Planning commission meeting and study session

The St. Louis Park Planning Commission is meeting in person at St. Louis Park City Hall, 5005 Minnetonka Blvd. Members of the public can attend the planning commission meeting in person or watch the regular meeting by webstream at www.parktv.org and on local cable (Comcast SD channel 14 and HD channel 798). Visit bit.ly/slppcagendas to view the agenda and reports.

You can provide comment on agenda items in person at the meeting or by emailing your comments to info@stlouispark.org by noon the day of the meeting. Comments must be related to an item on the meeting agenda.

Agenda

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

1. Call to order – roll call
2. Approval of minutes – Aug. 19, 2026; Sept. 16, 2026; Oct. 7, 2026
3. Hearing
4. Other Business
   4a. 2026 planning commission review
5. Communications
6. Adjournment

PLANNING COMMISSION STUDY SESSION

1. Site design charrette

Future scheduled meeting/event dates:

November 4, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting
November 18, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting
December 2, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting
December 16, 2026 – planning commission regular meeting

If you need special accommodations or have questions about the meeting, please call Laura Chamberlain at 952.924.2573 or the administration department at 952.924.2525.

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Planning commission

1. Call to order and roll call

Members present: Jim Beneke, Christopher Caton, Mia Divecha, Matt Eckholm, John Flanagan, Tess Machalek, Sarah Strain, Tom Weber

Members absent:

Staff present: Katelyn Champoux, Gary Morrison

2. Approval of Minutes – July 1, 2026 regular and study session minutes
It was moved by Commissioner Echkholm, seconded by Commissioner Flanagan to approve the July 1, 2026 minutes as amended with a minor change to the header date.
The motion passed 7-0.

3. Hearing
3a. Title: Zoning text amendment – Medical/dental clinic or Office
Location: 6213 Lake Street
Applicant: Liz Hochman
Case No: 26-07-ZA

Mr. Morrison, Zoning Administrator, presented the application submitted by Ms. Hochman and Ms. Knight requesting an amendment to allow medical and dental clinic or office uses in the Neighborhood 2, 3, and 4 (N2, N3, N4) zoning districts. The applicants intend to occupy a long-standing, currently vacant one-story office building on Lake Street that was rezoned from commercial to neighborhood in the recent zoning code update. Staff proposed three conditions: a 2,500 square foot maximum size; a defined list of permitted uses (dental care, eye care, physical therapy, family practice, prenatal care, counseling, acupuncture, and similar low-impact uses); and a prohibition on high-impact activities such as surgery, radiotherapy, and MRI that may generate hazardous waste. Typical zoning standards will still apply.

Commissioner Eckholm raised a concern that prohibiting "radiotherapy" could inadvertently prevent standard dental X-rays. In response to Commissioner Weber, Mr. Morrison confirmed that the amendment could be approved with staff given discretion to clarify the language regarding x-rays as an incidental use in a dental office. Commissioner Beneke questioned traffic in this zoning district. Mr. Morrison said due to the maximum size of 2500 sq. ft. the amount of traffic that is typically generated pretty low. Commissioner Caton asked whether hours-of-operation restrictions should be added. Mr. Morrison noted there is no limitation of hours, but this could be incorporated as an additional condition if the commission desired. Commissioner Eckholm confirmed that this application is for N2, 3 and 4 (not N1) zoning districts.

Chair Strain opened the public hearing. noting no members of the public came forward to comment, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Divecha asked why similar low-impact uses such as coffee shops or hair salons were not being considered simultaneously and could this applicant request a variance. Mr. Morrison explained that a variance for this property is not an option because the state of Minnesota does not allow cities to give variances to allow a use in a district that isn't already allowed. Commissioner Divecha preferred a broader and more robust discussion before making code-wide amendments but indicated she is not concerned about this particular application. The commission generally agreed that a fuller discussion of permitted uses in neighborhood districts belonged in a future study session or as part of the upcoming 2050 Comprehensive Plan update.

It was moved by Commissioner Echkholm, seconded by Commissioner Weber to approve the addition of medical/dental clinic or office land use to the Neighborhood -2, -3 and -4 zoning districts with the directive to staff to review and clarify radiology language to ensure standard dental radiology is not inadvertently prohibited. The motion passed 6-0 with Commissioner Divecha abstaining.

4. Other Business

5. Communications

6. Adjournment – p.m.

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Laura Chamberlain, liaison Sarah Strain, chair member

These minutes were created with the assistance of a generative AI transcript service, then edited and finalized by a city staff person.

Planning commission

Study Session

Members present: Jim Beneke, Christopher Caton, Mia Divecha, Matt Eckholm, John Flanagan, Sarah Strain, Tom Weber

Members absent: Ari Nieves

Staff present: Laura Chamberlain, Jennifer Monson

Item 1: Parking discussion, case studies

Ms. Chamberlain briefly outlined the policy resources included in the packet, which included materials from the Urban Land Institute, the Sustainable Development Code, the American Planning Association's Zoning Reform Toolkit, and a Bay Area regional government collaboration focused on parking policy. She outlined three goals: review the resources, discuss parking challenges and identify the commission's priority outcomes.

One commissioner observed that making comparisons between St. Louis Park and the cities featured in the case studies was difficult, given that most of those cities are significantly larger. Another suggested when viewed as part of the Minneapolis–St. Paul metro area, particularly as a first-ring suburb, St. Louis Park may share relevant characteristics with comparable urban neighborhoods. There may be specific pockets of the city that share characteristics with denser urban neighborhoods, suggesting that lessons from larger cities could be applied geographically rather than city-wide.

Commissioners were struck by the cost of structured and underground parking (cited at about $35,000 per underground space). Several supported Seattle's "unbundling" policy, which separates parking costs from housing costs so that residents without cars do not subsidize those with them. A commissioner asked how unbundling might apply to businesses, and Ms. Chamberlain said this merited further review.

Ms. Monson confirmed that recent zoning code updates had already removed parking requirements for the reuse of existing buildings zoned MU-1, MU-2, and MU-3. Ms. Chamberlain noted that these provisions apply to existing spaces, but that expansions still trigger current parking requirements. It was noted that eliminating minimums in the Walker Lake area was intended as a test case, to be evaluated after about a year before any expansion. Ms. Monson also noted that the city does maintain municipal parking lots that serve businesses, and that the costs of reconstructing those lots are typically assessed back to the property owners who use them.

Commissioners generally supported reducing or eliminating parking minimums for commercial uses. Their reasons included more productive use of land, the net fiscal drain of low-density, moving away from parking-heavy development, stormwater and impervious surface concerns, walkability and safety, small business formation, and housing affordability. Commissioners also raised the need for supporting infrastructure beyond zoning, including transit, bicycle and pedestrian networks, and public education that street parking is a public asset.

Ms. Chamberlain shared a series of practical concerns raised by city staff. She noted that the city is actively narrowing streets, which reduces on-street parking capacity. She acknowledged that the city's walking, biking, and transit networks remain incomplete, which complicates the assumption that residents can simply shift away from vehicle use. Other challenges included the cost of parking enforcement, snow removal logistics with increased on-street parking demand, and a growing number of resident petitions to re-establish resident-only parking on public streets.

It was also noticed that high school students are using the city owned lot behind the Lake Street businesses. The conversation included the potential for more city-owned or municipally managed parking structures in key commercial areas, such as the Excelsior corridor. Ms. Chamberlain said strategic municipal parking districts, as recommended in earlier plans, would require a stronger policy foundation, ideally in the comprehensive plan. Ms. Monson noted that funding such districts is difficult because assessments are charged back to nearby businesses. Ms. Monson also said that if minimums were removed, businesses might expand into former parking areas rather than convert them to other uses.

Commissioner raised the importance of ensuring that any reduction in parking does not disproportionately affect residents with disabilities or mobility challenges. Ms. Chamberlain responded by acknowledging the concern while noting that, statistically, households with disabled members are more likely to rely on transit and less likely to own vehicles. It was suggested there be a "yes and" approach that would improve accessibility through both ADA-compliant parking provisions and accessible pedestrian infrastructure, rather than using accessibility as a justification for maintaining excess parking.

Commissioners' Priority Outcomes:

- **Increased density and land use efficiency** - Reduce the amount of land dedicated to surface parking, particularly in areas where that land could support housing, retail, or other productive uses.
- **Housing affordability** - The cost of structured parking is a significant contributor to housing costs.
- **A safe, enjoyable, convenient and accessible walking environment** - The parking policy should serve the goal of making the city more walkable, with an explicit emphasis on ensuring that accessibility for people with disabilities is maintained and enhanced, not diminished.

- **Enabling more neighborhood-scale commercial uses** - Create the conditions for neighborhood coffee shops, small restaurants, and other pedestrian-oriented businesses to locate in residential areas where they are currently unable to do so.
- **Reducing impervious surface and supporting green infrastructure** - Environmental value of reducing parking footprints, including benefits for stormwater management and tree canopy.
- **Adaptability and reuse of existing structures** - Ability to repurpose existing buildings and parking structures without triggering new parking requirements as a key priority.
- **Due diligence on worst-case scenarios** – Study potential negative outcomes before advancing policy changes, in order to be able to respond credibly to public concern and secure the necessary votes on the city council.
- **Education and community engagement** - Public perception often does not align with the realities of parking policy; any reform effort needs to include a robust community education component to build understanding and support.
- **Fiscal responsibility and metrics** - A measurable outcome, such as a reduction in vehicles per household, should be tracked to evaluate whether policy changes are achieving their intended effect.
- **Alternatives to driving**

Ms. Chamberlain said staff would use the priorities list to plan next steps and planned to include the parking discussion into the upcoming comprehensive planning process.

Adjournment – 7:42 p.m.

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Laura Chamberlain, liaison Sarah Strain, chair member

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Planning commission

Study Session

Members present: Jim Beneke, Christopher Caton, Mia Divecha, Matt Eckholm, John Flanagan, Avi Nieves, Sarah Strain, Tom Weber

Members absent:

Staff present: Laura Chamberlain

Guests: Beth Elliott and Kristen Baldonado with Stantec

Item 1: 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update

Ms. Elliott explained Stantec's role includes engagement, particularly reaching residents who do not normally participate. Commissioner Divecha asked about the consultants' frame of reference, citing earlier parking discussions that benchmarked against much larger cities like Portland and San Francisco. Ms. Elliott listed work in Minneapolis, Cottage Grove, Spring Lake Park, Mounds View, Moorhead, Northfield, Owatonna, Texas, and Illinois.

Commissioners shared that they had been told that major changes must wait for the comprehensive plan. They found it frustrating to arrive at the plan and be told that this was not the time, particularly after the recent zoning code update, which largely codified existing conditions. Ms. Elliott replied that the comprehensive plan would largely codify and bring up into policy the work the city had done over the last decade, including the zoning updates and the related comprehensive plan amendments. She said big ideas often emerge from public engagement. She said her goal was to give the commission clear policy direction it could rely on when making decisions and when receiving testimony.

Ms. Elliott and Ms. Baldonado reviewed the 10-year cycle, which runs from census data to regional forecasts, the Imagine 2050 plan, and city system statements issued in fall 2025. Forecasts cover population, households, and jobs, and the city must accommodate them. The city has received its minimum requirements checklist, and consultants will send a link. Notable requirements include:

- Engagement of underrepresented populations.
- Allowance of more than single-family housing in low-density land use categories.
- Affordable housing at or below 50 percent of area median income.
- Surface water, wastewater, and water supply plans, which require coordination with the city's engineering consultants.
- Climate as a required topic, with analysis of social vulnerabilities.

Neighboring jurisdictions and Metropolitan Council staff will review the plan in 2028, with approval expected by the end of 2028. Noncompliance can make a city ineligible for funding.

Another commissioner cited the sewer dispute in North Oaks and the earlier lawsuit involving Lake Elmo. Commissioner Caton asked whether St. Louis Park would later have to compensate for other cities' shortfalls. He suggested raising the question with a Metropolitan Council representative, and Ms. Elliott said it could be asked. She added St. Louis Park is living the values the Metropolitan Council promotes.

The consultants said the plan would build on Vision 4.0 and the city council's five strategic priorities rather than begin with a new visioning phase. Staff want it concise, visual, implementation-focused, and supported by dashboards that are easy to maintain. It will also include an interactive online story map. Ms. Elliott said that a 10-page plan is not possible given the Metropolitan Council checklist, but that background material and checklist items can move to appendices or be linked. Chair Strain asked for a balance that gives enough information to explain why decisions or policy choices were made.

Stantec is partnering with Modern Day Me, which is finalizing an explanatory video. The first engagement push will include on-the-ground outreach at festivals, bus stops, playgrounds, and similar places, plus targeted online engagement. The winter newsletter is expected in early December, and online engagement will stay open until the end of the year. A second push focused on implementation is planned for late summer or early fall 2027, including two family-friendly community-wide meetings. The consultants showed a sample street-interview video from a Minneapolis project. In response to Commissioner Caton's question, Ms. Elliott explained that interviewers asked a few non-invasive questions to track audiences reached, responses are coded into themes by a data analyst, and results are shown publicly and combined with online input. Ms. Elliott acknowledged the commissioners' priorities and committed to incorporating them.

Stantec staff presented the following findings:

- Metropolitan Council forecasts show growth of about 13 percent in population and households and about 5 percent in employment between 2030 and 2050. This is roughly 3,400 added households, or about 170 per year, with shrinking household sizes sustaining housing demand. Commissioner Caton said this was a large amount of building.
- The city attracts adults aged 25 to 34 and retains older residents. Commissioners suggested that housing size, cost, and school quality may lead families to move outside the city.
- Single-person households are the largest household type. Commissioner Beneke noted that older residents often cannot find affordable places to move.
- The city is becoming more racially diverse, but language diversity is not keeping pace, which has implications for engagement and services.
- Poverty and social vulnerability are concentrated in the Aquila neighborhood. Ms. Elliott said a citywide plan can still target policies geographically.
- Housing is largely a choice between large apartment buildings and small single-family homes, mostly under 1,500 square feet, with little middle-scale housing.
- Homeownership is 58 percent overall with significant disparities by race and ethnicity and high cost burden among lower-income households.

The full community profile is online on the project's webpage and contains more detail for a breakdown of units by owner and renter occupancy. Regarding condominium construction. Ms. Elliott cited state legislation passed after the 2000s condo boom that increased developer liability, and a commissioner cited FHA eligibility problems and rising HOA requirements. Ms. Elliott said conversions of aging apartments are more likely than new construction, and that Stantec's development economists could return to discuss these issues.

The city has a very high workforce participation rate and unemployment below county and regional levels. About 40,000 people commute into the city to work, while only about 25,000 residents leave the city to work. Commissioners asked about work-from-home effects and the effect of the coming light rail opening. Most industrial buildings predate 1990 but are well leased. Of five aging commercial properties examined, three redeveloped into mixed use and two were adaptively reused. Ms. Elliott said the future land use map could include layers such as protected industrial categories and flexibility for accessory dwelling units, duplexes and quads.

Commissioners reported that they were surprised by the number of commuters and by the share of single-person households. A commissioner asked about the fiscal and economic consequences of continued movement from industrial and commercial uses to housing with a concern that there would be nowhere to work. Other comments from commissioners included:

- Favoring industrial and commercial uses to compete with parking rather than with housing.
- Protecting small light-industrial pockets, such as small businesses near light rail stations.
- Consider daily-needs businesses alongside destination businesses.
- Emphasizing housing, supporting walkable neighborhood small-businesses, easing barriers for startup businesses, and retention of existing businesses.

Commissioners asked that transportation (including bus transit) be included in the plan. Ms. Elliott said the community profile has transportation, parks, and climate sections and that a bus system change is open for public comment. Commissioners and consultants discussed the high rents in new mixed-use buildings and possible tools: standard preapproved building plans, a density bonus, traditional small shop-with-dwelling buildings and city financing conditions through tax increment financing or the affordable housing trust fund.

Ms. Elliott suggested that, after the plan is adopted, the commission use a checklist of plan-based discussion points to guide deliberation after public testimony.

Adjournment – 7:58 p.m.

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Laura Chamberlain, liaison Sarah Strain, chair member

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4a 2026 planning commission review

Executive summary

Title: 2026 planning commission review

Recommended action: Review the supporting documents.

Summary: Every late-fall, the planning commission reviews their year of work and begins discussion on establishing a work-plan for the next year. A priority setting meeting with city council and the planning commission chair as representative is planned for Nov. 9, 2026. The commission may receive new council-initiated items and feedback on draft 2027 work plan at that meeting. The planning commission will formally vote on the work plan at a future regular meeting and then it will go to the city council for formal approval.

Attached is the list of items the planning commission has undertaken this year, with the drafting, review and adoption of the zoning code phase 2 being the major project of the year. Other items that were completed this year include the Arrive + Thrive implementation tracker and the analysis of Vision 4.0 and Metropolitan Council Imagine 2050 regional development framework in anticipation of the comprehensive plan kick off.

Looking forward, staff have put together a draft of the planning commission's 2027 work plan items. Staff prepared the list based the planning commission's 2026 work plan and discussions had throughout the year. The list is mostly a continuation of the commission's ambitious work plan and based on budget and staff capacity to support these efforts. Unsurprisingly, the focus of a lot of the commission's work in 2027 will focus on topics within the comprehensive plan.

The commission is asked to review the draft work plan and identify if there are any gaps in the work plan or elements that need to be expanded. New elements that are agreed upon by the commission can be added to the draft work plan before it is presented to the city council.

Supporting documents: Draft 2027 work plan list

Prepared by: Laura Chamberlain, senior planner
Reviewed by: Jennifer Monson, planning and economic development manager

Planning commission accomplishments and draft work plan

2026 Accomplishments

1. **Planning and zoning application review.** The planning commission held public hearings and made recommendations for the following projects:
   - Park Community Church: CUP
   - Parkway on 5: preliminary and final plat and variance
   - 4000 Cedarwood Road: variance
   - 2625 Louisiana Ave: rescind two variances
   - Zoning text amendment: medical/dental clinic or office
2. **Broaden participation.** The planning commission continued to provide input to the city council via recommendations as well as participation in annual presentations with the city council. Commissioners will have a chance to socialize with the city council and other boards and commissions
3. **Implement light rail station plans (Arrive + Thrive).**
   - The commission provided feedback on the Arrive + Thrive implementation tracker
   - The implementation tracker is close to being finalized and published online. In addition to tracking actions from the Arrive + Thrive plan, it will be used as an example of how to approach implementation of the comprehensive plan.
4. **Zoning code update – phase 2**
   - Participated in multiple study sessions to offer feedback on draft articles.
   - Held public hearing for the zoning update ordinance, changes to the zoning map and related comprehensive plan amendments.
   - The city council followed the planning commission's recommendations and adopted the updated zoning ordinance and zoning map, with the ordinance language going into effect in August 2026.
5. **2050 comprehensive plan.**
   - Study sessions giving broad overview of comprehensive planning as well as introduction to consultant staff and idea prioritization.
   - Kick-off to multi-year process
   - First phase of public engagement
6. **Parking discussions.** The planning commission added parking minimums to their work plan in the spring. During a deep dive on the topic, commissioners identified their prioritized the outcomes.

Draft 2027 Work Plan

1. **Planning and zoning application review.** Review planning and zoning applications submitted to the city; hold public hearings to help inform commission recommendations, and BOZA and city council decisions.
2. **2050 Comprehensive Plan.** Analyze public input and draft policy direction for various topics covered by the comprehensive plan. Review policies and strategies amended in the comprehensive plan and review iterations of the comprehensive plan chapters. Monitor overall progress until adopted.

3. **Zoning code update – phase 3.** Review and recommend changes to the zoning code to better reflect the city's strategic priorities and implement the comprehensive plan goals, policies and strategies. Phase 3 will focus on creating an accessible online version of the zoning code, as well as deeper analysis and updates to sections that were outside of the scope of phases 1 and 2, such as landscaping standards.
4. **Parking discussions.**
    - Use prioritized outcomes to establish a framework to the parking minimum study.
    - Engage the public about the topic, possibly through the comprehensive plan, to establish policy direction
    - Identify action items and next steps.

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1 Site design charrette

Discussion: During the Oct. 21, 2026 study session, planning commissioners will be asked to participate in a mini design charrette to explore potential development concepts, site layouts and design considerations for a property in St. Louis Park.

The exercise is intended to be an idea generating planning effort to understand the planning commission's vision related to land use, building placement, and the relationship of potential development to surrounding properties and the broader community.

The charrette is anticipated to focus on the following elements:

- **Site layout and development concepts:** Explore potential building locations, site organization, and development patterns.
- **Access and circulation:** Consider vehicular access, pedestrian connections, parking, and internal circulation.
- **Compatibility with surrounding properties:** Evaluate transitions to adjacent uses, building scale, setbacks, and neighborhood character.
- **Landscaping and public realm:** Identify opportunities for open space, buffering, and pedestrian-oriented design.
- **Planning and zoning considerations:** Identify applicable comprehensive plan policies, zoning requirements, and other development considerations.
- **Implementation opportunities and constraints:** Discuss potential challenges and additional information needs.

The charrette will be exploratory in nature and is not intended to establish a final development plan or approve any land use or development application. Staff are looking for the commission's guidance as development concepts are proposed for the site.

Prepared by: Laura Chamberlain, Senior Planner
Reviewed by: Jennifer Monson, Planning & Economic Development Manager