

# **City of Ashland – Plan Commission Meeting Minutes**

A meeting of the Plan Commission was held on **Tuesday, January 20, 2026** 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. Erickson made a motion to approve the agenda and Ms. Gregor seconded. Motion Carried 6-0.

## **3. Consent Agenda**

- a. Approval of minutes from the October 21st, 2025 Plan Commission Meeting  
Mayor Mackenzie asked for approval of the minutes from the October 21st, 2025 Plan Commission meeting. Ms. Erickson made a motion and Ms. Tochterman seconded. The motion carried 6-0.

## **4. Identify Potential Conflicts of Interest**

None

## **5. Citizen Participation (non-agenda items)**

Scott Bretting – River Rock Inn and Bait Shop. With construction starting on the homeless shelter (2300 Lake Shore Dr W) very little is known regarding what is going on there. In earlier meetings, regarding this development, the question has been “where are people going to put their stuff”? What is going to be done to keep it from being blight? There were not going to be dilapidated vehicles, furniture, etc. outside there. When an addition was proposed it was going to be screened. Through-out the summer the place has looked horrible and it is an entrance and thoroughfare to Ashland. Now, with this apartment renovation, where are people going to put all their stuff when they get evicted and it doesn't fit inside? It is now piled up in front of the places (next door). The restaurant close by is very popular. We (the city) should be disgusted by this. The owner of Bluewave (Katie), across the street, is also very concerned and upset. People have been found sleeping in her lobby several times that had been evicted from these housing units across the street. Why is it her issue? These evicted folks have come into his shop wanting to warm up and have stolen items. Now it becomes his issue. Nobody seems to want to address the issue and it's a problem. As a thoroughfare to Ashland, it has got to be kept

clean. It seems to be ignored.

Tony Justich – Executive Director of Free Wisconsin. Wanted to address issue on agenda tonight regarding rehabilitation and transitional living here in Ashland. This type of facility has been in need since the Department of Corrections closed the transitional living facility back in September of 2024, then Crossroads ministry also shut down as well as the Sober Living Facility. The city has an ongoing problem with unhoused individuals committing crimes and exhibiting negative behaviors. Free Wisconsin works with justice impacted individuals and is a nonprofit organization in existence since 2023. He personally works with twenty clients a month of which fifteen to sixteen are from Ashland. Many are unhoused and are have criminal records and many have substance abuse history as well as mental health issues. He wants to emphasize the importance of stable housing for these people. It reduces recidivism by forty percent. In regards to overall statistics and success rates, this is huge. He urges the commission to consider this issue thoroughly. He would like to set up a reintegration center in town and is a needed service. Please act favorably and be open minded to solutions that are presented.

## **6. Action Items:**

- a. Public Hearing: Review and approval of Unified Development Ordinance Text Amendments. Applicant: Planning and Development Department  
Motion to start public hearing by Mr. Bierl. Second by Ms. Erickson. Motion carried 6-0. Steven Wiley presented the information for the changes to the ordinance. The three sections include:
  - 1) Part 6.3 – Parking and Loading. Change from minimum 25-foot drive aisle to 24-feet between parking. 25 feet is not typical based on research.
  - 2) Part 6.4 – Landscaping Buffers and Screening. Clarify allowed locations of trash enclosures; revise language so enclosures cannot be located between the front of the building and street unless there is no other reasonable location.
  - 3) Part 6.6 – Sign Standards. Allow one menu-board sign per drive lane instead of per parcel. Also recommending removal of the CUP allowance for sign area for all applicable districts. He reviewed this proposal with the city attorney who felt this was reasonable. Also included is the addition of a building management identification sign category.  
He reviewed these proposals for consistency with the comprehensive plan and vision and does not believe there are any conflicts. Existing uses are grandfathered in. He recommends approval of these amendments. This required a class II hearing notice which was issued. No comments were received.

Mr. Eades made a motion to go out of public hearing. Mr. Beirl Seconded. Motion Carried. Discussion: Mr. Beirl asked if this includes temporary dumpsters. Mr. Wiley noted this is covered under a building permit and would not include this use – only permanent enclosures. Mr. Beirl then asked, for the sign CUP change, does that mean that a business then has to follow the UDO regulations there is no other relief? Mr. Wiley noted that the only option would be to apply for a variance if there is a specific hardship. He added there could be language added for an allowance related to the distance the sign is set back from the property line. Mr. Beirl noted he would like to see some type of recourse for an owner to pursue. Ms. Erickson agrees. She asked how would this affect existing signs? Mr. Wiley

responded they are grandfathered in. Ms. Erickson felt the CUP allowance should not be removed until there is something in place for another recourse. Mayor Mackenzie asked if the variance aspect is not sufficient for the recourse option? Mr. Beirl said he doesn't know enough about the variance process and requirements to respond. It was established that owners can apply for a variance today and Mr. Wiley explained this process is not a given and would go through the Zoning Board of Appeals. Mr. Eades stated he feels that it should be removed; you should not be able to get a CUP for dimensional issues. It's not what CUP's are intended for. Mr. Wiley noted that the state legislation has changed and it restricts a community's ability to deny a CUP. Ms. Gregor asked how the standards apply if the sign is replaced? Mr. Wiley noted if a sign structure is replaced, then it would need to comply with the new standards. New copy only would be grandfathered in. If replacement is due to a natural cause, it may remain the same configuration. Mr. Eades noted that CUP's do not go with the property if it changes use but variances go with the property which is a positive. Mr. Wiley can follow up on this to verify. He noted that there are specific standards in the non-conforming section that would apply to these circumstances. A motion was entertained by Mayor Mackenzie to approve and recommend to council items 1 and 2 listed above. Second by Mr. Beirl. Carried 6-0. Mr. Eades moved to approve and recommend item no.3, the proposed sign standard changes, as presented. Second by Ms. Tochterman. Mr. Beirl asked for examples of where a variance would come into play on the size. Mr. Wiley noted an example situation with a lot that had limited frontage on the highway and a peculiar shaped lot. It comes down to what is reasonable with current limitations. It was agreed that if there are existing requirements that are not working for the community or are outdated, the city has been and will continue to do their part to make modifications to the ordinance within reason. Mayor Mackenzie called to vote to approve the sign ordinance changes as presented. Roll call vote: Erickson – NO, All others – YES. Motion carries 5-1.

- b. Review and approval of a Public Art Permit Application to allow a mural installation on the Vaughn Avenue Bridge at the 500 block of Vaughn Avenue. Applicant: Ashland Parks and Recreation Department

Mayor Mackenzie introduced the item and noted Parks and the artist (Rose Spieler-Sandberg) was available for comment. Mr. Eades made a motion to approve. Ms. Tochterman seconded. Discussion: Ms. Spieler-Sandberg described the grants received, the mural design and noted it would be removable in case the bridge was replaced. The mural will be worked on in public workshops open to the community starting on February 2nd. There are no future plans to do the south side at this time. Spieler-Sandberg noted the current project cost at this time is about \$12,500 for one side which would likely be a similar cost to do the opposite side. Mr. Wiley spoke briefly about the project and the standards for review, installation methods and permit approval requirements. This is a public information meeting and was published on January 15th. No comments received. Staff recommends approval with noted conditions. Motion carried 6-0 to approve the Public Art Permit.

## **7. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

a. Discussion on Transitional Living Facilities/Rehabilitation Centers in the City of Ashland

Mayor Mackenzie noted that there has been a request for a rehabilitation center in the city for justice impaired people. As the city looks at updating the comprehensive plan, what are thoughts on transitional/rehabilitative housing and how or where they might fit in. It is reasonable to say there is a need for it but where is the most suitable location? A current request is looking at East Main Street which is an area we are looking at promoting further development for public uses that would be an inclusive part of the West Main Street downtown area. There may be other concerns as well, looking for shared opinions. The article in the paper noting that there was a "memorandum of understanding" with the city which is false and was a mistake/miscommunication. Transitional housing is different than just a rooming house in that there is a staff office and residents are seeking treatment and resources to reintegrate into the community. This is meant to be a general conversation regarding the use and not about a specific project. Ms. Erickson commented there should be restrictions on this type of use in regards to proximity to schools. Main Street may not be a good place for this use with the issues we already have. We need to be proactive with enforcement with these types of projects and make sure they do what they say they will do. There will likely be people who have problems with any place that these are proposed. This would not seem to promote the desired redevelopment of Main Street. Mr. Wiley noted that these facilities would also have to meet state standards. Ms. Tochterman said she felt it was hard to talk about in the abstract without knowing specifics of a proposed project. Some of these uses may need access to resources that are located close to or in the downtown area. For example, she would want to know what the needs and the requirements are of the group to help evaluate the best location. Mr. Beirl said there will be a need for this type of facility regardless and everyone will say "not in my backyard". He agrees that the evaluation is best suited for specific projects. Several different factors need to be assessed pertaining to a proposed project and so should be specific to each one individually. Mayor Mackenzie noted there is a level of commitment required to bring a development like this to a point where it can be assessed by the commission without the developer putting a significant amount of time and/or money into it. Having the ability to give some feedback before this takes place would be beneficial on both ends. Currently we have provisions for rooming houses in some zoning districts but not others; these may need to be updated in the new comp plan and now is a good time for those discussions and hoped to have a more generic discussion about it. Mr. Eades stated that he assumes in the current UDO this use is not allowed in any zone without a CUP. Wiley confirmed this to be true. Mr. Eades thinks this is best maintained as is so any use of this type is evaluated on a case by case basis no matter the proposed location. Mayor Mackenzie noted we will see more of this and to reach out with any other feedback or questions.

b. Update on Property Maintenance Enforcement

Mr. Wiley noted current tasks: Snow removal, abatement/ tear downs of four properties last year.

c. Update on Building Permits for October-December 2025

No comments

d. Update on NWCSA Project at 2300 Lake Shore Drive West (Parcel # 201-04746-0000)

Mayor Mackenzie stated there have been questions and concerns about what is happening at this property. Initially the owner wanted to use the building for

additional emergency housing. They now are modifying the building to contain apartments for low income housing. The building is on a separate parcel and a right by use under our zoning. They have both a permit for the trailer and a demo permit. There is nothing in our zoning that mandates a requirement for separate storage. They are aware it is a property maintenance issue and the city will act if it is not up to UDO standards. The condition of the property has varied over time and they have been responsive when issues have come up. There is a landscaping provision that is being dealt with and will be done by May. The plans have also been reviewed and approved by the state. He reaffirmed the building is not going to be a boarding house for emergency housing but rental apartments. Each sleeping unit will have kitchens and bathrooms. There will be 11 units. Ms. Erickson asked who will be paying the rent and will vouchers be used? The answer to this is unknown by the city. Ms. Erickson noted it doesn't seem like they are doing a good job keeping up their current property and this new project seems like a loophole they found. She feels we should ask if it is really low-income people paying for the rent or people getting vouchers for an extended stay. Mayor Mackenzie responded he does not believe that is something we can legally require. It is also possible it could be tax exempt and we don't have the right to deny it because of this status. Ms. Erickson asked what if we find out later they are using it as a homeless shelter. If we find out they are not using it as apartments, the city can give them a cease & desist order. Mr. Wiley clarified that even though the property was purchased together, the project site is a separate parcel and has no relation to the CUP requirements that apply to the adjacent property containing the shelter. Mayor Mackenzie noted that the city is aware of and does get on the owner for the property when it is looking poorly. They have been somewhat responsive. Mr. Eades pointed out that there are many places in the city that need to do a better job of keeping properties maintained, based on the maintenance reports. Mayor Mackenzie noted that staff has been more aggressive than ever with property maintenance and code enforcement; but staff time and resources are limited. He feels the city has done a real good job keeping the city taxes in check even with the new upgrades that have been accomplished over the last year. Ms. Tochterman noted that there seems to be a lack of trust within the community regarding past experience and expectations of this development and the developer not following through with commitments. In the interest of collaboration, it would be nice if they shared more information publicly about their vision and project planning in the city. Mayor Mackenzie noted he would be happy to ask. He noted that their other property has a condition to prepare an annual report which he will inquire about. Ms. Erickson asked why are we moving forward with letting them start another new project when they haven't satisfied the requirements of their existing project? Mayor Mackenzie responded that the city has often been too lenient and given code violators too many chances to come into compliance. There was a motion to recognize Mr. Bretting to speak from the public by Mr. Eades. Second by Mr. Beirl. Motion Carried 6-0.

Mr. Bretting felt that it is obvious, by the title of the project, that it is meant to be transitional housing. When they are changing the use like they are, it should be coming in front of the board for approval. He stated there is not enough room for 11-unit parking. There should be 2 ½ spaces per apartment and it never been questioned as well as what are they going to do about the stuff which there is not enough room on the property. The stuff is piled out in front of the homeless shelter for long periods of time or sits by the dumpster for all the people coming into Ashland to see. The city shouldn't have to keep using their resources to keep

going after them to clean up – they already know the rules and that it is an issue. The outside of the property looks horrendous right now. They need to be made accountable and it doesn't seem to be happening.

Mayor Mackenzie noted there are different definitions of transitional housing and what qualifies under this which needs to be further evaluated. Ms. Erickson asked if there is any way to pause what is happening there now. Mr. Wiley noted he can reach out to Millie and get clarification on what exactly their intentions are for what they are planning to do to make sure we are on the same page. He feels the city made it clear to her what they are and are not allowed to do. The length of the stay for what they are calling "transitional housing" is somewhere between the short term and long-term definition. The emergency shelter stay is for up to a 30-day window with no where for them to go after an extension. The transitional housing unit would provide for a longer-term window of a year with another year-long extension possible. Ms. Tochterman stated this is different than an affordable rental apartment. Ms. Erickson expressed dissatisfaction that the commission was never notified of the plans for this project when it has been apparent that this property has been an ongoing topic of discussion over the years with various concerns that have been brought to the staff's attention. It adds to the distrust that the commission is not being informed of important issues. It seems, based on what she's hearing, that they have changed the words of what they are doing to satisfy the ordinance requirements but not the actual scope. Mr. Eades asked if anyone is allowed to rent the apartments. Mayor Mackenzie replied that is a question we will have to ask Millie. It was noted the city does not have any legal recourse to stop the project to further investigate some of these questions. Mr. Wiley noted they have met all the cities requirements as far as he can tell and the plans have been approved by the state.

e. Update on Miscellaneous Planning and Development Items

Mayor Mackenzie noted that the Beaser Avenue apartments have been started. Mr. Wiley noted they got started a little late and plan to be done and occupied in 2027. The city is still working with Alex Vickroy on a development agreement for the Beaser School re-use for market-rate unit apartments. The library completion has been a bit delayed due to some door issues. Still looking to be done and moved back in by March. There is a potential interested developer for the parcel by Kwik Trip but it is confidential at this time.

## **8. Announcements/Reports/Comments/Questions**

None

## **9. Adjournment**

Mayor Mackenzie recapped on the Transitional Housing discussion and asked for commissioners to reach out with additional input or feedback.

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Beirl, Second by Ms. Tochterman. Carried 6-0.

Meeting closed at 7:48 pm

Recorded by:

Terri Erickson

Assistant Planner

