City of Ashland – Plan Commission Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Plan Commission was held on **Tuesday, April 22, 2025** at **6:30 PM** in the City Hall Council Chambers (601 Main St W).

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Mackenzie called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and a quorum was declared present.

2. Approval of Agenda

Ms. Gregor moved to approve the agenda as proposed and Jeff Beirl seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

3. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of Minutes from the March 18th, and April 1st, 2025 Plan Commission Meetings

Mr. Eades moved to approve the minutes. Ms. Gregor seconded. The motion carried 4-0.

4. Identify Potential Conflicts of Interest

None

5. Public Comment (non-agenda items)

1. Ronald Frasier – 507 St. Clair St.

Mr. Frasier was interested in any hearing about future plans the city has for the railroad right-of-way between Prentice Avenue and Willis Avenue. Mayor Mackenzie responded that the tentative plan for the RV expansion in the packet may have caused some confusion. It has been considered for some time as a possible use for the area but has not been fully developed. Mr. Frasier noted that quite a few people were not aware of where things stand with this idea. He hoped in the future there would be better notification. Mayor Mackenzie said there have been public meetings and talk regarding this since he became mayor three years ago. Mr. Frasier expressed an opinion that if the city decides to sell this land down the road, the adjoining property owners should be given the initial opportunity to acquire the land or have a first right of refusal. Mayor Mackenzie noted that if people have questions about specific pieces of property to call and set up an appointment to discuss with the Planning Director, Steven Wiley.

6. Action Items:

a. Public Hearing: Review and Approval of a General Development Plan and Zone Change to allow a Multi-Family Residential Land Use on Parcel # 201-00356-0000, zoned Mixed Residential/Commercial (MRC) with Gateway Overlay (GTWY-O), Applicant: Vision, Inc.

Mr. Wiley presented on the topic and noted that this was the first part of a Planned Unit Development for a substantial multi-unit housing use at the vacant Roffers site off of Beaser Avenue adjacent to the police department. He noted this approval is for the General Development Plan. The required materials for this process have been submitted. The second part is the Specific Implementation Plan. He reviewed the subject site which is currently vacant and the existing land use and zoning for the property and surrounding land areas. He explained the proposed schematic site plan along with stormwater, grading and erosion control plans developed by the applicant. He reviewed building setbacks and parking requirements, impervious surface maximums, building height allowances and landscaping requirements. He explained that they are asking for an allowance to exceed the height limit in order to have a pitched roof which would tie in better with the neighborhood. City staff is supportive of this. Mr. Wiley showed the proposed monument sign and exterior elevations. He then presented the Standards for Review defined under the Unified Development Ordinance and the Application Submittal Requirements for a PUD-GDP (Planned Unit Development/General Development Plan). He concluded with a staff recommendation of the PUD-GDP with contingencies which were stated and described. He noted no written comments or phone calls were received in response to the required notification mailings.

Mr. Beirl asked if Plan Commission will have one more review of this before it goes to a development agreement? Mr. Wiley replied yes, that there will be another opportunity for review and recommendations before any building permits are approved. Ms. Gregor asked if this is a general idea of the finalized plans? Mr. Wiley stated this is correct. Mr. Eades asked for confirmation that the applicant needs this PUD approval to allow for some flexibility and not have to meet all the required codes. Mr. Wiley noted this is correct and that it gives us the ability to allow some give and take or set other requirements as a trade-off. Mr. Wiley introduced the development team from Vision, Inc. for the project.

Mayor Mackenzie entertained a motion to go into public hearing to discuss the review and approval of the GDP and open it up to citizen participation. Motion made by Mr. Beirl, second by Mr. Eades. Roll call vote carried 4-0.

Julian Deplacito – 418 Beaser Avenue
Mr. Deplacito asked if the schematic drawings are available for residents to see in more detail. Mr. Wiley responded he can send digital drawings and that a pdf version is also on the city website in the plan commission packet which is part of the meeting materials. It was also noted that he is welcome to meet with Mr. Wiley in person. Mr. Deplacito asked if there is a plan of where snow would be stored when this site cannot any longer be used. Mayor Mackenzie responded that the city will find a place to put it and that it may have to be hauled a little farther

away which will be determined by the Public Works Department.

A motion was made by Ms. Gregor to go out of public hearing. Second by Mr. Eades. Carried 4-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Beirl to approve, with staff recommendation, to forward this item onto city council for consideration. Second by Ms. Gregor.

Mr. Eades asked if we are only voting on the general plan for allowing this to be a PUD and not getting into the more specific details. Mr. Wiley responded that is the main thing but the staff welcomes input now on specific items. Mr. Eades asked where the snow will be stored. Jason Hale, from The Vision Team, answered that parking lots are often designed to be a bit oversized and this extra space would be utilized as much as possible before resorting to storm retention system use. Mr. Eades asked about dumpster location on the property. Mr. Hale noted that most of the dumpster storage will happen inside. There will be interior chutes from the upper levels down to the main floor. Mr. Beirl asked upon approval, if there were any time restraints for when the work needs to be completed? Mr. Wiley noted that they would need to make substantial progress moving forward with work at a satisfactory rate. A typical commercial permit would be good for two years but as part of a PUD process, the ordinance would require consistent progress to be made.

Mayor Mackenzie called to question to send this PUD proposal to City Council with a recommendation from the plan commission to approve. Roll call vote passed 4-0.

b. Public Hearing: Review and Approval of a Land Transfer Request for Portions of City-Owned Parcels #s 201-01049-0000, 201-01047-0000, and a portion of Water Street Right-of-Way, zoned Waterfront Public/Institutional (W-PI) with a Waterfront Overlay (W-O), Applicants: Debra Joanis and Robert Polencheck.

Terri Erickson presented the information on the proposed Land Transfer Request. She described the three separate pieces of city-owned property that are being proposed to be given to the owner to make their property larger. She explained the history of the area in regards to the railroad easement and discussions that occurred with staff relating to the future use of this area. It is a goal of the city to make these properties closer to conforming sizes. She reviewed the existing land use, zoning and surrounding uses as well as the CSM that was completed by the owner showing the 75-foot by 75-foot revised lot area. She commented on the standards for review for land sales/purchases and covered the staff review recommendations for the transfer. She also noted that the required public hearing notice was submitted. Mr. Wiley added that the only reason the schematic plan for the Kreher Park expansion was included in the packet was to give rationale for not giving back the complete 140-foot area to the owner. The Kreher park project was not a discussion or action item. Mr. Beirl asked what they city is trying to accomplish as this would still be a non-conforming lot. Mayor Mackenzie noted it does provide a greater buffer for the existing house. Mr. Beirl asked if the park expansion does not move ahead will the city offer the rest of the area to the owner for purchase? Mayor Mackenzie noted that he cannot speak for the council but that, yes, he would be willing to do that. It was noted that creating conforming lots where possible is the goal but not every situation allows this. Mr. Wiley noted they could rebuild as it currently exists if there was a fire or other natural disaster.

Mayor Mackenzie entertained a motion for a public hearing moved by Mr. Beirl and seconded by Mr. Eades. Roll call vote passed 4-0.

Robert Polenchek; Co-owner of property in question
Mr. Polencheck noted that he was thankful for the increase to a 75-foot lot but doesn't like that his lot still will not be conforming. He asked if the neighbors obtain more property in the future will they all be extended only to this 75-foot mark? Mayor Mackenzie responded that they probably would but that this is a new task for the plan commission with the intention to return to conforming lots. He noted we don't have the staff required to implement these transactions all at once as there are several miles of railroad right-of-way to deal with. They are being looked at on a case-by-case basis but it is reasonable to assume we would do something comparable for neighbors. Mr. Polencheck inquired about extending the depth to 100 feet instead of 75-feet. He also asked about potential landscaping and re-grading around the acquired rail-road right-of-way because it is several feet higher and collects water at the edges. Mr. Wiley responded that landscaping would be allowed here on his acquired land as per the ordinance standards.

Deb Joanis; Co-owner of property in question
Ms. Joanis asked what it would take to get 25 more feet to make it conforming as she was not aware her lot would still be non-conforming. Mayor Mackenzie noted that even if we gave the additional land the property would still not be conforming for residential development in the W-PI district. She would be allowed to make renovations to the existing structure in the current configuration as a grandfathered use. Ms. Joanis expressed she's grateful for what the city is doing as it has been an ongoing process with many delays, but during staff turnover the past several years she has been given different answers and it has been very disheartening as she has held onto the property hoping for a different result. At one point she was told she could obtain the property all the way back to the tree-line. She asked about the future plans for the RV park. Mr. Wiley responded that when staff reached out to Public Works for department approval of the land transfer, the Kreher Park Expansion plan was brought up which the Planning Department had not been a part of developing. This was how the 75-foot dimension was determined. Mr. Wiley noted that this can be further discussed and as far as he knows, current funding is not available for the park expansion. Ms. Joanis said she would like to talk with him more to see if there may be some allowance to acquire additional land beyond the 75-feet.

Don Jaskowiak; 121 N Willis Ave
Mr. Jaskowiak inquired about the six RV sites upland of the current sites and has looked at the current 2025 projects which noted the redevelopment of Kreher park. This describes the installation of a bathroom/bathhouse building and construction of new camp sites and site work which makes him think the city is moving forward with this project. He is looking out for his neighbors and the protection of their privacy. He noted that there are two old railroad grades and asked if this is the one that is closer to the lake. Mayor Mackenzie noted that there are tentative plans to expand the number of camping units but nothing imminent or finalized. There is repair work being done on the bathroom building currently.

Mr. Polencheck spoke up to mention that there are two railroad beds. One is the extension of water street (Superfund)and this is the one that affects them. This was agreed upon and Mayor Mackenzie noted there is likely more than just those two.

Mr. Eades made a motion to go out of public hearing. Seconded by Mr. Beirl. Carried 4-0.
There was a motion by Mr. Eades to approve and recommend the land transfer to city council with staff recommendations. Second by Gregor.

Discussion:
Mr. Eades asked if the lot was expanded to water street, would it be a typical lot size? Mr. Wiley responded that would be pretty standard with a 140-foot depth. Mr. Eades asked where the boundary is that is restricting residential development even if it is a conforming lot. Mr. Wiley noted the W-PI (Waterfront - Public Institutional) zone district restricts this and encompasses a number of properties in the area. Mr. Eades stated his concern is that a number of years ago there was a land division in town and the city was warned by the state that what they did was illegal because the city cannot create a non-conforming lot. He noted this is what we are about to do and that we should be making all these lots conforming. This affecting boundary location should possibly be moved to not include this specific area. Mayor Mackenzie responded this is something that could be considered but noted we are not causing a non-conforming lot but bringing it closer to conformance. If we could move the W-PI district northward to water street fully conforming lots could then be created. Mr. Wiley brought up the zoning map and noted the Waterfront District extends south to HWY-2 and that most of the properties surrounding the subject parcel are in the W-CC district, not in the W-PI district as the subject parcel is. Mr. Wiley agreed the existing W-PI zoning in that stretch makes sense for the park but may not for the existing residences. Mr. Beirl asked if the plan commission can amend their recommendation to revisit the added portion of the lot to make it conforming? Mayor Mackenzie agreed that they could make a motion to amend, with a recommendation to discuss enlarging the portion of land handed over to make a conforming lot. Mr. Eades noted he would like it to be moved to Water Street. Mr. Beirl said we should do everything in our power to make conforming lots. Mr. Eades agreed and proposed an amendment to shift the overlay to Water Street and also pursue extending all the residential lots along this alley north to Water Street. Mr. Wiley noted that we would have to do a zone change to accomplish this. Mr. Eades made a motion that the city council consider amending the land transfer boundary to extend the property lines to at least a minimum amount to make them conforming lots. Second by Mr. Beirl. Mayor Mackenzie clarified that this amends the motion and allows staff to consider recommending to council that they consider extending the boundary to water street or at least to 100 feet (instead of 75 feet). Motion Carried 4-0. A vote was taken for a resolution to approve and recommend the land transfer to city council with staff recommendations and amendment of transferring additional property to allow for a conforming lot to Water Street or at least 100 feet. Roll call vote: Carried 4-0. Mayor Mackenzie verified verbally with the applicant that they were willing to move ahead with this if offered.

c. Public Hearing: Review and Approval of Unified Development Ordinance Text Amendments. Applicant: Planning and Development Department

Mr. Wiley presented city staff research and proposed amendment revisions to the UDO (Unified Development Ordinance). Currently there is a blanket prohibition on corrugated metal siding. There is still some additional work that needs to be done with proposed text changes so he noted he is not looking for approval at this time. He reviewed research and noted staff is looking for a balance that provides more flexibility but prevents significant erosion of our design standards. He is looking at creating two ordinance subsections, one for residential and the other for non-residential. He reviewed a few different types of metal siding applications (standing seam, ribbed and corrugated) and showed some photo examples with varying levels of attractiveness or good/poor design. He expressed his dislike for weathered or rusted corrugated products in a city setting and showed examples. He questioned how we go about regulation without being overly burdensome on people but at the same time ensuring we have positive outcomes. There are attractive and high-quality metal cladding materials that can be used well and look good. He stated he is still working through language to try and achieve an ordinance that allows acceptable applications but prohibits the inappropriate. He reviewed standards for both non-residential and residential land uses including prohibiting the material on historic properties, the Gateway Overlay and the Waterfront Overlay unless historically present. Specification standards, finishes, fastener types, and maintenance practices are other criteria to evaluate and set standards. He reviewed how metal finishes may or may not be compatible or consistent with the comprehensive plan. In conclusion, he presented three options for moving ahead to the commission: 1) Vote to recommend council approval as presented. 2) Vote to recommend council approval with amendments. 3) Vote to table the amendments for further discussion. Mr. Wiley recommended option three. Mayor Mackenzie noted that we have advertised for public hearing in the hopes that there will be more input from community members. Mr. Eades made a motion to go into public hearing. Second by Beirl. Roll call vote passed 4-0. Discussion:

Ian Hauser; 614 St. Clair St
Mr. Hauser felt it made sense to be less prohibitive on allowing metal siding in the Gateway and Waterfront overlays. There is already an issue in town with many buildings looking run down. Siding is expensive and if this is a more affordable way to fix the problem he doesn't see a big issue with it. Maybe galvanized siding is ugly but is it more ugly than decaying asphalt siding?

Mayor Mackenzie responded, in all fairness to his question, it depends on who owns it. An owner doesn't see the ugliness sometimes that the neighbor sees and that's what we are trying to weigh. Some people want to see it because it is a more affordable material but we don't want to add to an already unsightly percentage of buildings in the city. We are looking for a meaningful way to incorporate these products without a negative effect.

Motion to go out of public hearing by Mr. Beirl, second by Ms. Gregor. Carried 4-0. Mayor Mackenzie asked the commission to table the item. He would like to do more community outreach to gather more public feedback. Mr. Eades made a motion to postpone to the next meeting, second by Mr. Beirl. Carried 4-0. Mayor Mackenzie commented that maybe a notice could be sent out with the water bill to accomplish additional outreach.

7. Discussion Items

a. Update on Property Maintenance Enforcement
None

b. Update on Building Permits for March 2025

None

c. Update on Miscellaneous Planning and Development Items

Mr. Wiley noted the city is moving forward with the TID-11 creation. The council reviewed it at the April 15th reorganizational meeting and voted to approve. They are looking at May 22nd for the joint review board meeting, which encompasses representatives from the local taxing jurisdictions, for a final review. The city is working with the developers on the development agreement and the approval process which tonight's action item was an initial step for.

Permitting is picking up. A number of items related to property maintenance are moving through the court system. One includes a raze order upheld by the city council. There are also chronic problem properties that have gone through the citation process required by the city attorney's office and have moved onto the court system. Steve touched on the process and noted that it is time-consuming but that staff is trying to be more aggressive with these cases.

8. Announcements/Reports/Comments/Questions

Mayor Mackenzie noted there will be a city-wide Spring clean-up and a clean sweep in June. He also relayed that Northland College has hired an assessor to provide an assessment of their property and buildings. They plan to shut their doors the end of May for students and staff. Then they will consider what to do with their assets. There is a requirement for accredited universities to go through a specific shut-down protocol which will be followed.

He mentioned that there was a resident that was cited for disorderly conduct towards our property maintenance specialist. The trial was this last week and the individual was found guilty and was fined for the charges.

Mr. Beirl asked what happens with the tax status of the Northland properties. Mayor Mackenzie responded that he does not know for sure but believes as long as the property is under their ownership it is still in a tax-exempt status.

9. Adjournment

Mr. Beirl made a motion to adjourn. Second by Ms. Gregor. Motion carried 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:03 PM.