



Planning Commission

Regular Meeting

~ Minutes ~

1408 Lake Street South
Forest Lake, MN 55025
www.ci.forest-lake.mn.us

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

6:00 PM

City Center - Council Chamber

[City of Forest Lake - Livestream and Recorded Meetings](#)

1. Call to Order

The Meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Paul Girard	Commission Chair	Present	
Susan Young	Commission Vice-Chair	Present	
Andy Aplikowski	Planning Commissioner	Absent	
Don Stehler	Planning Commissioner	Present	
Martin Huemann	Planning Commissioner	Absent	
Jesse Wagner	Planning Commissioner	Present	
Tim Stender	Planning Commissioner	Absent	

3. Pledge of Allegiance

4. Approve the Agenda

No comments on the Agenda.

Motion: Commissioner Young made a Motion to Approve the Agenda as presented.

Motion seconded by Commissioner Wganer. Motion carried 4-0.

5. Open Forum – Citizen Petitions, Requests, and Concerns

The Open Forum is available for residents to express personal opinions for any item of business.

Please limit your comments to three (3) minutes.

6. Consent Agenda Considerations (Action Items)*

a. Approve Planning Commission Meeting Minutes from December 10, 2025

No comments on the Consent Agenda.

Motion: Commissioner Wagner made a Motion to Approve Consent Agenda Item 6.a.

Motion seconded by Commissioner Young. Motion carried 3-0-1 (Stehler abstained).

7. Regular Agenda (Action Items)

a. Public Hearing: Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment to establish a buffer between properties approved for cannabis use and residential properties. (Case File No. PZ25-1396)



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Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore reviewed the purpose of the text amendment to clarify how residential distance requirements apply to cannabis businesses operating under a State of Minnesota Microbusiness license. He noted that the City Council acknowledged that the 250-foot separation standard was intended to apply to higher-impact activities rather than just retail cannabis sales.

Commissioner Young said if a business that had a license to do everything claimed to want to just do retail, their State of Minnesota license allows them to do cultivation. She said that the State license would allow them primacy to do the activities, rather than what the City understood as the use. She asked how they would avoid the situation. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore answered that one of the conditions tied to the Conditional Use Permit was that the business would do retail only. He said that the ordinance language was reviewed by the City attorney.

Community Development Director Wittman said that a vast majority of the licenses in the State are not just retail licenses but are some sort of micro or mezzo business with a retail endorsement.

Commissioner Young said a resident asked her the question. She said they would just get a retail license. Community Development Director Wittman answered that a retail license was limited to the number of social equity applications received, so the workaround was for the State to allow retail endorsements on the other type of license.

Chair Girard asked where they tie together, which type of business goes with what type of area. Community Development Director Wittman responded that when they originally drafted the cannabis ordinance, it was drafted with the intent that the type of use be associated with the type of zones rather than licenses, since license types could change over time.

Commissioner Young clarified that they still had the distance regulations from daycares and schools. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore confirmed this information.

Public Hearing was opened at 6:16 p.m.

No comments.

Public Hearing was closed at 6:17 p.m.

Motion: Chair Girard made a Motion to recommend Approval of the amendment to Section 153.092 (UU) of the City Code, finding that the amendment implements City Council direction; maintains protections for residential areas; and provides clear, enforceable, activity-based zoning standards. Motion seconded by Commissioner Stehler. Motion carried 3-1 (Young voted against).



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Chair Girard noted that this item will go before the City Council for final action.

8. Discussion

a. BOOST Initiative – Code Update Discussion

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore presented an overview of the BOOST Initiative, an effort to improve clarity, predictability, and efficiency in the application of the City’s zoning code. He explained that the City’s current code structure lags behind ten identified peer cities and can result in uncertainty regarding review authority and process.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore outlined potential directions under consideration, including:

- Creation of a new Chapter 150 to consolidate administration, definitions, common procedures and requirements;
- Clarification of review roles between staff and the Planning Commission; and
- Establishment of clearer definitions for major versus minor amendments.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore stated that staff believes it is in the best interest of the public for all proposed code updates to be reviewed as a complete package, with a formal public hearing held at the end of the process once the full set of proposed changes is presented.

Commissioner Stehler stated that the proposed direction made sense and asked whether staff intended to use artificial intelligence (AI) as part of the process.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore responded that AI would be used as an initial research and comparison tool only, and that staff would ensure all resulting language aligns with City intent and policy direction.

Commissioner Stehler expressed that the goal should be for the zoning code to clearly and correctly answer questions posed by applicants and the public. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore agreed and noted that clearer code language would also help reduce staff workload.

Commissioner Young expressed concern about AI using information from global sources. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore clarified that staff limited AI inputs to the zoning codes of the ten peer cities to compare how similar issues are addressed regionally.

Community Development Director Wittman added that staff is testing AI inputs cautiously and emphasized that maintaining the integrity of existing laws and ensuring modern, regionally appropriate language is a priority.

Chair Girard suggested that staff track administrative decisions over time.



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Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore stated that staff is absolutely willing to provide record of decisions made administratively on a regular basis during Planning Commission meetings, likely within the updates portion of the agenda.

Commissioner Young asked how many applications had been delayed due to administrative review and noted that several Planning Commission meetings have been canceled over the past two years. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore responded that the BOOST Initiative is intended to clarify and codify existing practices that are already implied in the zoning code but not explicitly stated, in order to establish clearer guardrails around what decisions staff may make administratively, rather than to expand or create new administrative authority.

Community Development Director Wittman read from the site plan approval section of the zoning code and noted that some provisions suggest projects “residing” on a site should come to the Planning Commission, even when such review is not customary in cities with codified design standards. She provided additional examples, including parking lot repaving, which represents maintenance rather than a change or expansion of use.

Commissioner Young stated that when considering variances, the Commission looks for improvements and asked whether updated parking standards would be applied administratively.

Community Development Director Wittman responded that review would depend on project scale, distinguishing between significant changes and minor maintenance.

Chair Girard stated that if the use has not changed, he does not need to see the project.

Community Development Director Wittman noted that the City has codified design guidelines for commercial and non-residential uses.

Commissioner Young commented that specific design standards often result in positive outcomes.

Community Development Director Wittman clarified that design standards are not part of the BOOST Initiative, but suggested that a future discussion on community design and aesthetics may be beneficial.

Commissioner Young asked how staff intends to define “minor” changes.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore stated that staff would bring examples of minor and major changes to a future meeting for Commission feedback. He emphasized that no code amendments would be adopted until the end of the process, following public hearings.

Commissioner Wagner commented that graphical representations may be clearer than written text.



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Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore discussed two additional directions under consideration as part of the BOOST Initiative.

Chair Girard clarified that staff would provide examples for all three directions, particularly those proposed to be addressed within Chapter 150.

Commissioner Young reiterated the need for clear, concrete examples.

Chair Girard suggested a technical review process that would allow the Commission to see staff decisions.

Commissioner Young expressed concern that while staff discussed addressing items in sections, the public would not have an opportunity to comment until the final meeting. She suggested breaking the work into chunks rather than a full rewrite.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore responded that a piecemeal approach would be difficult to implement and stated that Chapter 150 would serve as the first step, followed by complete, cohesive sections.

Chair Girard commented that most residents would not engage unless changes directly affect them.

Commissioner Young stated that the Planning Commission is not a policy-making body and asked whether the City Council would be concerned about the Commission addressing policy issues.

Wittman responded that the City Council is seeking policy direction from the Planning Commission on zoning matters.

Chair Girard requested additional time for Planning Commission members to review materials prior to meetings.

Wittman stated that staff could aim to distribute materials by end-of-day Wednesday, noting that initial drafts would focus on concepts rather than finalized ordinance language. She added that any proposed code language would require consultation with the City Attorney.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore concluded by noting that the BOOST Initiative has required significant effort and emphasized staff's desire to work closely with the Planning Commission throughout the process.

9. Updates

Councilmember Larson said that they reviewed the Cell Tower at Hosanna Church.

Community Development Director Wittman explained that it was the text amendment.



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Councilmember Larson said that they tabled the matter and hoped to add more design standards to the ordinance.

Chair Girard asked if it would come before the Planning Commission again. Community Development Director Wittman said that it would go back to the City Council.

Councilmember Larson thanked Commissioner Huemann for his service on the Planning Commission. He noted that they had a person of interest from the Economic Development Authority who would like to join the Planning Commission, so they will complete a review.

Commissioner Young asked for information about the City Council and Economic Development Authority regarding downtown development. Councilmember Larson answered that the proposal for a structure that would have apartments, condos, an event center, retail, a restaurant, and a hotel. He said that the design needed tweaking, but they provided initial feedback.

Chair Girard asked if they clearly identified the public parking. Community Development Director Wittman said that they did not do a deep dive into zoning, but the developer was trying to build in public parking in the site development.

Commissioner Young discussed maintaining a sense of Forest Lake with the trees. She said that the building was not the vision that was discussed and presented in the new downtown concept.

Councilmember Larson stated that the developer was seeking feedback on the initial proposal, but it is still a concept.

Community Development Director Wittman commented that the Metropolitan Transportation Organization was starting a door-to-door, on-demand bus service in Forest Lake on a limited basis. She clarified that it was available at a centralized location in Forest Lake. She said that they had transportation services that would go to the hospital in Wyoming. She stated that all four cities received approval to enter into a cooperative partnership to discuss the Elmcrest Avenue Corridor. She noted that the code enforcement position hours increased to 32 hours, which enabled a quicker response.

Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore said that Tim's Marina released an environmental assessment worksheet and would be open for thirty days for public comment.

Commissioner Young asked if they were considering a more stable parking surface. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore said it was not a part of the assessment.

Chair Girard asked about how to access the assessment. Assistant Community Development Director Gilmore said that they would make sure the links were working properly.



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Chair Girard thanked Commissioner Huemann for his service.

10. Adjourn

Motion: Commissioner Stehler made a Motion to Adjourn the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

Motion seconded by Commissioner Wagner. Motion carried 4-0.