

EAST BETHEL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

November 25, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Sharon Johnson, Brian Downie, Kristina Pagnac, and Kory Jorgensen

MEMBERS ABSENT: Glenn Terry and Tanner Balfany

ALSO PRESENT: Grace Gerard, City Planner
Brian Mundle, City Council Liaison

1.0 Call to Order

Chair Johnson called the Planning Commission regular meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2.0 Adopt Agenda

Commissioner Jorgensen moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to adopt the agenda with the addition of the acceptance of Tanner Balfany's resignation from the Planning Commission.

Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

3.0 Updates

Council Liaison Mundle updated the Commission on recent Council actions. He noted that the Council is advertising for a Senior Planner position. At the Council's last meeting, they recommended raising park fees from \$2000 to \$3500 and trail fees to \$1500. He stated that there will be a tree lighting at the Senior Center on December 5, 2025.

The next Planning and Zoning Commission meeting is scheduled for December 22, 2025.

4.0 Approve October 28, 2025, meeting minutes

Johnson stated that Terry had a correction on line 117, to change "They" to "The Met Council."

Commissioner Pagnac moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to adopt the October 28, 2025, regular meeting minutes as corrected. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

5.0 Elect Vice Chair of Planning Commission

Commissioner Johnson moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to nominate Kory Jorgensen as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

6.0 Interview of Planning Commission Applicant: Gerald Tiah

Gerard stated that they received an application from Gerald Tiah at the end of October for the vacant seat on the Planning Commission. The term for this seat ends on January 31, 2026. If an appointment is recommended, he will be appointed at the December 8, 2025, Council meeting.

Downie asked why he is interested in becoming a Planning Commissioner for East Bethel.

Mr. Tiah noted that his kids grew up in East Bethel, and he has lived in the area for almost 20 years. He stated that he loves the people in the area.

Jorgensen asked what strengths and abilities he would bring to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Tiah stated that he is well educated and will use that to his advantage on the Commission. He is also familiar with planning and decision-making in the corporate world.

Johnson asked, as a Planning Commissioner, what he would view his role as a representative of the City. Mr. Tiah stated that he would be an example of the City and would be seen as a representative of the City.

Pagnac asked what his vision for the Hwy 65 corridor is.

Mr. Tiah stated that he drives on it every day. He would like to see it not only improve, but also become safer. He noted that his vision would be to create an overpass over the Highway for people to cross.

Downie asked if he holds any roles that would put him in a conflict of interest as a Planning Commissioner.

Mr. Tiah stated that he is a lead tech for the City of St. Francis, but said nothing that could cause any conflict.

Jorgensen asked if he had any questions or anything else to add.

Mr. Tiah stated that over the past few years, he has been looking into planting more for the community and has a community garden be a priority in the future. He asked if there were any plans for something like this in the future.

Johnson stated that as a City, there are no plans right now. She shared that she has a farm that people come by and do that type of thing at.

Mr. Tiah stated that he saw a development right off Hwy 65. He asked if this is a residential area or if they are looking to add businesses to the area.

Johnson stated that they will be looking into the planning for that area in the next few years.

Johnson stated that they will write yes or no privately on a sheet of paper for the vote.

Gerard stated that Mr. Tiah has been recommended for appointment to the Planning Commission.

7.0 Public Hearing – Consider requests for variances for front yard and side yard setbacks at 19511 East Front Boulevard NE

Gerard reviewed the staff's report stating that the City received a complete variance application from Joseph and Sheri Belchak to allow for the construction of a 1,250 square foot attached garage to be located 19 feet 8.4 inches from the front property line and 5 feet 8.4 inches from the side property line on property at 19511 East Front Boulevard NE. To approve the garage as proposed, two variances are required from which establish setback requirements for structures within the Coon Lake Residential Zoning District. The City received a complete variance application from Joseph and Sheri Belchak to allow for the construction of a 1,250 square foot attached garage to be located 19 feet 8.4 inches from the front property line and 5 feet 8.4 inches from the side property line on property at 19511 East Front Boulevard NE (PIN# 25-33-23-12-0003). To approve the garage as proposed, two variances are required from Appendix A Section 51(7)B of the City Code, which establishes setback requirements for structures within the Coon Lake Residential Zoning District.

Gerard noted that the attached garage would replace an existing detached garage. The existing garage has a front yard setback of 27 feet and a side yard setback of 5 feet 8.4 inches. The new garage will expand the area of the garage that is 5 feet 8.4 inches from the side yard property line, thus requiring a variance to expand the area of the existing structure, which is non-conforming.

Gerard stated that both variances would be necessary for the applicant to construct the garage as proposed. One variance may be approved without the approval of the other. If only the first variance is approved, the applicant will be required to reduce the depth of the proposed garage to bring it into conformity with the 25-foot front yard setback requirement. If only the second variance is approved, the

applicant will be required to reduce the width of the proposed garage to bring it into conformity with the 7-foot side yard setback requirement. Each variance shall be considered separately.

Gerard noted that the City's discretion in approving or denying a variance is limited to whether the proposal meets the standards set in the Zoning Ordinance for a variance. The City has a high level of discretion with a Variance because the PC Packet Pg. 7 burden of proof is on the applicant to show that the variance standards have been met. The applicants have submitted a survey, building plans, and a narrative detailing the requests.

Gerard noted that she received a letter from a neighboring property owner in support of both variances.

Johnson opened the public hearing at 7:18 p.m.

David Sakowski, next door neighbor to the property owners, stated that he is in support of this request. He noted that he would like East Bethel to have bigger garages to avoid junk on properties.

Joe Belchak stated that he is hopeful that his request will be approved so he can move things into his garage.

Johnson asked if he had been looking into having a smaller width to come closer to the variance.

Mr. Belchak stated that he has a 24x24 now, and it is not big enough. He stated that due to the septic, he can't have a three-car drive.

Jorgensen asked if he would have it match the house.

Mr. Belchak stated that he will have the same shingles and match the style of the home. He noted that he has heard no complaints from neighbors.

Johnson closed the public hearing at 7:26 p.m.

Johnson read a comment from Commissioner Terry stating, "My opinion is that the front yard setback does not meet the variance standards, as the garage could have its length reduced to fulfill the setback requirements. That particular dimension is by preference of the owner, not due to conditions or hardship. The side yard setback variance is fine to comply with the required 20-foot-wide garage standard."

Downie stated that he agrees with Terry. He noted that 5 feet doesn't seem like a lot, but he knows that in garages, 5 feet can make a big difference. He stated that the homeowner is aware of the requirements and is still requesting a variance. He stated that he would be in support of moving forward with the approval of both variances.

Jorgensen stated that he is in support of a bigger garage. He added that he likes that the homeowner is being intentional to match the house.

Johnson stated that this does not change the character of the neighborhood. She noted that

Jorgensen stated that the uniqueness is caused by the lot placement and the septic location.

Johnson stated that it is a reasonably good use for the property.

Commissioner Jorgensen moved and Commissioner Pagnac seconded to recommend approval of both variance setbacks at 19511 East Front Boulevard for the garage addition to City Council with the conditions set forth in the provided Resolution. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

This item goes before City Council on December 8, 2025.

8.0 Public Hearing – Consider a request for a Conditional Use Permit for a Lower Potency Hemp Edibles Retailer for The Smoke Saloon at 18429 Highway 65

Gerard reviewed the staff's report stating that staff received a complete application from Ramadan Hussein for a CUP to allow the operation of a lower-potency hemp edible retailer located at The Smoke Saloon, 18429 Highway 65 NE. City Code defines a lower-potency hemp edible (LPHE) retailer as: "A hemp business that sells lower-potency hemp edibles to customers, including on-site consumption, pursuant to Minn. Stats. § 342-46".

Gerard stated that this property is guided Commercial and zoned B-3 – Highway Commercial. The properties to the north and south are guided and zoned the same. The properties to the east are guided Mixed Use and zoned MXU – Mixed Use. Highway 65 borders the western side of the property. Per City Code Appendix A, Section 47, "Lower-Potency Hemp Edible Retailer" requires a CUP within the B-3 – Highway Commercial Zoning District.

Gerard reviewed that "Lower-Potency Hemp Edible Retailer" is a conditional use within the B-3 Zoning District. According to the Office of Cannabis Management, "Lower-potency hemp edible retailers can sell packaged lower-potency hemp edibles to consumers aged 21 years of age and older. Lower-potency hemp edible retailers may deliver lower-potency hemp edibles to consumers 21 years of age and older with applicable endorsement". State Statute prohibits LPHE retailers from selling or delivering cannabis flower, cannabis product, or hemp-derived consumer products, excluding edible products.

Johnson opened the public hearing at 7:41 p.m.

Bruce Lawrence stated that he owns the other half of the building where this business is located. He stated that his buyers were opening a dedicated dispensary business at this location. He stated that due to the proximity of The Smoke Saloon, their purchase has been crushed. He explained that the business looking to open is not at all similar to the 5D dispensary. He stated that originally, the City was supposed to have four cannabis licenses, not only two. He stated he would just like to ensure that his building sale can continue to take place. He stated that he is in favor of this CUP request. He stated that he is requesting that the 1000 ft buffer between cannabis businesses be amended, abolished, or adjusted.

Ramadan Hussein stated that he is the owner of The Smoke Saloon. He stated that he has had the license for over 2 years. He noted that he will take care of the issue with the signs.

Johnson closed the public hearing at 8:01 p.m.

Pagnac noted that she has no issues with the request.

Downie noted that as long as the requirements are met, he has no issue.

Commissioner Pagnca moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to recommend approval of the CUP to City Council with the conditions set forth in the provided Resolution. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

This item goes before City Council on December 8, 2025.

9.0 Public Hearing – Consider a request for a Conditional Use Permit for a Cannabis Microbusiness for 5D Dispensary at 18447 Highway 65 NE, Unit B

Gerard reviewed the staff's report stating staff received an application from Brittney Yares for a CUP to allow the operation of a cannabis microbusiness located at 18447 Highway 65 NE, Suite. City Code defines a Cannabis Microbusiness as: "A cannabis business that grows cannabis plants from seed or immature plant to mature plant, harvests the cannabis flower from a mature plant, makes cannabis and/or hemp concentrate, manufactures artificially derived cannabinoids, adult-use cannabis products,

lowerpotency hemp edibles, and/or hemp-derived consumer products, and sells immature cannabis plants and seedlings, adult-use cannabis flower, adult-use cannabis products, lower-potency hemp edibles, hemp-derived consumer products, and other products authorized by law to other cannabis businesses and to consumers, including on-site consumption. The applicant is proposing to operate a Cannabis Microbusiness out of 5D Dispensary, an existing business selling “holistic wellness products” according to its website.

Gerard stated that this property is guided Commercial and zoned B-3 – Highway Commercial. The properties to the north and south are guided and zoned the same. The properties to the east are guided Mixed Use and zoned MXU – Mixed Use. Highway 65 borders the western side of the property. Per City Code Appendix A, Section 47, “Cannabis Microbusiness” requires a CUP within the B-3 – Highway Commercial Zoning District.

Gerard stated that issuance of a CUP by the City does not entitle or ensure the granting of a license by the State. The applicant is subject to all rules, regulations, and inspections required by the OCM for the issuance of a cannabis microbusiness license. A CUP is one of many items required in this process.

Johnson opened the public hearing at 8:08 p.m.

Emily Shide stated that she is a new resident of the City. She stated that this would be a great addition to the City.

Brittany Yares stated that she owns other businesses in the City. She noted that she has lived in the City her whole life. She added that her business is holistic and educational to the community. She noted that they are only retail and everything will be prepackaged.

Johnson closed the public hearing at 8:13 p.m.

Commissioner Downie moved and Commissioner Pagnac seconded to recommend approval to City Council with the conditions set forth in the provided Resolution. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

This item goes before City Council on December 8, 2025.

10.0 Consider a Site Plan Review for AMBA East Bethel Commercial at PID# 32-33-23-21-0012

Gerard reviewed the staff’s report stating staff received a complete application from AMBA Holdings LLC for a Site Plan Review to allow the construction of AMBA East Bethel Commercial, a multi-tenant commercial building proposed to contain a daycare and 3 retail units.

Gerard stated that this lot is 4.43 acres. The applicant is proposing to construct a 20,400 sq. ft. commercial building, including an 11,860 square foot daycare space and 8,400 square feet of space to be divided between 3 retail units. The applicant has provided a floor plan of the building showing the proposed daycare space. Tenants have not been identified for the retail units at this time. This property is zoned B-3 – Highway Commercial and guided Commercial. The properties to the south are guided and zoned the same. The properties to the north are guided Mixed Use and zoned MXU – Mixed Use. The properties to the west are guided and zoned I – Light Industrial. Highway 65 borders the eastern side of the property.

Gerard stated that a site plan review is required for all new construction commercial buildings. A daycare facility and most retail businesses are permitted uses within the B-3 – Highway Commercial Zoning District. Tenants have not been identified for the retail units on the site, and, if a potential tenant proposes a use that is not listed as a permitted use under the Zoning Code, the tenant will be required to obtain all necessary land use approvals and/or applicable licenses to operate.

Downie noted that he sees no reason to deny the request.

Commissioner Pagnac moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to recommend approval to City Council with the conditions set forth in the provided Resolution. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously**

This item goes before City Council on December 8, 2025.

11.0 Accept the Resignation of Commissioner Tanner Balfany

Johnson read his email stating his reason for resigning. He noted that it is due to personal reasons and time restraints.

Commissioner Jorgensen moved and Commissioner Downie seconded to accept Tanner Balfany's resignation. Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

12.0 Staff Updates

Gerard stated that, as mentioned previously, there is a posting on the City website for a Senior Planner position. She noted that she submitted her resignation at the beginning of November, and her last day will be December 12, 2025.

13.0 Adjournment

Commissioner Pagnac moved and Commissioner Johnson seconded to adjourn at 8:25 pm.

Johnson asked any discussion? To the motion, all in favor say aye. **All in favor.** Johnson asked any opposed? That motion passes. **Motion passes unanimously.**

Submitted by:

Sylvia Rokosz

TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.