

City of Duluth Planning Commission

January 13th, 2026 – City Hall Council Chambers
Meeting Minutes

Call to Order

President Gary Eckenberg called to order the meeting of the city of Duluth Planning Commission at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 13th, 2026, in the Duluth city hall council chambers.

Roll Call

Attendance:

Members Present: Nik Bayuk, Gary Eckenberg, Brian Hammond, Danielle Rhodes, Dave Sarvela, Kate Van Daele, and Andrea Wedul

Members Absent: Chris Adatte and Jason Crawford

Staff Present: Amanda Mangan, Jenn Moses, Chris Lee, Jason Mozol, Christian Huelsman, Reina Owecke, Ariana Dahlen, and Sam Smith

Approval of Planning Commission Minutes

Planning Commission Meeting – December 9th, 2025 –

MOTION/Second: Bayuk/Wedul approved

VOTE: (7-0)

Public Comment on Items Not on Agenda

No comments.

(Item PLVAR-2512-0015 was removed from consent agenda and placed under public hearings.)

Consent Agenda

PLSUB-2512-0016 Minor Subdivision at 010-4500-03900 (N 59th Ave W) [RO]

PLVAC-2512-0012 Vacation of Slopes and Fills Easement at 404 E 5th St by Hanft Fride PA
[CH]

~~PLVAR-2512-0015 Variance to Shoreland Setbacks for the Chester Creek Ski Chalet and
Addition by LHB Inc. [RO]~~

PLVAR-2512-0016 Variance to Side Yard Setbacks at 702 S 63rd Ave W by Theresa Corey
[CH]

MOTION/Second: Wedul/Bayuk Approve the consent agenda items as per staff recommendations

VOTE: (7-0)

Public Hearings

PLVAR-2512-0015 Variance to Shoreland Setbacks for the Chester Creek Ski Chalet and

Addition by LHB Inc. [RO]

Staff: Reina Owecke addressed the commissioners. The applicant proposes to reconstruct the Chester Creek Ski Chalet, by using the existing foundation. The plans propose a first and second story addition, a new deck, and new gravel paths to access the parking area and other infrastructure, none of which would be any closer to the creek. The applicant requests to reduce the required structure setback from 150' to 47' to allow for the reconstruction of the chalet in its existing location by using the existing foundation. Dave Schaffer, Executive Director of the Chester Bowl Improvement club, and representatives from LHB were in attendance and willing to answer commissioners' questions.

Commissioners: Wedul expressed concerns regarding the proposed installation of turf grass on the project site, as it is shallowly rooted and could impact storm water conveyance to the creek. She asked if there was another seed mix option that would allow for better rooting and structure.

Applicant: Heidi Bringman, Senior Landscape Architect with LHB, addressed the commissioners. She stated that they will be using Northern Boulevard turf seed mix, which is somewhat native to the area. This type of seed mix is salt tolerant, and it will be put into areas on the project site that will be compacted by snow due to ski racks and foot traffic. Bringman said they could explore using more native options for some of the periphery areas with less foot traffic, as more native types of seed mixes cannot be mowed as frequently. Dave Schaffer addressed the commissioners. The property is busy year-round with the different types of activities that are hosted there. He stated that while he is not as knowledgeable on the different types of seed mixes as Bringman is, he does know that a durable type of seed mix is necessary for their property due to the climate and high foot traffic.

Commissioners: Wedul asked the applicant if people travel down towards the creek near the property and wanted to know if there was some sort of buffer below the path to protect the creek.

Applicant: Schaffer responded that some people trout fish down there, but there is tall grass and there isn't a direct path that leads to that area. There is a buffer in the section between the path and the creek, and the same buffer exists on the far side of the creek as well.

Commissioners: Commissioners thanked the applicant for answering their questions and expressed their support for the project.

Public: No speakers.

MOTION/Second: Van Daele/Wedul approve as per staff recommendation

VOTE: (6-0)
Bayuk abstained

Other Business

PLEAW-2511-0002 Final AUAR Order for the Downtown Duluth AUAR

Staff: Mozol addressed the commissioners and gave the commissioners an update on where staff are in the process. He stated that they are at the end of the scoping EAW and will be moving into the draft AUAR stage. Mozol presented the final AUAR order to commissioners, and the action that is being asked is for them is to adopt the order for the draft AUAR. Similarly to the scoping EAW, the draft AUAR will go through a public comment period, but the draft AUAR will include the analysis of the actual impacts of the different scenarios that were proposed. The final order document contains five comments that were received from various agencies, and Mozol went over them briefly. Commissioner Hammond had comments at a previous meeting about including additional area in the study to better align with the

regional exchange district, and Mozol stated that a few blocks were added to address that request. He noted that an area along Lake Superior near the Lakewalk that was not included because there is no development foreseen in that area.

Commissioners: No comments.

Public: No speakers.

MOTION/Second: Wedul/Van Daele Approve as per staff recommendation

VOTE: (7-0)

PLSUB-2510-0013 Request to Waive Subdivision Regulations for Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) of Duluth at Harbor Highlands

Staff: Chris Lee addressed the commissioners. He presented the memo and went over the history of the project. The preliminary plat for Harbor Highlands First Addition was approved by the Planning Commission on August 20, 2024 (PLSUB-2406-0003). A final plat was approved by Planning Commission on March 27, 2025 (PLSUB-2411-0007), but the Plat has not yet been recorded with St. Louis County. The City received several documents from The Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) of Duluth as a request to waive the subdivision regulations to convey property by a metes and bounds description, including a letter from Attorney James Aird on behalf of The HRA of Duluth. The letter also describes minor mathematical corrections to two parcels that can be approved as an after-action review by the Land Use Supervisor as these constitute minor changes to the plat. Staff recommends approval.

Commissioners: Wedul asked staff if the city could be exposed to any legal issues if planning commission were to waive these requirements.

Applicant: James Aird addressed the commissioners. He stated that the nature of the request is to mitigate some issues that came from previous miscommunications between the HRA and the planning commission. When planning commissioners were reviewing the preliminary plat in 2024, there was discussion to create a connection to Lake Avenue through Lot 8 on the property, which required extra approvals from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The idea was to remove Lot 8 from HUD's request, which HUD approved, but development of Lot 8 cannot happen without further approval from HUD. HUD approved a legal description for release in a quick claim deed to One Roof that used a metes and bounds description, but that does not meet UDC requirements, which created the issue at hand.

Commissioners: Wedul asked Aird to summarize what is being proposed.

Applicant: Aird responded that The HRA simply requests that the Planning Commission allow the recording of the deed to the developer using the HUD-approved "pre-plat" legal description. This would briefly create a non-conforming lot, but such nonconformity will be immediately cured by recording of the Plat. The development agreement will include language about the Lake Avenue connection condition as well. In the meantime, the other 26 lots on the property are ready to be developed, and One Roof would like to begin building soon.

Commissioners: Wedul stated that it sounds like there will be little to no legal exposure for the city. She asked staff if there is any possibility of any future re-reviews that would be required per the UDC if this request is approved.

Staff: Moses stated that the applicant has made their intentions clear. Staff also have the approved plat, so any plat recorded on the property would have to be in conjunction with the final plat that planning commission approved last spring.

MOTION/Second: Bayuk/Wedul Approve as per staff recommendation

VOTE: (7-0)

Communications

Land Use Supervisor (LUS) Report – Moses stated that city council approved the contract for the Lester land use study last night. There was a request for proposals (RFP) issued in December, and after those were scored Bolten & Menk were the winning consultant. There will be six to seven months of more public involvement throughout the process. Moses also shared that the annual planning commission meeting will be coming up soon and staff are weighing potential dates for that meeting. There will also be a special meeting next week on Wednesday, January 21st.

Commissioner Van Daele thanked staff for keeping the public involved in the land use study process.

Heritage Preservation Commission Report – Wedul stated that the HPC met yesterday, and there was no business on the agenda. She noted that planning staff will be presenting at the February meeting.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 5:37 p.m.

Respectfully,

Signed by:

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Jenn Moses, Manager
Planning & Economic Development