

MEETING MINUTES

Birchwood Planning Commission Regular Meeting

City Hall - 7:00 PM Regular Meeting 8/27/2026

Submitted by Michael Kraemer – secretary

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: – Andy Sorenson - Chairman, Michael Kraemer, Casey Muhm, Michael McKenzie, Michelle Maiers-Atakpu

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: City Mayor – Jennifer Arsenant, Ryan Hankins – Council Member, Mary and Brad Hapka (135 Wildwood), Amy and Darren DeYoung (309 Wildwood), Paul Edwards (neighbor to 321 Wildwood)

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman - Sorenson call meeting to order at 7:01 PM.
2. PUBLIC FORUM
 - a. None
3. Approve Minutes from 6/3/2026 Planning Commission meeting.
 - a. Motion by Muhm to approve minutes with typo correction, McKenzie 2nd. Yes – 5, No – 0. Motion to approve passed.
4. REGULAR AGENDA
 - a. Item 1.A – 135 Wildwood Ave. (Hapka – Garage Setback Variance)
 - i. Introduction of application was presented by property owners Brad and Mary Hapka.
 - ii. Staff memo from City Planner Ben Wikstrom was included in packets. The application narrative identified variance requests for street and side yard setback for new larger garage and preliminary discussion of future impervious surface variance consideration once the garage variance requests were resolved. Planning staff report did not include recommendations only pro and con talking points on the setback variances. **Based on City Planner Wikstrom’s indication that the impervious surface variance request had not been fully vetted by the applicant and staff, the Planning Commission focused on just the street and side yard setback variances.**
 - iii. At 7:09 PM Chairman Sorenson opened the meeting to public hearing on the proposed street and side yard setback variance application and invited anyone present who wanted to speak to the topic. With no requests to speak the public hearing on the application was closed at 7:11 PM.
 - iv. Commission talking points included the following:

1. The existing garage is in need of replacement and could be replaced in-kind in the current location without the need for variance.
 2. City code suggests 30' foot setback from street right-of-way and 10' from side yard property line.
 3. Current garage locations is 10'-12' from street right-of-way and approximately 2' from south property line.
 4. Grade difference between lots along south property line may require the south wall of the garage to serve as a retaining wall.
 5. Current garage is approximately 29' – 30' from street side of house and could afford movement of garage toward the house to achieve a 20' street ROW setback for vehicle parking.
 6. Moving the proposed garage toward the house would shrink the current yard space.
 7. Achieving a 20' setback from the face of the garage to the street right-of-way by a new or replacement garage may be a reasonable compromise. It would accommodate the object of the code for off street parking and vehicle movement safety while preserving as much yard as practical.
 8. Future Actions: A thorough "impervious surface" analysis and discussion was not addressed by the Planning Commission. Expanding the garage size and additional site changes may trigger need for additional analysis and may even require a variance.
- v. Recommend Approval with Findings and Conditions or Denial with findings.
1. Advisory Motion by Sorenson, 2nd by Maiers-Atakpu : The City Council consider denying the "street setback variance". Advisory vote: Yes – 4, No – 1.
 2. Advisory Motion by Kraemer, 2nd by Muhm: The City Council consider approving the "sideyard setback variance" to provide options for garage upgrade and addressing the current grade differential with the lot to the south. Advisory vote: Yes – 5, No – 0. Motion passed
- b. Item 1.B – 315 Wildwood Ave (Holka – New Home Height Variance)**
- i.* City Planner Wikstrom provided a memo in the Planning Commission's packets addressing the proposed concept building plans and issues surrounding the Height Variance issue.
 1. City Planner Wikstrom's memo included the following discussion points:
 - a. *"...the proposed house can be seen as meeting the general intent of the ordinance (average height) is well below the*

maximum allowed, and tallest point is a minimal part of the structure as viewed from the lake side), and generally in harmony with the comprehensive plan (single family home which happens to be proposed on a narrow, sloped, buildable lake lot).

ii. Planning Commission Discussion

1. Planning Commission discussion acknowledged the following:

- a. The pre-existing lot is long and narrow with challenging topography changes across the site.
- b. This lot's topography creates unique site development challenges contributing to the practical difficulty of the site. (I.e. The lot has a high elevation in the center one-third of the lot and then severely drops in elevation in both the front (street side) and back (lake side) yards.)
- c. Despite design efforts identified in the concept plans using flatter roof slopes, minimal ceiling heights on each floor, minimal truss depths, and cascading roof lines to mimic the site topography, the severe elevation changes in the lot tends to expose the front (38') and back (39) ends of the house structure, exceeding the City Code max height (35).
- d. The Planning Commission discussion acknowledged City Planner's previous recommendation for need of compliance with all City Codes including but not limited to:
 - i.** Retaining walls design
 - ii.** Bulk stormwater management and impervious surface thresholds.

iii. Recommend Approval with Findings and Conditions or Denial with findings.

- 1.** Advisory Motion by Kraemer, 2nd by Muhm: The City Council consider approving the variance to the "height limitation" of 35' specific this lot and the proposed structure design as a reasonable solution to the practical difficulty of this site. Advisory vote: Yes – 5, No – 0. Motion passed.

c. Item 2 - Review and Consider Revisions to Code 300.020, 301.070, 301.080, 302.055, 306.030 (Zoning)

- i.** Action taken: Withdrawn and tabled until the next meeting, to allow Commission time to review.

d. Item 3 - Review and Consider Additional Height Clarification for Code 302.045

- i.** Action taken: Withdrawn and tabled until the next meeting, to allow Commission time to review.

ADJOURN 8:37 PM

- e. Motion by Maiers-Atakpu, 2nd by Sorenson to adjourn meeting. Vote: Yes - 5, No – 0. Motion passed.