

**Minnnetonka Planning Commission  
Minutes**

**October 12, 2017**

**1. Call to Order**

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

**2. Roll Call**

Commissioners Powers, Schack, Sewall, Calvert, Knight, and Kirk were present. O'Connell was absent.

Staff members present: Community Development Director Julie Wischnack, Assistant City Planner Susan Thomas, Senior Planner Ashley Cauley, Planner Drew Ingvalson, and Assistant Fire Chief Jim Flanders.

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

**4. Approval of Minutes:** September 20, 2017

***Sewall moved, second by Calvert, to approve the September 20, 2017 meeting minutes as submitted.***

***Powers, Schack, Sewall, Calvert, Knight, and Kirk voted yes. O'Connell was absent. Motion carried.***

**5. Report from Staff**

Wischnack briefed the commission on land use applications considered by the city council and comprehensive guide plan committee:

- Adopted a resolution approving the Shady Oak redevelopment project.
- Adopted a resolution approving items for a religious institution in an industrial park.
- Adopted a resolution approving items for Fretham's 18<sup>th</sup> Addition on Lake Street Extension.
- The comprehensive guide plan committee meeting focused on transportation. The next meeting will focus on natural resources.

**6. Report from Planning Commission Members**

Schack attended the comprehensive guide plan steering committee meeting with Chair Kirk and Calvert. Biking, walking, and aviation were included in the transportation discussion. She encouraged the public to attend the meetings. Calvert and Chair Kirk agreed. The next meeting is November 15, 2017.

Sewall thanked staff for hosting a great open house. He encouraged the public to attend next year.

**7. Public Hearings: Consent Agenda: None**

**8. Public Hearings**

**A. Locational and screening variances for a weather station at 10500 Cedar Lake Road.**

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

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

Hennepin County Emergency Management Director Eric Waage explained the public warning system. The proposal would help protect lives, property, and be more accurate. He appreciates the support from city and school district staff.

John Wetter, Hopkins School District Technology Services Manager, stated that students would benefit from having a real-world experience with weather. Student safety during heat and cold weather would be evaluated.

Mr. Waage stated that the data would be immediately available to the local area. The proposal would be the best site. Data collected would include wind direction and speed, atmospheric pressure, rainfall, lightning detection, freezing rain, and soil. The Minnehaha Watershed District is interested in the rainfall and soil data to help them be more accurate when determining when to release water at Gray's Bay Dam and provide flood control. Airport data can be an hour old.

Powers asked if the tower could be expanded and used for additional equipment in the future. Mr. Waage stated that sensors could be added, but not height because the World Meteorological Organization sets the standard for wind measurements at 30 feet. Temperature censures are also required to be taken at the proposed height.

Calvert noted that students would be able to view the data. Mr. Wetter stated that all of the data would be provided on the website *West Hennepin Mesonet*.

Knight asked if a small fence would be adequate. Mr. Wetter stated that he hoped by getting students involved in collecting data and learning its purpose that the equipment would stay in good working order.

Knight asked if a free-standing structure would be better than a guide-wire structure. Mr. Waage stated that the vendor uses the guide-wire structure and it is rated to withstand 100 mile-per-hour winds.

Knight asked if the structure would impact the school's future plans for the area. Mr. Wetter explained the location selection process. He hopes to obtain data related to heat stress on turf. The proposal would not limit future expansions.

Calvert thought that a low fence might not protect the equipment from balls being used on nearby fields. Mr. Wetter said that the positioning should prevent that from happening.

Sewall asked if the equipment would emit light or sound. Mr. Waage answered in the negative. It would be solar and battery powered. The only thing that would click would be the electro-magnetic field to detect lightning. He has an agreement with Twin Cities Public Television. It would broadcast all of the weather data on channel 2.5.

Chair Kirk asked how close landscaping could be located to the equipment. Mr. Waage stated that the fence line is 40 feet by 40 feet. He would like to have a clear zone of 100 feet.

Schack asked where similar stations are located in Hennepin County. Mr. Waage stated that the west half of the county is covered. There is one at the airport. The first ring suburbs still need coverage. There are 12 right now and he hopes to add 3 before winter. Approximately 30 stations are needed to cover all of Hennepin County.

The public hearing was opened.

Donna Anderson, resident of Cedar Ridge Condominiums, stated that her initial reaction was that it would be a horrible eye sore because of its height. She was concerned with student safety and the school district's ability to expand in the future. She questioned if the radio waves would effect a person's body. She suggested a site near Lindbergh.

No additional testimony was submitted and the hearing was closed.

Mr. Waage stated that people in emergency management think that the towers are beautiful because they provide information to keep people safe. The standard has been a six-foot fence. That could be reassessed. The school and local law enforcement have taken security into account. There are two different types of bases. A big steel base plate would be used for this one. It would not move until Hennepin County would move it and then it would be hard to tell it ever existed on the site. The proposal does not use radar. It would use a cell phone transmitter that would eventually change to something similar to a hand-held law enforcement radio. There would be no radiation.

Chair Kirk stated that commissioners support a fence. He felt six feet in height would be adequate. A chain-link fence with smaller footholds would help discourage it from being climbed. He thought the equipment would be safer because it would be out in the open. He suggested adding vegetation on Lindbergh Drive to break up the view from Birch View Lane.

Calvert thought that the tower would be beautiful because it would help keep residents safe. The cost benefit would outweigh the aesthetic detraction.

Schack recalled neighbors who voiced opposition to adding anything else to the campus, but the proposal has such protection-of-life value plus the added educational component that it makes sense.

Sewall appreciated that it could be removed with minimal impact to the site. A few years down the road technology could change and make the tower obsolete. The weather safety factor would help protect student athletes more than the potential of students being injured from climbing the fence.

Powers supports educational tools. Not everything has to be beautiful or buffered. It would be an information gathering tool to make all residents safer. He saw no issue except making sure that school staff on site would have a key to retrieve a ball when needed. He is completely in favor of the proposal.

Calvert appreciates the educational aspect. Chair Kirk agreed.

***Knight moved, second by Schack, to adopt the resolution approving the locational and screening variances for a weather station at 10500 Cedar Lake Road.***

***Powers, Schack, Sewall, Calvert, Knight, and Kirk voted yes. O'Connell was absent. Motion carried.***

Chair Kirk stated that an appeal of the planning commission's decision must be made in writing to the planning division within 10 days.

**B. Conditional use permit with a variance for an outdoor seating area at 15200 State Highway 7.**

Chair Kirk 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.

In response to Knight's question, Ingvalson stated that the house is an additional 35 feet from the property line, so the proposed outdoor seating area would be over 200 feet from the house.

Katie Elmer, one of the owners, and Jennifer Kaufmann, operations supervisor, introduced themselves and were present to answer questions.

Calvert asked how many parking spaces would be removed. Ms. Elmer stated that no customer parking stalls would be removed.

Chair Kirk asked if names would be called on the patio. Ms. Kaufmann answered in the negative. Pagers are now used instead.

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

***Sewall moved, second by Powers, to recommend that the city council adopt the resolution approving a conditional use permit with a variance for an outdoor eating area at 15200 State Highway 7.***

***Powers, Schack, Sewall, Calvert, Knight, and Kirk voted yes. O'Connell was absent. Motion carried.***

**9. Other Business**

**A. Concept plan review for iFLY at 12415 Wayzata Boulevard.**

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

Cauley reported. She recommended commissioners provide their reaction and general comments related to building scale, building design, and appropriateness of the use of the site.

Patrick Framel, Sky Group Investments, LLC., and Mark Lee, real estate and development director for North American iFLY, representing the applicant, introduced themselves. Mr. Framel provided illustrations of the proposed unique structure and a video. Mr. Framel stated that their mission is to make the dream of flight a reality. Ages 3 to 103 years are eligible to participate. The company has safely flown over 7 million people in 15 countries since 1998. The environment is completely controlled. There is no noise outside of the facility. The company is one of the largest providers of STEM education. The company provides community impact programs. The shape of the building is driven by the mechanics. Adjustments have been made to match the color scheme mandated by GGP's design criteria that was approved by the city. The sign would be modified to integrate with the surrounding buildings. This is not the application phase. He would appreciate feedback.

Powers asked how many sites have failed. Mr. Framel said zero. The company has opened 66 facilities since 1998 and all are still operating.

Schack asked if food or beverages would be provided. Mr. Framel stated that birthday parties or corporate events may be catered. Vending machines are available for beverages. There would be a large berm between the rear of the building and Interstate 394. There would be an air conditioning unit outside, but no other noise would be heard outside. It would be similar in height to a five-story apartment building.

Powers asked why this would be the best site. Mr. Framel answered that this area is already dynamic and draws people from the region. He likes the family focus. Most of the other facilities are on pads in mall parking lots. The typical experience lasts an hour or an hour and fifteen minutes with actual flight time of a couple minutes. The price is typically \$50, but varies depending on the time of year.

Powers asked if the use would have back-up power in case of a power outage. Mr. Framel answered in the negative. The engine would not come to a complete stop if it failed. The fans would continue to move air and slow down gradually. A tremendous amount of testing has been done.

Mr. Framel stated that the sign plans have not been finalized.

Chair Kirk invited audience members to provide comments.

Ryan Smith, Minneapolis resident, stated that he has visited several iFLY locations. He is very excited. The building looks weird on paper, but it looks great in person. He prefers the big sign that would be legible from the interstate. It would bring patrons to the mall.

Knight liked that the building would be see-through. It would not be as noticeable. He suggested an exterior color that would blend in with the background, but did not object to the building's appearance. He liked the logo of a person flying. He noted that the "Macy's" sign is not visible from the interstate until the driver is passing the site.

Schack noted that the city council approved a 42-foot sign for Total Wine. The concept plan's sign is 56-feet tall.

Calvert thought that the logo looks neat, but the sign would look too much like a billboard. It would not be in compliance with the sign ordinance. She thought the building would provide a good transition to add more mass to the area. The use would fit the area, but the proposed logo would be too big. She would like materials used to make it blend in.

Powers disagreed. The sign should be bright, attractive, and inviting. The future of Minnetonka is density and mass. This would lead the Ridgedale area. He did not want it to blend in to the extent that Knight mentioned, but he does not want it to be an eye sore.

Chair Kirk suggested the applicant work with the sign ordinance to brand the building. He supports the proposed concept.

Sewall was confident a compromise could be made for the signs. He would have the "indoor skydiving" face Interstate 394. The use would fit the area similar to a movie theater. He liked the unique look and being able to look through the building would be an asset. It would be large, but the interstate would be elevated and there are no residential areas real close without buffering. He was glad there would be no exterior noise. It looks great.

Chair Kirk likes the STEM educational component of the use. He hoped economical packages would be provided for groups of students.

Schack supports the proposal. It would be great to have a unique attraction. It would be an asset to the city and Ridgedale Center. It is a great family opportunity. The height looks different, but she recognized other uses that have been allowed to have signs larger than allowed by the sign ordinance.

Chair Kirk realized that the proposed building would highlight the area and surrounding businesses. He was comfortable with the scale. The use would be brilliant.

Sewall suggested that General Growth Properties update a plan for the future.

Chair Kirk and Wischnack discussed the master development plan for the Ridgedale area.

## 10. Adjournment

***Calvert moved, second by Schack, to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m.  
Motion carried unanimously.***

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