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City of Ashland, Wisconsin
601 Main Street West Ashland, WI 54806 www.coawi.org

PLAN COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

August 19th, 2025 at 6:30PM at the City Hall Council Chambers and via Go To Meetings

The meeting can be joined in person or by using a computer, smartphone or tablet at

<https://meet.goto.com/775025133>

**The meeting can also be joined by phone at
1 866 899 4679 using Access Code: 775-025-133**

Present: Jeff Beirl, David Eades, Laurie Gregor, Mayor Matt Mackenzie, Steven Wiley (Planning and Development Director), Terri Erickson (Assistant Planner)

Absent: JoAnn Erickson (excused), Ana Tochtermann (excused), Shawn Brede (excused)

AGENDA

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
Mr. Beirl made a motion to approve the agenda and Ms. Gregor seconded. Motion Carried 4-0.
3. Mackenzie asked for approval of the minutes from the July 15th, 2025 Plan Commission meeting.
Mr. Eades moved to approve as proposed and Ms. Gregor seconded. The motion carried 4-0.
4. Identify potential conflicts of interest
None
5. Citizen Participation (non-agenda items)
Aaron Wilson, who was in attendance for a discussion item topic spoke at this time to bring up a few unrelated topics:
 - 1) He expressed concern about the presence of homeless people downtown.
 - 2) He brought up the amount of trash that can be seen along the trail adjacent to Walmart.
 - 3) He felt this is a deterrent for tourists and young professionals moving into town and that appearances matter.
6. Action Items:
 - a. Public Hearing: Review and approval of Unified Development Ordinance Text Amendments. Applicant: Planning and Development Department

Steven Wiley presented on the topic. He explained the background and analysis in relation to the Comprehensive Plan and the discussions he had with the City Administrator. He explained the focus on the uses in the ground floor of downtown buildings from Ellis Ave to 9th Ave West and that they should be

limited to uses that help to truly revitalize the downtown. No one using these spaces now would be required to leave - this transition would happen over time. Other, various uses would still be allowed on the upper floors such as office and residential. Retail and food service would be emphasized at the street level. He is recommending approval of the draft amendment.

Mr. Beirl asked, knowing that existing services will be grandfathered in and there are many of these, how many buildings would this affect? Mr. Wiley responded that he would need to follow up with that number and could do an inventory. Mr. Beirl asked for confirmation that the purpose of this is to establish more retail commercial on second street? He noted that even retail businesses are closed in the evening and he doesn't see this changing. Is there a current demand for space by retail and dining establishments? If there is not, and professional businesses try to sell with no luck, how does this affect the property value? The supply and demand should be evaluated. Mr. Wiley agreed that having vacant storefronts may not be better than uses that are not considered high priority in the downtown district. Mr. Beirl asked why the uses crossed off the list didn't include car washes? Mr. Wiley agreed that too should probably be taken off the list. Beirl stated he will not vote for this until there is more information and it can be further assessed.

Mayor Mackenzie asked for a motion to go into public hearing. Motion by Mr. Eades, second by Mr. Beirl. The motion carried 4-0.

Mr. Wiley noted the class II public hearing notice was posted as required. (July 31st and August 2nd) There were no responses.

Mayor Mackenzie asked for a motion to go out of public hearing and into discussion. Motion by Ms. Gregor, second by Mr. Eades. The motion carried 4-0.

Discussion: Ms. Gregor asked what constitutes a business service? Would this include a title company or real estate agency? Mr. Wiley reviewed the list of uses under this definition. It would not include title companies. Gregor pointed out that many of the existing businesses downtown would no longer be allowed if this were to pass. She would also be concerned about the resale value if so many business services become restricted.

Mr. Eades agreed that the idea needs to be further vetted. He would like to see an inventory of what businesses are currently there. He felt that restricting these types of businesses on the street level will not promote downtown vitality unless there is a waiting list of people wanting to get in. He brought up North Lakes Clinic and whether or not that really belongs in the downtown. He noted the city of Eau Claire had a similar issue when they rented out much of their downtown to non-profits. Then when there was more demand for downtown space, they had no open places for businesses to move in. Mr. Wiley noted that it is a goal to have more of a "destination" downtown but agreed he does not know of a list of entities waiting for space. He will have further discussions with the City Administrator regarding this.

Mr. Beirl asked Wiley to go over the grandfather clause and the conditions required. Wiley noted existing uses are grandfathered in as long as they remain there. If the use remains the same, even under a different owner, it would be able to remain as is. If the building becomes vacant or the use is discontinued for twelve or more consecutive months, then the new requirements would kick in.

Mr. Eades asked if prior approved CUP's stay with the building if the use doesn't change. Would it be up to the plan commission to determine if the CUP remains with the property or if a new owner would be required

to obtain a new one. Mr. Wiley responded that this would need to be further determined on a case by case basis.

Mayor Mackenzie noted that this item is looking for a recommendation for passing it onto to council with our approval.

Mr. Beirl asked if running an office out of a second or third floor mandates an elevator? Mr. Wiley noted it is possible based on the occupancy type.

Mayor Mackenzie suggested that this item could be brought back for more discussion at some future point once more information and research have been collected for a revised proposal. No further action taken.

7. Discussion Items:

- a. Discussion on a Conditional Use Permit to allow a Rooming House land use at 400 3rd Avenue West (Parcel # 201-01665-0000), zoned City Center (CC). Applicant: Aaron Wilson.

Mayor Mackenzie noted this project pertains to development on the third level at the Depot building from former office space into rooming houses. The discussion revolves around whether or not there is enough support for this in order to move ahead with a CUP request for this, which would be required for the proposed new use. It is likely code upgrades would need to be done in order to make this a viable project.

Aaron Wilson, the new owner of the Depot building, gave a background of his history with the historic structure and described his Physical Therapy business located on the first two levels among a couple other businesses. He explained that the third floor was once used for supplemental office space but is now vacant, unused space. He noted the goal is to provide a temporary living option for young single professionals. He stated he will not be willing to punch a new opening in the exterior wall of the building as this is cost prohibitive.

Mayor Mackenzie added the purpose of the discussion was to evaluate if the commission would support a development of this type to move onto council for review if the historic preservation and safety/code requirements could be met. There are code requirements for exiting the building that need to be met. Currently there are no windows that open on this level. Mayor Mackenzie noted that there are inspections required by the fire department and other agencies that need to be completed to assure compliance. There are different requirements for a bedroom or sleeping space than there is for an office space. Mr. Wilson asked if the historic requirements apply to both the interior and exterior of the building. Mr. Wiley responded that it was mainly the exterior that the local preservation commission is concerned about. Historic tax credit funding from the state would require both an interior and exterior review. He noted that he has put Mr. Wilson in touch with the city's plan review consultant to help him work through what will be required for this type of occupancy. The Planning Department doesn't have leeway with making decisions regarding the building code requirements. Commercial projects of this size are reviewed under the state adopted codes and we don't have authority to overrule these requirements. We do have authority over the zoning and land-use aspect and would be the entity that approves a certificate of occupancy.

Mr. Beirl noted he would support a CUP for this as long as it can be done legally, properly and to code as per the guidelines required by the state. Mr. Eades agreed with this comment - that it would need to meet code. He also referred to state statutes for minimum requirements. Terri Erickson explained that due to the

complexity of the International Building Code, which is adopted by the state and would apply to this project, we cannot tell Mr. Wilson exactly what he can or cannot do. There are so many sections and exceptions that may or may not apply to this space depending on many different factors of the project including uses, occupancy and area. Mayor Mackenzie noted that the consensus seems to be that there is no opposition by the commission in regards to the concept of what Mr. Wilson wants to do, but that he needs to go through the proper steps to develop a plan that meets state code and statute requirements. Mr. Wilson asked if there was a way to verify if this project would get approved for a CUP before jumping through all the hoops needed to develop plans to the extent needed for code approval. Mr. Wiley noted that cities are restricted in their ability to deny a CUP if the ordinance conditions are met. Mr. Eades stated that a commission member could assign a condition to the CUP that is unrealistic for the applicant to meet. He added that the commission cannot require conditions that cause undue hardship for the applicant which was reinforced by Mr. Wiley who said that conditions would need to be tied to the ordinance. He suggested the next step, in order to gauge if the project is viable, is to connect with the E-plan consultant for an initial code consultation. Mr. Wilson understood this and agreed he had enough to go on to move forward.

- b. Update on Property Maintenance Enforcement
- c. Update on Building Permits
- d. Update on Miscellaneous Planning and Development Items

Mr. Wiley gave an update on the status of the Beaser Avenue development with Vision, Inc. He noted the finalized Development Agreement just needed to be signed. The WI-DNR Storm Water and Erosion Control permit has been obtained. The transfer of property to the developer should be happening over the next week or so.

Mr. Wiley mentioned that Alex Vickroy continues to pursue the adaptive reuse of the historic Beaser school building with the use of state historic tax credits. Staff is working on a development agreement for this, too.

The City Administrator has once again started up the City Downtown Façade Program with \$100,000 total available with a \$20,000 limit per applicant. This is a matching grant for historically sensitive work on main street facades. He's already met with two applicants seeking this funding.

Staff continues to work on getting out raze orders for problem properties. The yellow house by Burger King will be coming down. The city acquired it from the owner in exchange for forgiving the existing judgements ruled against them. The County will be demolishing the fire damaged home on 3rd Street West. The fire-damaged Belany property has been demolished and the lot looks much better. There was a recent fire at El Tarasco that has caused them to shut down temporarily. Mr. Eades asked if the yellow burger king house could not be saved? Mr. Wiley responded that the Building Inspector does an inspection, as well as the health department, and had determined it was not fit for human occupancy. If the cost of repairs exceeds fifty percent of the structure's total value, then the repairs are presumed unreasonable by ordinance. Mayor Mackenzie added that the County is looking at tearing another house down on East Main across from Culvers. Mr. Eades asked why the County is involved? Mayor Mackenzie responded that a portion of these houses the county owns due to delinquent tax payments. He mentioned a proposal for new ordinance language regarding requiring a permit for owning empty houses will be forthcoming to help keep track of these properties and encouraging getting them back on the market or tearing them down.

Mr. Beirl asked if the library remodel is on schedule? Mayor Mackenzie replied that he believes it is, but will know more tomorrow after a tour with the DOA. He stated the project is still on budget with the amount that

was authorized by the referendum along with a grant received from the DOA. The final completion date was unknown but it is believed to be during the Spring of 2026.

8. Announcement/Reports/Comments/Questions
 None
9. Adjournment
 Motion by Mr. Beirl, Second by Mr. Eades. Carried 4-0.
 Meeting closed at 7:31 pm

Recorded by:
Terri Erickson
Assistant Planner

It is possible that a quorum of members of other governmental bodies of the municipality may be in attendance at the above stated meeting to gather information or speak about a subject, over which they have decision-making responsibility. Any governmental body at the above stated meeting will take no action other than the governmental body specifically referred to above in this notice. The City of Ashland does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, national origin, sexual orientation, age or disability in employment or provision of services, programs or activities. NOTE: Upon reasonable notice, the City of Ashland will accommodate the needs of disabled individuals through auxiliary aids or services. For additional information or to request this service, contact the Planning & Zoning Dept. at (715) 682-7041.