

Commissioner Bjorkland indicated he could not support the graphic portion of the sign request. He explained the scale of the signs was also a concern for him.

Commissioner Jacobson recommended a finding be drafted to state not all businesses within this district can disregard the sign code standards.

Commissioner Burlingame moved and Commissioner Bjorklund seconded a motion to recommend approval of Planning Case 26-001 for a Sign Standard Adjustment through the Site Plan Review process to install up to 163 square feet in wall signage, 72 square feet in graphic signage, and 33.5 square feet in freestanding signage at 3535 Pine Tree Drive based on the findings of fact and the submitted plans, as amended by the conditions in the February 4, 2026, report to the Planning Commission adding a finding of fact that reads: The Planning Commission finds the requested sign standard adjustment is appropriate due to the public emergency services use of the property and the functional need for clear identification and that approval of this request was based on the specific land use and site context and does not constitute a general precedent for Sign District 7.

Commissioner Bjorklund reiterated that he would be voting against this request because he believed the signage was serving marketing purposes, was not needed at the proposed scale and was too costly for the public.

The motion carried 6-1 (Commissioner Bjorklund opposed).

C. Planning Case 25-016 – 3628 Connelly Avenue – Site Plan Review – No Public Hearing Required

Senior Planner Fransen stated the Applicant has submitted a land use application for Site Plan Review and Variances at the Subject Property. The Applicant seeks to purchase the property and relocate an existing retail business, Scale Model Supplies, from Saint Paul to Arden Hills. The Subject Property is owned by Waters Edge Enterprises Inc., and the building is occupied by JV Pallets, a company that manufactures and recycles wood pallets. The existing use is an existing nonconforming use that has been in operation as a light industrial/manufacturing and warehousing site since 1959. The B-2 zoning district today does not allow this use as a principal use. The proposed retail use is permitted within the B-2 zoning district.

Senior Planner Fransen explained the proposal includes reconfiguring access to the parking lot and restriping parking spaces within the existing parking lot. Three existing parking spaces, partially located within the right-of-way, are proposed to be removed and replaced with landscaped areas. The Applicant proposes to convert an overhead door to a standard retail dual door entryway. Other minor modifications to the exterior of the structure are proposed for safe and convenient access to the structure for customers.

Senior Planner Fransen reported the proposal includes a request to allow for fewer on-site parking spaces than required in the Zoning Code. The Applicant states the existing parking lot accommodates up to 24 parking spaces and that this number is sufficient to operate the business. Scale Model Supplies has been in business for more than 43 years. The store specializes in model trains and model kits as well as other hobby-related products. The business owner seeks to downsize from a 20,000 square foot space located in Saint Paul and find a space compatible with growing the online sales side of the business. The Applicant anticipates using approximately 7,500 square feet for retail sales and the remaining 1,800 square feet would be allocated for

office, storage, restrooms, and utilities. The Subject Property would allow for a combination of retail space for direct sales and inventory space for both direct and online sales.

Senior Planner Fransen indicated the business is open Monday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. with typically four (4) employees on site at a given time. The business receives deliveries from standard-size courier vans and does not regularly use overhead doors or a loading dock. The Applicant states these operations are likely to continue. The Applicant states that on the busiest days, the business does not require more than 22 parking spaces at one time. Recent checks showed that at the current location, a maximum of 13 spaces have been used at one time, and the average number of parked cars is eight. The store is a destination for customers who plan their visit, know what they are looking for, and do not linger for long periods of time. Therefore, sales are typically spread throughout the day, and the existing parking lot will accommodate the need.

Senior Planner Fransen reviewed the Plan Evaluation and provided the Findings of Fact for review:

General Findings:

1. The Subject Property is located within the General Business District designated for Community Mixed Uses on the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.
2. The Subject Property is zoned B-2 General Business.
3. The Subject Property contains an existing nonconforming principal structure and existing nonconforming setbacks, landscaping and parking lot.
4. The Subject Property has been used for manufacturing continuously since 1959. Manufacturing is not a permitted use in the B-2 General Business District.
5. The Applicant submitted site plan review and variance applications to establish a retail sales use in an existing manufacturing and warehousing facility at 3628 Connelly Avenue. Retail sales is a permitted use in the B-2 General Business District.
6. Site Plan Review is required for conversions from one permitted use to another permitted use when the new use has a greater off-street parking requirement than the existing use. In the parking requirements table, manufacturing use falls under the category of Other Business and Industry, which requires a minimum of 1 for each 1,000 square feet of floor area, or 10 required parking spaces. The minimum number of off-street parking spaces required for retail sales use is 1 for each 150 square feet of gross retail sales floor space. The Applicant proposes to dedicate 7,500 square feet of the structure sales floor space, which would require 50 off street parking spaces.
7. The Zoning Code requires 50 parking spaces for a retail use with Applicant is seeking site plan approval to operate a retail sales use with 24 off street parking spaces where the Zoning Code requires 50 parking spaces.
8. The Applicant is seeking a variance from design standards in Section 1325.06 related to required parking location, parking islands, landscaping, boulevard trees, and window and door openings.
9. The Applicant is proposing to remove three existing parking spaces that encroach on the right-of-way from Connelly Avenue and to increase the landscaped area on the property.
10. The Applicant requests to waive the requirement for a traffic study. The Applicant offers sufficient data in the application to demonstrate the proposed use will not result in a large amount of additional traffic and that the current conditions of the site can support the anticipated traffic.
11. The proposed plan does not conflict with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Code or the Comprehensive Development Plan for the City.

12. The proposed use is not anticipated to create a negative impact on the immediate area or the community as a whole.
13. The proposed plan will not produce any permanent noise, odors, vibration, smoke, dust, air pollution, heat, liquid, or solid waste, and other nuisance characteristics.
14. The proposed plan is not expected to have significant impact on traffic or parking conditions.
15. A public hearing is not required for site plan review.
16. Property owners within 500 feet of the subject property were notified of the application as established in city code.

Variance Findings:

17. The Applicant is seeking variances from design standards in Section 1325.06 related to required parking location, parking islands, landscaping, boulevard trees, and window and door openings.
18. Variances are only permitted when they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.
19. The proposed is in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the ordinance.
20. The proposed is a reasonable use of the property that would not be allowed under the rules of the Zoning Code without the requested variance.
21. The proposed would not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.
22. The variance request is not based on economic considerations alone.
23. A public hearing is not required for variance requests

Senior Planner Fransen reviewed the motion options available to the Planning Commission for Planning Case 25-016 for a site plan review and variance to establish a retail sales use at 3628 Connelly Avenue:

1. Recommend Approval with Conditions

1. The project shall be completed in accordance with the submitted plans as amended by the conditions of approval. Any significant changes to these plans, as determined by the Community Development Director, shall require review and approval by the Planning Commission and City Council.
2. The proposed parking area shall conform to all other regulations in the City Code.
3. A Building Permit shall be obtained for alterations to the existing principal structure.
4. All light poles, including base, shall be shoebox style, downward directed, with high pressure sodium lamps or LED and flush lenses. Other than wash or architectural lighting, attached security lighting shall be shoebox style, downward directed with flush lenses. In addition, any lighting under canopies (building entries) shall be recessed and use a flush lens.
5. A Right-of-Way permit shall be obtained from the City's Engineering Department prior to working in the right-of-way including, but not limited to parking lot resurfacing, driveway apron installation, and installing curb and gutter.
6. Curb and gutter must be installed according to the City's standard plate.
7. A Grading and Erosion permit shall be obtained from the City's Engineering Department prior to commencing any grading, land disturbance or utility activities greater than 2,500 square feet. The Applicants shall be responsible for obtaining any permits necessary from other agencies, including but not limited to Rice Creek Watershed District and Ramsey County prior to the start of any site activities.

Verification of approved permits or documentation from other agencies that a permit is not necessary shall be provided to the City.

8. A separate sign permit shall be required for each sign on the site.

9. Any future trash enclosure shall use gates and be constructed on three sides using the similar or complementary materials, colors, and patterns used on the building. Locations shall be approved by the Planning Department.

10. All disturbed boulevards shall be restored with sod. All areas of the site, where practical, shall be sodded or seeded and maintained. The property owner shall mow and maintain all site boulevards to the curb line of the public streets.

2. Recommend Approval as Submitted
3. Recommend Denial
4. Table

Chair Collins opened the floor to Commissioner comments.

Commissioner Jacobson asked if the current business was leaving the community.

Senior Planner Fransen reported this was the case. She explained the applicant would be purchasing the site.

Commissioner Jacobson stated she appreciated all of the improvements that would be made to the site. She inquired if the parking lot could be altered in such a way that it would drive through to the next property.

Senior Planner Fransen explained the adjacent property was private and there was not a city street between the two properties. She commented on the grade change between the two properties, noting a through roadway would not be feasible.

Commissioner Jacobson requested further information on the right-of-way to the left that was in yellow on the map. She stated it appears there was not much area for landscaping.

Senior Planner Fransen indicated this area was showing the constraints for the landscaped area. She reported this type of request did not require a full landscaping plan but noted the applicant has indicated a willingness to plant trees.

Commissioner Jacobson questioned if runoff from the building should be a concern.

Senior Planner Fransen commented if there was a change to the land area over 2,500 square feet a grading and erosion permit would be required. She did not anticipate downspouts would fall under this category.

Community Development Director Reilly clarified that the building official and public works staff would ensure runoff from one property was not going to another. He reported staff would work with the applicant to ensure water was going to the right place.

Commissioner Bjorklund inquired why this building was allowed to exist in its current condition.

Community Development Director Reilly stated like most cities, staff responds to complaints when addressing the City’s nuisance ordinance. He explained because the applicant had brought forward a new use for the property, the site would now be brought into compliance with City Code. He was confident that the new owner would own and operate the property within the City’s standards.

Commissioner Bjorkland indicated the number of parking spaces was only 24 when 50 parking spaces are required.

Senior Planner Fransen reported this was the case.

Commissioner Birken explained the business only required 13 parking spaces.

Community Development Director Reilly reported the applicant has addressed the parking requirement by stating their business does not have the same level of traffic as other retail uses. He indicated the City’s parking requirements are quite significant compared to neighboring communities.

Chair Collins commented the Commission would not see this request if the retail use was not included in the application.

Senior Planner Fransen stated this was correct.

Chair Collins stated he appreciated all of the site cleanup work and investments the applicant would be making in this property. He invited the applicant to come forward at this time.

Bruce Gardner, owner of Scale Model Supplies, introduced himself to the Commission and noted he was available for comments or questions.

Commissioner Lindau asked if the 22 parking spaces onsite would meet the needs of the business.

Mr. Gardner stated this would be an adequate number of parking spaces. He anticipated there would be a boost in business after the move but noted he has never needed more than 22 parking spaces for his business.

Commissioner Birken inquired if the trees on the far side of the building.

Mr. Gardner explained these trees have been removed.

Commissioner Birken encouraged the applicant to consider planting trees along this stretch of greenspace.

Mr. Gardner stated he would be open to this but noted the trees would not be visible to the public.

Commissioner Bjorklund questioned how the building space would be used.

Mr. Gardner indicated a large portion of the building was set up as storage that he would not be using. He commented 9,500 square feet of the space would be used for retail space. He noted his 6,000 square foot slot track would not be making the move to his new facility.

Commissioner Jacobson stated this would be a great tenant and business for the community. She looked forward to the proposed improvements for this building and supported this Planning Case moving forward.

Commissioner Lindau indicated he supported this Planning Case moving forward as well.

Commissioner Burlingame questioned if a traffic study should be completed for this Planning Case. He stated overall this would be a net improvement for the property.

Senior Planner Fransen explained the Planning Commission could make a recommendation to waive the traffic study requirement.

Chair Collins moved and Commissioner Lindau seconded a motion to recommend approval of Planning Case 25-016 for a Site Plan Review and Variance to establish a retail sales use at 3628 Connelly Avenue based on the findings of fact and the submitted plans, as amended by the conditions in the February 4, 2026, report to the Planning Commission adding Condition 11 to read: The Planning Commission recommends waiving the traffic study. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

UNFINISHED AND NEW BUSINESS

Community Development Director Reilly reported Boston Scientific submitted a request in writing to suspend the application indefinitely. Subsequently city staff has learned that the firm intends to withdraw the application for the noise wall. He noted that Boston Scientific stated an intent to remove cottonwood trees sometime this year. City staff awaits further information from Boston Scientific.

REPORTS

A. Report from the City Council

Councilmember Weber provided the Commission with an update from the City Council. He stated the Council has been discussing affordable housing and noted the Planning Commission would be seeing something soon. He discussed the recent items that had been addressed by the Council noting immigration enforcement was discussed. He thanked the public for all of their comments. He reported the Council would consider resolutions or ordinances at their next meeting in order to do what the City could in these difficult times. He commented on the JDA meeting, which was held on Monday, February 2. He stated the County has brought forward the idea of changing the trail widths and distances between lighting fixtures on both sides of the spine road. He indicated an amendment to the TRC would be required for the trail width and lighting spacing. He reported the JDA has asked the County to consider how to move the Rice Creek Commons project forward without a lead developer.

B. Planning Commission Comments and Requests