

**Minnetonka Planning Commission
Minutes**

Jan. 4, 2024

1. Call to Order

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

2. Roll Call

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

Staff present: City Planner Loren Gordon and Assistant City Planner Susan Thomas.

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

4. Approval of Minutes: Dec. 14, 2023

Waterman moved, second by Banks, to approve the Dec. 14, 2023 meeting minutes as submitted.

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

5. Report from Staff

Gordon briefed the commission on land use applications considered by the city council at its meeting of Dec. 18, 2023:

- Approved a 12-month extension of approvals for Abdo Market House, a multi-family residential development, at 14317 Excelsior Blvd.
- Approved a 12-month extension of site and building plan approval for Bauer's Minnoco Custom Hitches and Auto Repair at 13118 Excelsior Blvd.
- Adopted a resolution approving items for construction of a new house at 2404 Bantas Point Road.
- Introduced an ordinance adopting a master development plan for redevelopment of the existing properties at 15407 and 15409 Wayzata Blvd.
- Adopted a resolution denying a conditional use permit for an accessory structure in excess of 1,000 square feet and 12 feet in height at 12620 Orchard Road.

6. Report from Planning Commission Members

Powers enjoyed visiting Ridgedale Commons Park.

7. Public Hearings: Consent Agenda

No item was removed from the consent agenda for discussion.

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

A. Conditional use permit with location variance for an educational use within an existing religious institution at 12007 Excelsior Blvd.

Recommend that the city council adopt the resolution approving a conditional use permit and variance for an educational use within an existing religious institution at 12007 Excelsior Blvd.

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

8. Public Hearings: None

9. Other Business

A. Concept plan for a residential care facility development at 12620 Minnetonka Blvd.

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

Gordon reported. Staff recommend commissioners provide comments and feedback to assist the applicant with future direction that may lead to the preparation of more detailed development plans.

Joshua Wert, owner and operator of English Rose, applicant, stated that:

- English Rose runs and operates care homes for those who need 24-hour care. There are five in Edina and one in Minnetonka.
- He met with the neighbors and gave them this presentation four weeks ago.
- The house locations were chosen to accommodate the floodplain.
- The houses would be beautiful.
- The neighbors of the existing English Rose homes love having them as a neighbor. The homes are well cared for and are beautiful on the inside and outside.
- He invited commissioners to visit the current locations.
- He provided renderings of the applicant's preferred home style.
- Caregivers are vetted and highly trained. The ratio of caregiver to resident is one caregiver to three residents.

- There will be a 70 percent increase in the number of Americans 65 years of age and older from 2020 to 2060. By 2060, one in four Americans will be 65 years of age or older.
- Dementia villages consisting of approximately 50 care homes are becoming popular in other countries. He feels that is the most humane form of dementia care.
- He would like to have a common building on the property for larger gatherings.
- The proposal would meet a community need for senior housing.
- There is nothing like the proposal anywhere in the United States.
- The applicant has over 25 years of experience operating quality care homes.
- The proposal would be better for the property than up to six, new, \$2-million houses.
- The proposal would have minimal impact on the environment. The houses would be built on a slab.
- He has met with neighbors and dealt with their concerns that include outdoor lighting.
- The site would remain as green as possible. All ordinance requirements would be met. The proposal would connect to existing trails and be inviting to the community. He was open to ideas on how to invite the community in.
- He wants to serve the Minnetonka community he was raised in.
- The houses would be made from quality materials and have an elevated design.
- The proposal would provide important caregiver jobs.
- People from other countries have visited English Rose to learn how they operate. He hopes to visit a dementia village in another country when he gets closer to having the opportunity to create one and have them provide comments when he has prepared a plan.

Powers confirmed with Mr. Wert that he has met with specialists to discover the best lighting and acoustic features for those with dementia that may be included in the proposed care homes. His standards would exceed those required by the Minnesota Department of Health.

In response to Banks' questions, Mr. Wert answered that:

- The proposed houses would be about 3,000-square feet in size and one level.
- The goal would be to have nine bedrooms for nine residents.
- Two staff for six residents or three staff for nine residents would be on site at all times, but would not live there.
- Two residents who share a room would still count separately in the resident total.
- Dementia residents do not drive.

- He is civic minded and open to utilizing “the barn” to benefit the community as much as city staff feel that it would be beneficial.
- He wants the city to be proud to have these care homes.

Maxwell confirmed with Mr. Wert that the current English Rose care homes were made from existing homes. Mr. Wert explained that the new standards adopted by the Minnesota Department of Health created the unintended consequence of making it unattainable to retrofit an existing house to become a licensed, dementia-care home. The proposal would be the first newly-constructed-single-family-dementia-care homes licensed by the Minnesota Department of Health.

In response to Waterman’s question, Mr. Wert explained that dementia patients do not spend a lot of time outside and are accompanied by staff when they are outside. He wants as much integration with the public as possible. The residents would always be supervised.

Henry noted that neighbors expressed a preference for the proposed houses to look different from each other. Mr. Wert stated that he is leaning toward four houses with unique exteriors that would feel like a regular neighborhood. English Rose started its first dementia-care home in 1997 and has been providing in-home care for 10 years. The neighbors prefer the houses to be located where they are shown in the concept plan.

Henry suggested having jobs for the dementia patients to perform like serving refreshments to the public in the barn. Mr. Wert likes that idea. He agrees that it would be positive for the dementia patients. In the Netherlands, there are dementia farms with a barn in the middle and care homes on the outside. Dementia patients do farming, provide child care and take care of the animals with supervision.

In response to Hanson’s questions, Mr. Wert explained that he prefers to keep the residences all one level if possible.

Mr. Wert confirmed that the dementia-care homes would be private pay. The reason dementia villages work in other countries is due to universal healthcare. Public health care in the United States averages one caregiver to 18 residents at care facilities. The only way to keep the ratio of one caregiver to three dementia patients and the number of residents low enough to live in a residence is with private pay. He is proud of how English Rose serves a unique portion of the population and how the caregivers are given stability and support as well as financial compensation.

Hanson supports the site being used for dementia-residential care. Mr. Wert confirmed that the houses would be regular, single-family houses with kitchens.

Chair Sewall invited anyone to comment. No one chose to speak. The public comment portion of the meeting was closed.

Hanson stated that:

- He supports rezoning the property for the proposed dementia-care homes.
- He would be comfortable if the residences would have second stories.
- He looks forward to learning more information to determine the amount of needed parking. Deliveries may create additional traffic.
- He would prefer the houses to have a similar feel, but have different exterior characteristics from each other.
- He would like a sign to identify the trail for the public.
- The proposal would be an appropriate use for the site.

Henry stated that:

- He appreciates the thoughtful presentation.
- He sees the benefit of the property becoming a park, but he leaves that to the city and the landowner to come to an agreement. If the property would not be able to be a park, then he would support the proposed concept plan to provide memory-care homes.
- The site would provide the opportunity for memory-care patients to interact with the community. He sees the public benefit of having a memory-care facility located between two parks. It would provide an opportunity to educate the community.
- He suggested holding events such as a pet adoption.
- He trusts staff and the applicant to work together to create a site plan that would meet ordinance requirements and protect the environment.
- He suggested the bike path be lighted at night.
- He looks forward to learning how many residences could fit on the property if an application is reviewed by commissioners. He hopes the applicant moves forward with an application.
- He supports making the exterior of each house unique.
- The number of houses seems appropriate. He likes the idea of memory-care villages.
- The best use for the site would be a park, but, if that is not possible, then the second best use would be the proposed concept plan which would be a really good use of the property.

Powers stated that:

- He struggled with a site zoned R-1 being developed for a private-pay use.
- He suggested the applicant meet with specialists to learn how to best customize the new care homes for dementia patients.

Banks stated that:

- He appreciated the presentation.
- The concept plan looks and sounds great.
- He supports including affordable housing if that would be possible.

- He was concerned with having enough parking to deal with deliveries and visitors accessing Minnetonka Blvd.
- He was concerned with the residents being safe from outside threats.
- The English Rose care home currently operating in Minnetonka is great.
- He would like each care home to look slightly different from each other.
- He looks forward to seeing the details provided in an application.

Henry suggested making the proposed care homes carbon neutral and educating the public on how to make a house more energy efficient.

Waterman stated that:

- Providing dementia care in a residence is a good thing.
- He appreciates the neighborhood input on the design of the exterior of the homes.
- He likes the single-level houses, but that is not essential.
- The trail cutting through the property would provide a certain amount of public benefit.
- He struggled with rezoning the site since the surrounding uses are park land and the comprehensive guide plan guided the property for park land, but weighed that against the property owner's right to do something with the property. The best use of the site would be a park.
- He would like the trail located further away from the care homes.
- He anticipates that the concept plan would have a challenge meeting ordinance requirements.
- He understands the applicant's enthusiasm for an available, larger property in Minnetonka.
- He likes the concept.

Maxwell stated that:

- Park land would make the best use of the site and the concept plan would be the second best use of the property.
- The property currently has one residence. It would make sense to have a residence on the site. The proposal would be a significant increase in density and increase in the amount of impervious surface located within close proximity to the creek.
- The amount of parking surfaces may need to be higher which would require more impervious surface.
- She suggested the applicant work with Minnehaha Creek Watershed District staff earlier rather than later.
- The trail connection would be a unique opportunity to make the trail more continuous with a single owner of the property rather than an R-1 subdivision with different property owners that could make the trail disjointed.


- She felt the trail would make more sense on the north side to allow users to avoid crossing the driveway access.
- She does not see an increased safety risk to someone inside a house from a pedestrian or bicyclist traveling on a trail compared to one traveling on a street or sidewalk.
- The trail would provide a public good.
- The city council and economic development authority commission have jurisdiction to determine if an application would be considered multi-family housing and the feasibility of requiring the project to include affordable units.

Chair Sewall stated that:

- He likes the concept plan.
- R-1 zoning makes no sense for the property.
- The proposal would be a great way to tie in more of the community.
- He was not sure if the concept plan would meet ordinance requirements. He recommends that the applicant work with staff once the applicant receives feedback from an engineer.
- He looks forward to reviewing details related to the traffic flow of vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists on the site and parking.
- He likes the idea of a “barn” or gazebo being centrally located and providing a location to have interactions with the public, but it may be challenging if it would cause parking and traffic congestion issues.
- This proposal is much better than other uses that could be located on the property.
- He looks forward to seeing a formal application and wished the applicant luck.

10. Adjournment

Waterman moved, second by Banks, to adjourn the meeting at 8:13 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

By: 
Lois T. Mason
Planning Secretary