



DATE: March 9, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
Jessica Jagoe, City Administrator

FROM: Elena Fransen, AICP, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Planning Case #26-001 – No Public Hearing Required
Applicant: Lake Johanna Fire Department
Property Location: 3535 Pine Tree Drive
Request: Sign Standard Adjustment (Site Plan Review)

Budgeted Amount:	Actual Amount:	Funding Source:
N/A	N/A	N/A

Council Should Consider

Motion to approve, table, or deny the following:

- Adoption of Resolution 2026-013 for Planning Case 26-001 to allow a Sign Standard Adjustment through the Site Plan Review process for the property located at 3535 Pine Tree Drive (“Subject Property”). Lake Johanna Fire Department (“The Applicant”) proposes to install 235 square feet of signage on the building, including a graphic sign, and 33.5 square feet of signage on a 79 square foot freestanding monument.

Background

1. Overview of Request

The Applicant proposes installing two wall signs totaling 163 square feet and one graphic sign totaling 72 square feet on the eastern elevation of the building for a total of 235 square feet of signage on the building. The Applicant also proposes to install a 79 square foot freestanding monument on the property with a total of 33.5 square feet in signage.

The Applicant is seeking flexibility through the Site Plan Review process for a sign standard adjustment for size of proposed wall and freestanding signs and for type with the proposed graphic sign. The proposed signage would not be permitted without an approved sign standard adjustment.

2. Planning Case Background

In Planning Case 24-009, the Applicant applied for a Master and Final Planned Unit Development to construct a 41,000 square foot headquarters fire station facility which was approved by the City. The proposal included a 30 square foot freestanding monument with 36 square feet of signage and two (2) non illuminated wall signs for a total of 28 square feet to be located on the east and west elevations. At the Planning Commission meeting on July 10, 2024, the Applicant clarified the proposed monument signage and stated their intent to comply with the sign code and that flexibility would not be sought for signage.

Since those approvals in 2024, and prior to applying for required sign permits, the Applicant determined that a change in the proposed signage is needed. The proposed wall signage includes one (1) edge illuminated graphic sign, one (1) non illuminated sign, and one (1) illuminated sign, all to be installed on the east elevation of the building. No wall signage is proposed for the west elevation. The proposal includes one (1) non illuminated monument sign.

Based on the signage described, the previous PUD Amendment approval, and the requirements for the Subject Property’s Sign District, staff advised the Applicant of the need to submit a land use application for a sign standard adjustment as described in Chapter 12, Section 1260 of the city’s Code of Ordinances. Adjustments to the requirements and standards for the height, number, type, lighting, area and/or location of a sign may be approved with a Site Plan Review or Planned Unit Development process. The sign flexibility that the Applicant is seeking under this proposal for the Subject Property has been initiated through the Site Plan Review process.

3. Site Data

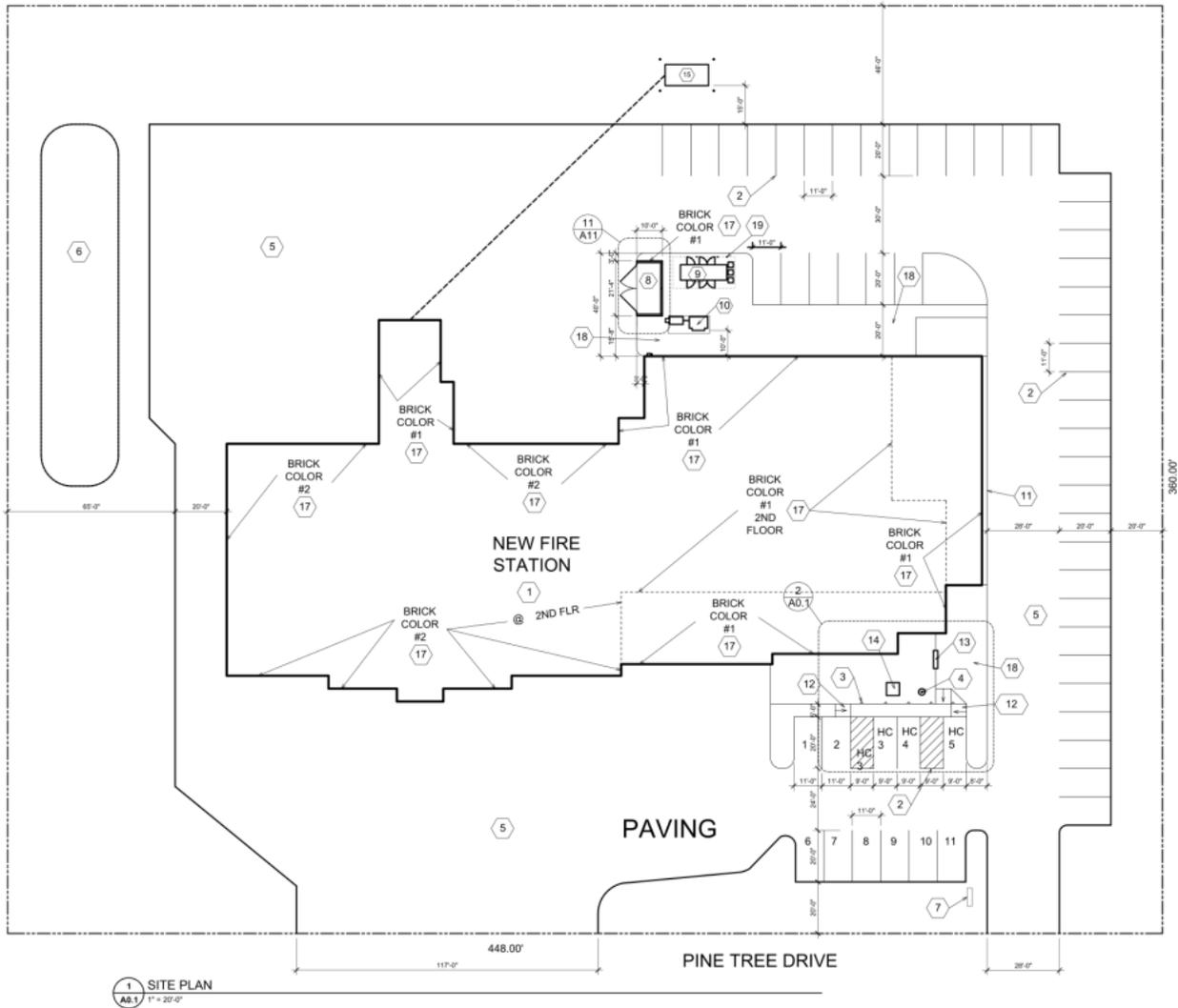
Future Land Use Plan:	Commercial Mixed Use
Existing Land Use:	Public Use
Zoning:	B-2 General Business District
Size (entire property):	3.7 acres (161,172 SF)

4. Existing Conditions

The Subject Property is located in the B-2 General Business Zoning District and is part of Sign District 7. The Subject Property is guided for Community Mixed Use in the 2040 Land Use Plan. Surrounding properties are located in the B-2 General Business and B-3 Service Business Zoning Districts and include a mix of retail and residential uses.

Sign District 7 allows for wall signage with a maximum sign copy area of 45 square feet. The maximum freestanding sign copy area allowed is 25 square feet. The total area of a freestanding sign shall not exceed 1.5 times the permitted sign copy area of a freestanding sign, which is 37.5 square feet for Sign District 7. Sign District 7 does not allow for graphic signs.

Proposed Site Plan



Approvals

1. Site Plan Review

The Applicant proposes to install wall and graphic signage on the eastern elevation of the building and a monument sign on Pine Tree Drive.

The Applicant's request for flexibility is initiated through the Site Plan Review process due to the nature of the sign standard adjustment and the previous land use approvals for the site. It is established in Chapter 12 of the City Code that this flexibility can be granted by a Site Plan Review rather than the full Planned Unit Development amendment process, which would require the drafting of a PUD amendment by the city's legal counsel and subsequent approvals from the Developer of the PUD and the City Council.

The Applicant is not seeking any other flexibility or changes to the site.

Plan Evaluation

Chapter 12, Sign Code Review

1. Sign Standards by Sign District – *Section 1240.02*

The Subject Property is located within the B-2 General Business District and falls under Sign District 7. Sign District 7 includes properties in the I-Flex, Gateway Business, or other commercial or industrial district without frontage on the following roadways: Lexington Avenue, Highway 96, and County Road E. Sign District 7 allows for a maximum of 45 square feet of copy area for wall signage. Wall signs may be illuminated externally or internally. Sign District 7 does not permit graphic signs, which are defined in the Sign Code as a sculpture attached to or sign painted directly on a wall that is primarily symbolic or representational in nature and not alpha or numeric in content or copy. Graphic signs are permitted in Sign Districts 4 and 5, where properties have frontage on County Road E east of Highway 51 and on Lexington Avenue South of Interstate 694.

The Applicant is proposing two (2) wall signs, one non illuminated 88 square foot sign reading “Lake Johanna Fire Department” and one internally illuminated 75 square foot sign reading “Station 110,” both on the eastern elevation of the building. Station 110 has been assigned to the fire station on the Subject Property by Ramsey County.

In addition to the two wall signs, the Applicant’s plans include an edge lit graphic logo sign measuring 72 square feet in area that would also be attached to the eastern elevation of the building. The graphic sign depicts a fire phoenix, an image that the Lake Johanna Fire Department adopted in 2014 and distinguishes it from other local fire departments. The phoenix image is also used in the seal on the proposed monument sign and is featured on the vehicles associated with the Lake Johanna Fire Department. No wall signage is proposed for the west elevation of the building. The Applicant is requesting flexibility to allow the facility wall signage to exceed the permitted 45 square feet by 190 square feet for a combined total of 235 square feet.

The east elevation of the fire department building measures approximately 30 feet tall by 292 feet wide for an approximate total elevation square footage of 8,764 square feet. The proposed signage would cover 2.7 percent of the total east building elevation and 5 percent of the east elevation that is not clear glass. As described, the proposed would be comparable to the main elevations for four other nearby properties. Additional information is included in the table below.

Table 1. Wall Signage and Elevations for nearby properties.

Property	Sign District	Elevation Area	Wall Sign Area	Percent of Wall Sign Area to Elevation Area
<i>Proposed</i>	<i>Sign District 7</i>	<i>East – 8,764 square feet</i>	<i>235 square feet</i>	<i>2.7 percent</i>
Goodwill – 1103 County Road E	Sign District 5	East – ~3,375 square feet	60 square feet (approved November 2025)	1.8 percent
Cub Foods – 3717 Lexington Avenue	Sign District 5	East - ~10,560 square feet	513 square feet	4.8 percent

Walgreen's – 3585 Lexington Avenue	Sign District 5	East - ~3,452 square feet	49 square feet	1.4 percent
Flaherty's – 1273 County Road E	Sign District 4	South – ~2,329 square feet	216 square feet	9.3 percent

Sign District 7 allows for a maximum of 25 feet of copy area for freestanding signage with a maximum height of eight (8) feet. Freestanding signs may be externally illuminated. The sign code also requires that the total area of a freestanding sign shall not exceed 1.5 times the permitted sign copy area of a freestanding sign. For Sign District 7, the total area of a freestanding sign shall not exceed 37.5 square feet.

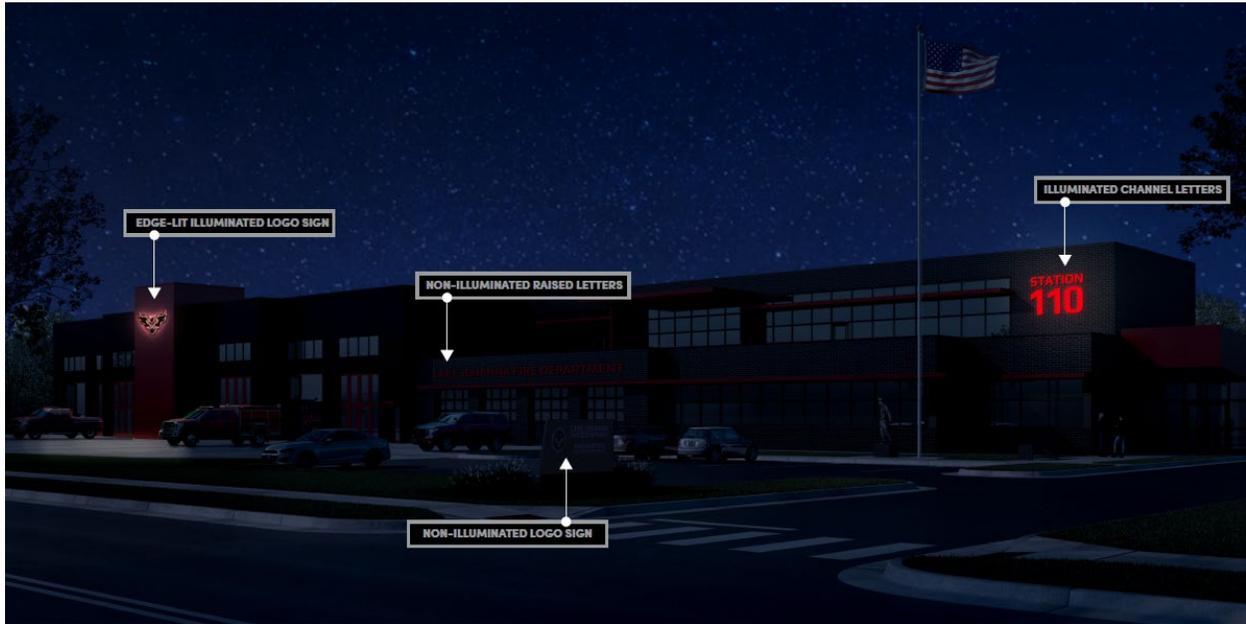
The Applicant is proposing one (1) six-foot tall monument sign that is 79 square feet in area with 33.5 square feet in non illuminated copy. The proposed monument is 2.35 times the proposed sign copy area and exceeds the permitted 37.5 square feet for a freestanding monument sign by 41.5 feet. The proposed sign copy area is 8.5 square feet more than permitted. Flexibility is required for both the proposed freestanding sign copy area and proposed freestanding monument area in excess of what is permitted in Sign District 7.

The Applicant is requesting flexibility to allow for the proposed signage to be installed on the Subject Property. The Subject Property currently does not have any wall, graphic, or monument signage.

Proposed Signage at Eastern Elevation (Day View)



Proposed Signage at Eastern Elevation (Night View)

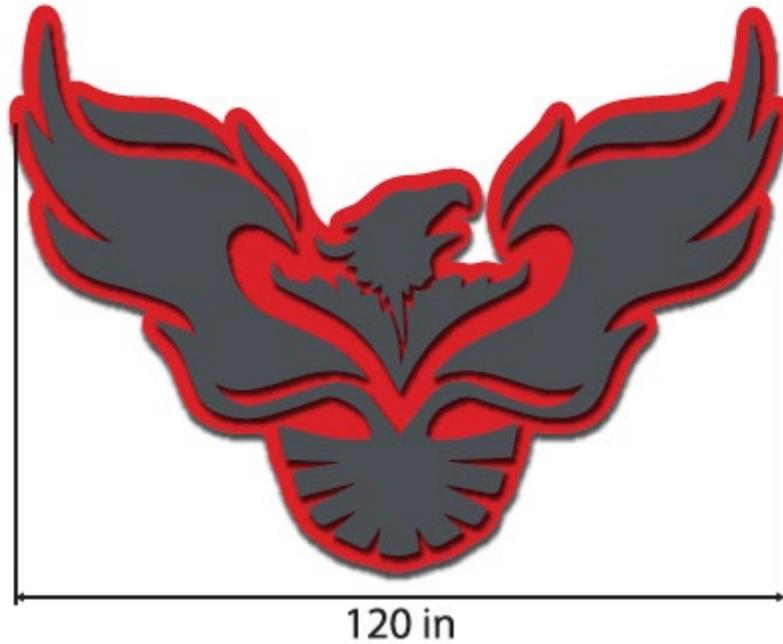


Proposed Wall Signage

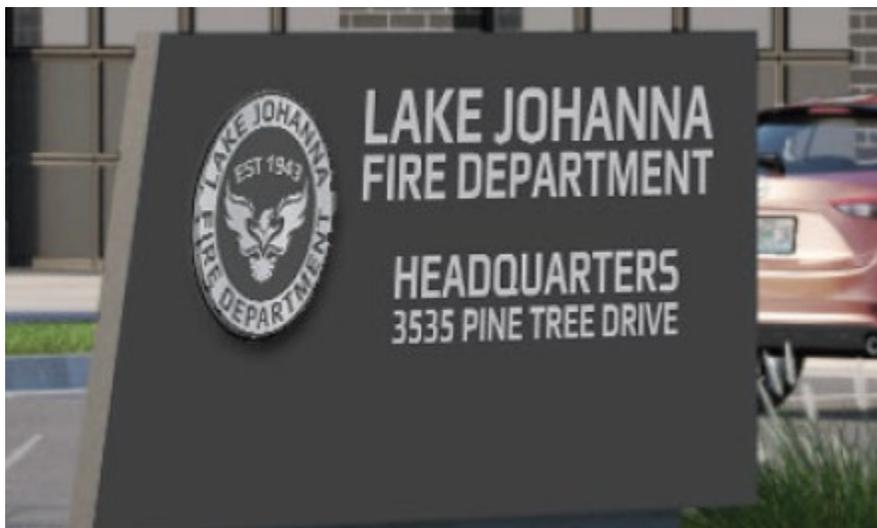
21 1/2 in **LAKE JOHANNA FIRE DEPARTMENT**
588 in

STATION
110
89 3/4 in
120 in

Proposed Graphic Signage



Proposed Monument Signage



2. Sign Standard Adjustments – Section 1260.01

The Applicant requests flexibility for additional square footage of wall signage area, monument signage, and graphic signage. City Code Section 1260.01, Sign Standard Adjustments states

“adjustments to the requirements and standards for the height, number, type, lighting, area, and/or location of a sign or signs established by this Chapter may be approved with a Site Plan Review or a Planned Unit Development process.” To approve any sign standard adjustment, the City Council must determine if the proposed signage meets the sign standard adjustment criteria. The criteria of Subd. 1 or Subd. 2, as applicable, shall be satisfied, and the necessary criteria of Subd. 3 shall be satisfied:

1. Subd. 1 There are site conditions which require a sign adjustment to allow the sign to be reasonably visible from a street immediately adjacent to the site.

This criterion does not apply.

2. Subd. 2 The sign adjustment will allow a sign of exceptional design or a style that will enhance the area or that is more consistent with the architecture and design of the site.

According to the Applicant, the proposed signage is of exceptional design to both enhance and coordinate with the architecture and design of the site. The stature of the signage is scaled appropriately for the structure. The structure has a 90-foot setback from the front property line on Pine Tree Drive. Signage lighting is soft and does not inhibit night vision and the direction of the signage is toward adjacent commercial properties. The font used is ADA-compliant and enhances readability for individuals with disabilities, with clear, distinct letter shapes and sufficient contrast.

3. Subd. 3 The sign adjustment will not result in a sign that is inconsistent with the purpose of the zoning district in which the property is located or the current land use.

This criterion must be met. According to the Applicant, the proposed signage is consistent with the purpose of the B-2 General Business Zoning District and will not negatively impact adjacent properties or residents. As an emergency services facility, the structure must be easily identifiable by the public. The Applicant notes that the amount and placement of signage would be similar to retail businesses in the vicinity.

1355.04 Procedural Requirements for Specific Applications

Section 1355.04, Subd. 5 of the Arden Hills Zoning Code states that a public hearing is not required for Site Plan Review, but neighboring property owners shall be notified. Notification was prepared in accordance with City policy.

Findings of Fact

The Planning Commission reviewed this application at the February 4, 2026, meeting and offers the following findings of fact for your consideration. Discussion comments included noting the scale of the building, the setback of the building from Pine Tree Drive, and the intended use of the building. During the meeting, the Planning Commission voted to propose an additional finding, “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. The approval of this request is based on the specific land use and site context and does not constitute a general precedence for Sign District 7,” as an additional finding of fact.

1. The Applicant applied for Site Plan Review to install 163 square feet in wall signage and 72 square feet in graphic signage on the eastern elevation of the building and install a 79 square foot freestanding monument with 33.5 square feet of sign copy at the subject property, 3535 Pine Tree Drive.
2. On December 9, 2024, the City Council approved a Planned Unit Development Agreement for the Subject Property.
3. The Subject Property is located in the B-2 General Business District and is guided as Community Mixed Use on the 2040 Land Use Plan.
4. The Subject Property is located in Sign District 7, where the maximum wall signage permitted is 45 square feet.
5. In Sign District 7, the maximum freestanding sign copy area permitted is 25 square feet.
6. In Sign District 7, the maximum freestanding monument area permitted is 37.5 square feet.
7. Graphic signs are not permitted in Sign District 7.
8. The Subject Property has no existing signage.
9. Adjustments to the requirements and standards for the height, number, type, lighting, area, and/or location of a sign or signs established by this Chapter may be approved with a Site Plan Review or a Planned Unit Development process as described for in Section 1320 and 1355 of the Zoning Code.
10. Through the Site Plan Review process, the Applicant requests 163 square feet in wall signage and 72 square feet in graphic signage, bringing the total building wall signage to 235 square feet.
11. The Applicant requests 33.5 square feet in freestanding sign copy area.
12. The Applicant requests 79 square feet in freestanding monument area.
13. The proposed signage plan does not conflict with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Code or the Comprehensive Development Plan for the City.
14. The application is not anticipated to create a negative impact on the immediate area or the community as a whole.
15. The proposed plan will not produce any permanent noise, odors, vibration, smoke, dust, air pollution, heat, liquid, or solid waste, and other nuisance characteristics.
16. A public hearing is not required for Site Plan Review.
17. 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. The approval of this request is based on the specific land use and site context and does not constitute a general precedence for Sign District 7.

Options and Motion Language

The Planning Commission reviewed this application at the February 4, 2026, meeting. At that time, it recommended approval with conditions of the application from Lake Johanna Fire Department for the proposed signage by a 6-1 vote. The following are motion language options for the City Council to consider:

1. Approval with Conditions: Move to *adopt* Resolution 2026-013 approving 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, 33.5 square feet in freestanding sign copy area, and 79 square feet of freestanding monument area at 3535 Pine Tree Drive, based on the findings of fact and the submitted plans, as amended by the conditions in the March 9, 2026, report to the City Council:

- 1) The project shall be completed in accordance with the plans submitted. 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) A separate sign permit shall be required for each proposed sign.
 - 3) All signage shall meet all other requirements of Sign District 7.
2. Approval as Submitted: Move to *adopt* Resolution 2026-013 approving 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, 33.5 square feet in freestanding sign copy area, and 79 square feet of freestanding monument area at 3535 Pine Tree Drive, based on the findings of fact and the submitted plans in the March 9, 2026, report to the City Council.
 3. Denial: Move to *deny* 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, 33.5 square feet in freestanding sign copy area, and 79 square feet of freestanding monument area at 3535 Pine Tree Drive, based on the following findings of fact: *findings to deny should specifically reference the reasons for denial.*
 4. Table: Move to *table* 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 sign copy area, and 79 square feet of freestanding monument area at 3535 Pine Tree Drive: *a specific reason and/or information request should be included with a motion to table.*

Public Notice and Comments

Staff published a notice in the *Pioneer Press* as required by City procedure on February 25, 2026. Public notices were mailed out on February 25, 2026. The mailing was sent to neighbors within 500 feet of the subject parcel. Staff have not received any public comments regarding this application at the time of report drafting.

Deadline for Agency Actions

The City of Arden Hills received the completed application for this request on January 6, 2026. Pursuant to Minnesota State Statute, the city must act on this request by March 4, 2026 (60 days), unless the city provides the petitioner with written reasons for an additional 60-day review period. The sixty (60) day timeline begins on the day the City is in receipt of what has been determined to be a complete application.

Based on the date of completeness, and the city meeting schedule for February and March, the city provided the Applicant with written reasons to extend the City's review period from 60 days to 120 days so that the planning case may be heard by the City Council on March 9, 2026. With consent of the applicant, the City may extend the review period beyond the initial 120 days.

Attachments

- A. Land Use Application
- B. Location Map
- C. Applicant Narrative
- D. Applicant Sign Plan
- E. Draft Planning Commission Minutes
- F. Planning Commission Memo
- G. Resolution 2026-013
- H. Presentation