Hopkins Public Schools, applicant, stated that the proposal would complete a project that started in 2018. More parent input was collected when the project was developed in 2018. The proposal would improve pedestrian safety and clean up the area where vehicles and buses travel.

Henry thought the proposal would help alleviate safety concerns.

Banks confirmed with Neil Tessier, engineer for the applicant, that the divider between the parking areas would be grass.

The public hearing was opened.

Peter Harris, 4907 Covington Road West, stated that:

- The 2016 construction project was disruptive and noisy. The trucks beeped all the time.
- A lot of dust settled on the back of his house.
- The construction occurred in the evenings and on weekends.
- The drainage ditch was installed in 2016 and caused the current problem of backing the buses.
- The proposal would be disruptive to the neighborhood.
- The proposal would reduce the size of the main parking lot. He was concerned that there would not be enough parking stalls.
- He hoped the proposal would not be approved.
- He requested that construction be prohibited after 4 p.m. on weekdays and on weekends.

No additional testimony was submitted and the hearing was closed.

Ingvanson explained that the noise ordinance prohibits construction noise from occurring outside of the hours of 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. If those hours were reduced, then the construction project would last a longer period of time and add on additional time spent unloading and loading equipment. Wischnack encouraged the homeowner to discuss options with the applicant.

Mr. Tessier explained that construction would begin June 12, 2023 and would need to be completed by Labor Day weekend. He understands that the school is in a neighborhood. Measures would be taken to control dust and mitigate noise as much as possible.

In response to Maxwell's question, Mr. Newman explained that the number of parking stalls was increased in the front of the building during the first phase of the project. The site is required to have 80 parking stalls and it would have 117 parking stalls on site which would be more than adequate. There are three six-grade sections that will be leaving Glen Lake Elementary and moving to the middle school by the next school year. The number of teachers and staff will be reduced.

Mr. Tessier stated that the staff parking lot is half full during school days now. There are a few days a year for parent events when parking is full. Basketball courts, the playground and the bus-parking area are utilized for additional parking during those events.

Henry acknowledged that construction would be inconvenient for neighbors but saw the long-term good in the proposal. The proposal would increase safety for children and is part of a comprehensive parking rearrangement. He supports the proposal.

Maxwell supports the proposal. It would be an improvement in safety by creating better traffic flow. She appreciates that it would not just add an impervious surface but would add a stormwater management feature. She is glad that the sledding hill would be preserved.

Chair Sewall lived near Hopkins High School when the 10 acres of turf were installed, so he understands the inconvenience. The proposal's site would have adequate parking and the proposal would make the nonconforming parts of the site more in conformance with current ordinance requirements. He supports staff's recommendation.

***Banks moved, second by Henry, to adopt the resolution approving the site plan and expansion permit for Glen Lake Elementary at 4801 Woodridge Road.***

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

Chair Sewall stated that an appeal of the planning commission's decision must be made in writing to the planning division within ten days.

**B. Items concerning Greystar Development at 10701 Bren Road East.**

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

Gordon and Cauley reported. Staff recommended denial of the application based on the findings listed in the staff report.

Hanson confirmed with Cauley that there would be five surface-visitor-parking stalls and 33-dedicated-visitor-parking stalls in the enclosed parking structure. Hanson noted how enclosed visitor parking was not being utilized by visitors at another newly constructed apartment building.

In response to Chair Sewall's question, Wischnack stated that there are 8,627 rental units in Minnetonka. Of those, 3,290 of the rental units provide affordable housing. Of those, 930 of the affordable housing units are located in the Opus area.

Ned Dodington, representing Greystar Development, stated that:

- The applicant understands the concerns councilmembers and commissioners expressed regarding the mass and scale of the building, but in terms of meaningful feedback, the applicant has been more focused on more detail-level-oriented concerns. The applicant believes that the proposal would be appropriately scaled for the location, density and site and be similar to other locations in Minnetonka.
- Architectural modifications were made to decrease the appearance of the mass of the building; the length of the façade of the building would be less than many other buildings near Opus; and a pedestrian cut through the courtyard was added to allow more of a public feel and provide a connection to the trail and future southwest light rail transit (SWLRT).
- The applicant worked with staff and neighbors to address their concerns.

- The applicant believes all of the staff's concerns may be addressed except for those related to the tree ordinance and landscape valuation.
- The green wall is a viable option.
- The project is intended to be solar-ready and electric vehicle charging stations are planned to be located in the garage.
- The applicant is committed to creating a multi-family development of the highest quality.

Burt Coffin, ESG Architecture and Design, representing the applicant, stated that:

- He thanked staff for working with them.
- His architecture firm has partnered with Greystar to complete 2,000 residential housing units in the twin-cities area.
- Since the concept plan review, a break in the façade was added that provides an entrance to the building.
- Brick replaced the stucco on the first floor.
- The windows were made more regular and color palettes were adjusted.
- The building was moved back from the property line to create a more integrated west façade.
- The staff did a good job describing the proposal.
- The differences between the proposal and the shadows created by examples of buildings he provided are not that big.
- The scale of the proposed building is similar to Minnetonka Station and The Alcott.
- The proposal would have walk-up units, front porches and sidewalks.
- The proposal would be a harmonious addition to the community.
- The comprehensive guide plan supports growth in this location.
- Other buildings of this scale are being built in the immediate vicinity.
- He requested commissioners support the proposal.

Ryan Herm, the landscape architect for the proposal, gave a presentation and stated:

- The proposal would provide a connection to the trail system.
- Landscaping would include pollinator-friendly plantings, ornamental trees, shrubs and over-story trees.
- The courtyard would have a large green-open space, fire pits, a swimming pool and lounging areas.
- The site would maximize the use of perennials and ground cover that require less maintenance.
- Street trees were eliminated due to the city's snow removal policy.
- He reviewed the landscape plan that he believes complies with tree replacement requirements.

- The applicant is willing to add “expensive materials” to reach the landscape valuation requirement including a green wall that would grow along a trellis on the west side of the building.

Mr. Dodington stated that:

- The applicant requests that commissioners recommend approval of the proposal to the city council with conditions to meet the landscape valuation and tree preservation ordinance requirements and commit to creating a solar-ready product.
- The proposal would provide a public benefit by providing high-density-residential-multi-family housing; affordable housing; a cost-efficient-building type; an above-ground garage; a connection to the hiking trails on three sides; unique architectural designs on three sides; a water reuse irrigation system; and extensive landscaping.
- The applicant requested that commissioners find that the “landscape valuation and tree protection variances are not required because the plans illustrated tonight show that we believe that we can comply with the ordinances.”
- The applicant believes that this is the best product for Opus here today.

Hanson noted that a recently completed multi-family residential project has been receiving numerous complaints from neighbors due to visitors parking in the street rather than parking in ample visitor parking located in an enclosed structure. He asked how visitors would be prompted to utilize enclosed-guest-parking stalls. Mr. Coffin explained that signs would be used to help visitors locate guest parking. There would be five guest parking spaces outside and 33 guest parking stalls inside the parking structure. A visitor would pull up to the garage entrance and the door would open by the motion sensor to access 33 guest parking stalls. Another door would need to be accessed to reach the resident parking stalls.

Henry appreciated the applicant’s thoughtful presentation. Henry asked if there would be restricted access to the courtyard area. Mr. Dodington answered that there would be access-controlled entry points to the building and courtyard area.

Henry asked if the trees would grow to their full potential if they were in the shade. Mr. Dodington said that there would be ground underneath the courtyard that would allow the trees to be better than anything that has been done previously. Mr. Herm said that each tree species would grow and work for the space. Size, shade tolerance and soil capacity were studied at length. He was confident with the planting scheme.

Henry was concerned with the mass of the building. He suggested removing half of a story on the top row to add more light to the courtyard. Mr. Dodington said that reducing the mass of the building would cause either the height of the building to increase or a reduction in the number of units. The applicant chose a density appropriate to the site

and its location. Scale is dependent on the things around it. The proposal would be shorter than the Minnetonka Station project.

Henry likes the amount of landscaping around the building.

Banks appreciated the applicant's presentation. He liked how the concept plan feedback was incorporated into the current plan. Banks noted that the courtyard would be shaded from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Mr. Dodington explained that there would be light exposure along the walls of the courtyard at certain times of the day. Mr. Coffin explained that the courtyard would be 85 feet wide and almost twice that in length. The pool would be located in the sunniest location.

Banks asked how tall the trees located on the outside of the building would grow. Mr. Herm answered a maximum of 40 feet after 20 years. Part of the intent is to create a dappled-light effect. The plan shows the trees at their mature width.

In response to Banks' question, Mr. Herm stated that the building being setback 30 feet would allow 10 to 12 rows of perennials to be planted. The proposal would be most similar to the Bloomington Central Station project where the buildings are located closer to the street.

In response to Banks' questions, Mr. Dodington said that adding solar to a roof would be a new project for the applicant. It would create additional costs.

In response to Hanson's question, Brian Frank, with Sambatek, explained the rainwater irrigation tank system which would meet watershed requirements. Mr. Frank and Mr. Herm were confident the tanks and trees would have no trouble coexisting.

Chair Sewall acknowledged the site's lack of green space. One option would be to add vegetation on the roof of the residential building or the roof of the garage. It seems like that would be the only compromise short of redoing the entire plan. Mr. Dodington said that a green wall could "absolutely be put on the table." A green roof with a solar-ready infrastructure would be trickier. The applicant team is willing to engage in those strategies.

The public hearing was opened.

Troy Thelen, the current owner of 10701 Bren Road East, stated that:

- Two other developers gave up on developing the site. He commends Greystar for submitting ten revised plans.
- Size can be compromised and a balance can be found for everyone.
- The Wellington has no trees.
- He thought it would be awesome to look at the courtyard from an apartment.

- The SWLRT will be there eventually and help alleviate parking concerns by people riding the train. There is no space to park on Bren Road.
- He thinks it is in everyone's best interests to make something work.

No additional testimony was submitted and the hearing was closed.

Henry stated that:

- He was glad for the attention paid to the landscaping which adds to the sustainability and coziness of the project.
- The building has not changed its number of proposed units since the concept plan review.
- He wants the proposal to happen and Greystar has put a lot of thought into the proposal, but, as it is, he does not support the proposal because the building would be too massive.
- He hopes that a similar proposal will be submitted with a reduction in the mass of the building. He suggested removing the top level around the atrium to make it less massive and the courtyard to not appear to be a bottomless pit when viewed from the top.
- He likes most other aspects of the project.

Maxwell stated that:

- Overall, she likes the proposal. It has unique architecture. A lot of thought went into the flow of the building, the experience for residents and the landscape design.
- There is value in the affordable units being proposed.
- She likes that the proposal would have electric-vehicle chargers on each floor of parking.
- She wished there was more time to find a way to comply with the tree protection ordinance rather than starting from scratch.
- The mass of the building is a little big, but that would not be a deal breaker.
- She saw the main issue to be not meeting tree-ordinance requirements.

Hanson stated that:

- There is value in the applicant making an effort to revise and submit the plan multiple times.
- There is some frustration with the proposal being revised ten times, but each time it is submitted it still does not meet ordinance requirements.
- The 120-day deadline feels arbitrary.
- He understands that the developer feels that the proposal would be a good one and work for the market.
- He supports moving forward and would not deny the proposal.



- The developer should work toward maintaining green space and landscaping if that is the path to mitigate the tree ordinance requirements.

Banks stated that:

- He would like to have seen a reduction in the size of the building since the concept plan. The only compromise was made with the landscaping. He would like to see more added to the landscaping than just plants.
- The proposal is a great effort, but he would like to see more of a compromise to meet the minimum landscape requirements.
- He would not support the proposal because none of the revisions made changes to the building.
- He feels that the proposal is close and the building is gorgeous. He hopes the developer does not give up on the project, but he would like to see a reduction in the number of units and an increase in the amount of green space. The green space may be more important than making the roof solar ready.
- He hopes the project will work out.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- He was o.k. with the mass of the building.
- The location would be appropriate for more density.
- The parking variance is not a problem with appropriate signage and the process being made easier to access enclosed visitor parking.
- The green-space requirement needs to be honored.
- He believes that there is a compromise that could accommodate the green-space requirement.

***Henry moved, second by Banks, to recommend that the city council adopt the resolution denying the request.***

***Henry and Banks voted yes. Maxwell, Hanson and Sewall voted no. Powers and Waterman were absent. Motion failed.***

This item is scheduled to be reviewed by the city council at its meeting scheduled for May 22, 2023.

## **9. Other Business**

### **B. Concept plan review for Greco (Hillcrest Nursing Home site) at 15409 Wayzata Blvd.**

Gordon reported. Staff recommends that commissioners provide feedback on key topics identified by staff 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 Brandsted, president of Greco Properties, applicant, stated that:

- Neighbors expressed concerns with increased traffic, parking on the street and the height and density of the building.
- The applicant initially looked at saving the existing building which would house 100 to 120 units of assisted living and 70 to 80 units of independent living.
- The current concept plan moved the assisted living to a one-story building on the west side of the property and reduced the number of units to 40 or 50. The independent living building would have 120 units.
- He pointed out 54 surface parking stalls on the site plan near the independent-living building and 17-surface-parking stalls near the assisted-living building. Residents of assisted living typically do not drive. There would be a single level of underground parking with 176 stalls below the independent-living building.
- The traffic pattern encourages drivers to turn left instead of right into the neighborhood.
- The higher-density parking area traffic has been relocated further north on the site to avoid the neighborhood.
- By locating the independent building on the footprint of the old building, more trees and landscaping would be able to be preserved.
- Greco would be the owner and operator of the independent building and bring in an operator for the assisted-living building.

In response to Hanson's question, Mr. Brandsted explained that the independent-living building could easily be utilized for all-age residential housing in the future.

Hanson stated:

- He felt that the concept plan has merit to proceed.
- The use would fit in the proposed location.
- Constructing a new building would allow for more residential-looking architectural features.
- He likes the tiers of the independent-living building which make it feel more like a single-family residence.

Banks stated that:

- He agrees that the concept plan has merit to proceed.
- He appreciates how the applicant obtained feedback from neighbors and made changes to the concept plan to address the concerns.

- The roundabouts and green spaces throughout the parking area look symmetrical and artful.
- The traffic pattern through the parking area has been improved and is now easier for drivers to get in and out.
- A new building would allow more creativity with its appearance and the green space.
- There would be ample parking.
- He likes the thoughtfulness of the curved driveways to keep drivers from entering the neighborhood when exiting.

Henry stated that:

- He likes the transition from the previous concept plan to this one.
- He agrees that there is merit in proceeding.
- It is a very thoughtful proposal.
- The independent-living area would be secluded.
- Keeping the assisted-living building on one level would address the concerns of the neighborhood.
- He would miss the old building. It is beautiful and harmonious with the neighborhood.
- The concept plan would be the best use of the site.
- He would like a walk out and wall of windows to provide a seamless transition from inside to outside.
- He was comfortable with the number of parking spaces and building mass.
- He looks forward to reviewing a formal application.

Maxwell stated that:

- She agrees that there is merit for the concept plan to proceed to a formal review.
- She appreciates the changes done to the plan to improve the traffic flow and organize the buildings to minimize the impact of traffic on the neighbors.
- She likes the height of the buildings and would like the architecture to reflect a residential feel rather than a boxy-commercial-looking building.
- Utilizing the footprint of the existing building would save trees and green space.
- She suggested integrating the sidewalks and walking spaces to interact with the natural parts of the site.

Hanson supports maintaining the green space.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- He appreciates the applicant making changes in response to commissioners' comments and neighbors' concerns.
- There is merit to the plan.
- He is excited to see a similar use to what is there now.
- He likes the height of the buildings.
- He likes the parking areas and suggests providing way-finding signs for drivers to follow.
- He supports maintaining as much of a residential look and feel as possible. There is a nursing home on Hwy 7 which looks like a large, single-family residence.
- He suggested doing both phases at once to shorten the construction time if possible.
- The concept plan is a great step forward in the right direction.

**10. Adjournment**

***Hanson moved, second by Maxwell, to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.***

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Lois T. Mason  
Planning Secretary