



**COTTAGE GROVE PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**12800 Ravine Parkway South**  
**Cottage Grove, MN 55016**

**June 23, 2025**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - 7:00 P.M.**

The Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission was held in the Council Chamber and telecast on Local Government Cable Channel 16.

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Frazier called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Pradeep Bhat-Here; Ken Brittain-Here; Jessica Fisher-Here; Evan Frazier-Here; Eric Knable-Here; John Stechmann-Here; Terrence Woodman-Here.

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Emily Schmitz, Community Development Director; Max Erickson, Planner; Justin Olsen, City Council Liaison.

**3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

***Knable made a motion to approve the agenda. Brittain seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (7-to-0 vote).***

**4. OPEN FORUM**

Frazier opened the Open Forum and asked if anyone wished to address the Planning Commission on any non-agenda item. No one spoke. Frazier closed the Open Forum.

**5. CHAIR'S EXPLANATION OF THE PUBLIC HEARING PROCESS**

Frazier explained the purpose of the Planning Commission, which serves in an advisory capacity to the City Council, and that the City Council makes all final decisions. In addition, he explained the process of conducting a public hearing and requested that any person wishing to speak should go to the podium and state their full name and address for the public record.

**6. PUBLIC HEARINGS AND APPLICATIONS**

**A. Dressely Accessory Structure - Case CUP/V2025-015**

**A Conditional Use Permit to exceed the maximum total accessory structure square footage permitted in the R-2 Zoning District, which is 2,000 square feet. The applicant has also applied for a Variance to allow for an accessory structure to be placed in front of the principal structure, and a Variance from the required architectural materials for accessory structures.**

Erickson summarized the staff report and recommended approval based on the findings of fact and subject to the conditions stipulated in the staff report.

Frazier asked if there were any questions for staff, and there were none. Frazier asked at this time if the applicant would like to add anything additional and asked that he state his name and address for us.

Good Evening, my name is Al Dressley, I live at 6255 Hadley Avenue South. I am just as far as the variances and some of the things that I've looked at, I want to thank Max Erickson and also Samantha for helping me walk through the paperwork on all this. It's not an easy task to go through all this paperwork. One of the things I wanted to point out is my neighbor to the left of me also has a metal barn that had a permit that was granted in 1997, that barn is 30 x 40 feet. I've got his approval, got two neighbors on both sides of me to have this built. The difference is I think when we think of metal buildings, we think of just a plain old metal building, but I've got a lot of features on this building, insulation, cosmetically outside with eyebrows over the doors, windows; it's not going to be just a plain old shed that's out there. Another thing I wanted to make sure that everybody knows is that if you're familiar with this land or this location, which I ask if you ever get a chance to drive by, you won't be able to see this from the road, just as my neighbors won't see this from the road. And finally, what I think is important is I've been there since 1994, and next to me I recognize Ken and some of you, I think, but in 1994, I moved in, and I was under the assumption that this was land that I could do some things on, that's why you buy these larger lots. In 2017, around me, there was a lot of Codes changed for a developer to come in; they were supposed to be three-to-five acre lots, and now we're got ¼-acre lots with 200 houses plus. I understand that it's an opportunity for the City to get tax money on those, and all I'm asking for is if we do that for developers, I've been there since 1993, I've paid my taxes. I'm asking just to have something in front of my house. Unfortunately, not to mention my septic that the City wanted to put water in, but they didn't want to run it all the way back, so that's why my septic is back there; but there's also a creek back there that I've asked the DNR if I could reroute to do things, and they absolutely said no, I can't reroute that because it's a natural. So, with that said, I guess that's what I'm going for. I watch these Planning Commissions quite often, and I see a lot of Codes change. I'm just asking for something that my neighbor has, something that won't infringe on any of my neighbors, its not going to be an eyesore of any sort, and no one's going to actually see it, so that's it. Thank you for your time.

Frazier said all right, thank you. Any questions for the applicant.

Fisher said so, in the packet there is a photo of a metal barn. Is that your neighbor's? Dressley replied no, my neighbor's doesn't even have windows. I didn't take a picture of my neighbor's. Fisher said okay, where did you get the photo of the one that you included in your application? Dressley replied I don't know if I gave that or if that, I think I just got that off the internet. Fisher said okay. Dressley said but again, mine's even got more cosmetic things than that does; I mean, I'm having a door made and all these other things, so. Fisher said okay, thank you.

Woodman said so, one of the concerns that I know you brought up was the expense of building it, and I know we're not considering expense in this, but what other alternatives did you look at? Is there, like could this structure, this same exact structure be just thrown up with vinyl, or is it all constructed as one thing, so what's? Dressley replied well, its not constructed as one thing. One of the other things that I probably didn't mention is you know there are a lot of people using steel now, instead of wood. First of all, it's stronger, it lasts longer than the wood; if I was to put up a wood shed or storage unit, I would have to be maintaining that, the wood's going to, after so many years, I'm going to have to fix that. The difference is it's almost three times as much, I looked at it because one of the things that Eric pointed out right away is, you know, look at some of the options that you might have and I did. And it's at least three times as much as what I can get a metal building for, and I think that's why you're seeing more and more buildings out there be metal; you're seeing roofs all metal, a lot of things are going metal just because of the price. Woodman said thank you.

Frazier said you mentioned that your neighbor has a metal outbuilding, and I think you said that was in 1997? Dressley replied yep, I've got the permit from 1997. So, I don't know, you know, the zoning, we understood the zoning, but I don't know what the definition was back then, you know, because we can't find it, Erickson can't find it, what it stated that it had to be, but it was R-2. I thought I was R-1 at one time, but it was R-2 since 1981, but it doesn't state what the definition of R-2 is for building.

Frazier said sure, okay.

Frazier asked if there were any further questions, and none were asked. Frazier said all right, thank you very much.

***Frazier opened the Public Hearing. No one spoke. Frazier closed the Public Hearing.***

Frazier asked if there were any further comments or discussion from the commission.

Woodman said I did drive by, I'm right in the area today, and I am in agreement that there would be no way that this would be visible from the road there, maybe just a couple of visible through the trees type of things, but nothing that would be visual. I also think if you look at the reason for the setbacks that we have in the first requirement, I think that that really comes down to the visual appeal to your neighbors; you know, keeping it off property lines and all of that, but then you look at the reason for the 2012 change is really to prevent brand-new developments going in with mainly metal construction, like we're setting the precedent for the City of what these new builds look like. So, I do think that there's room to approve both, in my opinion, because I don't think going metal disturbs anything in that area, having been from there, driving through there, I don't see any way that that would be a disruption. I know that's not what the recommendation was, but that's my viewpoint is that there really wouldn't be any negative to the City, specifically calling out the harmony of the area. I feel like that area is still a fairly rural little strip of land, and we could look at giving him a variance for that.

Brittain asked can we ask staff a question? Frazier replied yeah, I was going to do so myself, so go ahead. Brittain said okay. So, we have reference to a neighboring property with a shed on it. Are there any other properties that you're aware of in the area that have sheds of this type? Erickson replied there is another shed that is south, I'm forgetting the road it's on, it's pretty close, it's in an R-3, but it was constructed well before, the same thing. That neighbor's shed we have the building permit for, and it shows metal was approved, but I couldn't come across any Code that kind of spoke to that in 1997. And then there's other buildings in the community that are in the R-1 district that prior to the Zoning Code of 2022 Amendment allowed for metal, and the current iteration lays out all residential should be these wooden, vinyl lap. Brittain said okay, thank you.

Frazier said so Max, I guess that was going to be my question as well, then. So, as far as we know, back in 1997, because we had the building plans at least that show that in this area metal was allowed, but we know for sure in 2012, the ordinance changed to say in these areas, R-2, R-3, and down, we had to have wood. R-1 was still allowed to have metal, but now, it was the intent of the Council to say that in every residential district, they had to be a wooden structure with this split brick, vinyl, concrete walls. Am I following kind of the legislative history here? Erickson replied so, we have what it changed from in 2012, and that goes back to 2000, which was after 1997. But before the change in 2012, the language read that it must complement the materials and the color palette of the house, and now they made it more specific, but essentially what you repeated is correct. Frazier said okay. So, the Council then in 2012 said you know, we really want to have these wooden secondary structures in most of these residential areas except for the R-1, which are going to be like the over five acres I think is an R-1, over three acres. And then when we did the rewrite in 2022, Council said actually in all residential areas, we want these same types of structures. Erickson replied that's correct; Frazier said all right, thank you.

Brittain said I agree that you know fundamentally, I don't see any harm being caused by this, but unfortunately, the rules that we're currently bound by from the Zoning ordinances prohibit it. So, while fundamentally I don't have an issue with it, I don't see findings of fact to the level that would constitute granting a variance for the materials.

Fisher asked how big is this lot that your home is on? Erickson replied it is 4.7 acres.

Bhat said I have one quick question. So, the requirement for the building material is for aesthetics or what is the reason behind it? Erickson replied the requirement is to maintain consistency in residential districts, and Emily, maybe you can tap in, but it's to maintain a certain aesthetic and character of the community. Schmitz stated that was the intent in 2012 is to ensure that those materials were consistent with those materials that are permitted on residential homes, right? We have standards for the architectural materials there and we wanted that to be consistent, and to Erickson's point, to be consistent within those residential areas. Bhat said thank you.

Fisher said I'm just having a hard time with this one because I mean, this is a 4.7-acre lot, like I understand that I could not put up a little metal shed on my third of an acre lot, but this is a very large lot in a very densely-wooded area. So, it makes sense to me, like Commissioner Woodman said, like it doesn't cause any harm; however, our variance, the checkboxes we use to grant a variance are not being checked. So, I have a hard time with this one because it's definitely in a gray area, that's my thought on it.

Frazier said I guess I'll add my two cents. I agree with Commissioner Fisher and Commissioner Brittain, you know, in the grand scheme of things, does it seem like that big of a deal to allow this on this specific instance where it seems like it's going to be screened from view, the current neighbors don't care. You know, it is going to create an economic hardship, which again is not sufficient to grant a variance, but it can be part of it is my understanding. No, it doesn't make a ton of sense to me to deny it; however, we are required to follow the rules that the City Council has laid out, and I think what speaks to me most clearly is that

we still had this exception in the R-1 district where you could have an over three-acre parcel and still have these kind of structures that the applicant is asking for today. And just three years ago, the City Council said actually, we don't want that in our community, we want these type of structures that are already in R-2, R-3, R-4, and so, to me, that is a clear indication from City Council that that is their intent of what they want in the community. So, I don't see that there is a variance basis to go from that. Obviously, City Council can tell me I'm wrong and decide differently, that is their prerogative, but based on the history as I know it here today, it is my belief that City Council has given us an instruction of here is what the accessory structure should look like in our community, and these are what should be approved. With that being said, any further comment or discussion?

***Brittain made a motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit and the Variance for the accessory structure as to the location on the property based on the findings of fact and subject to conditions stipulated in the staff report, and a motion to deny the Variance to the architectural materials, subject to stipulations in the staff report. Stechmann seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (7-to-0 vote).***

## 7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

### A. Approval of the May 19, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

*Staff Recommendation: Approve the May 19, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes.*

***Fisher made a motion to Approve the May 19, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes. Bhat seconded. Motion passed unanimously (7-to-0 vote).***

## 8. REPORTS

### A. RECAP OF JUNE 4 AND JUNE 18, 2025 CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Schmitz summarized the actions taken at the June 4 and June 18, 2025 City Council Meetings.

With that, Council Member Justin Olsen is here with us to add anything, and he's typically available for questions. Council Member Olsen said good evening, Mr. Chair and Members of the Commission, it's great to be here with you today. I know you went through some training earlier today with our esteemed City Attorney, Kori Land, I hope you all got a lot out of that. Kori likes to do that training annually, and I think tonight's accessory structure conversation probably leant itself to some of the things that she discussed with you in that training, which is why she does it. So, again, I'm glad you had the opportunity to take some time with her.

One of the things I wanted to mention is as you look around tonight, you probably notice a new face on the commission. The gentleman sitting here to my left and to your right is John Stechmann. John's been a member of the community for quite some time. He was one of two candidates that I interviewed for the open position, and both interviews were absolutely out of the park, just wonderful, either choice would have been a great choice, but I ended up selecting John because the other candidate I think has some additional skills as it relates to maybe our EDA that I'd like to take advantage of. So, please welcome John as a new member of the commission, I think you'll find he'll do a terrific job; I've known John for a little while, and he's one of those guys who does his homework, I'm willing to bet he's driven past this accessory structure seven-or-eight times already, preparing for tonight's meeting. So, welcome.

I also wanted to mention a couple of other things. You heard mention that the Chair said anything decided upon this evening will go to the July 16 City Council Meeting, that's quite a ways from here. We never have a meeting the week of July 4, so that's why there's that delay. But then, after that, we start our every week budget meetings until we figure it out. So, there's going to be a lot of heavy lifting ahead with this budget year, it seems like that happens every year. If you have any recommendations with respect to budget focuses for the City Council, things you might like to see us do more of, less of, etc. in the community, now would be a great time to reach out to a City Council Member or two and sit down and have a cup of coffee and talk about some of those things. We work very hard to maintain a high level of service in the community, and there's always that delicate balance between value and cost. A lot of people know the cost of things, very few people know the value of things, and so, we have to try very hard to communicate value; one of those communication points is we are the second lowest per capita tax community in Washington County, we only fall short of St. Paul Park, and they get over \$1 million a year in Local Government Aid that we don't get. If we had an even playing field, we would be the lowest. We also are a AAA Bond-rated community, and for a

community of our size, that is not an easy thing to accomplish, but because we are very careful with taxpayer dollars, our fee structure, so on and so forth, our amazing staff and our Council work really hard to maintain financial integrity. We have a ten-year Financial Management Plan that we follow very closely, and that has leant itself to the bond houses looking favorably upon our paper, which saves us a whole lot of money in interest anytime we do go to bond, and we want to continue that path. So, those will kind of be our north star as we work through the budget process this year, but your recommendations would be very welcome.

The last thing I wanted to mention and I'll open it up to you for questions is we did have a promotion in our Public Safety Department at our meeting last week. Officer Matt Sorgaard, some of you may know Officer Sorgaard by his partner, Odin, as Officer Sorgaard is a K9 police officer. He and Odin are a tremendous team; in fact, they went to national competitions last year and finished second to the Washington County deputy that actually trained them both. So, he might have taught them everything they know but not everything he knows. Either way, really a great team, and we are grateful that Matt put in for the open sergeant's position here in the City of Cottage Grove and he was ultimately selected. So, he was sworn in last week, had his badge pinned, and has already started working on those sergeant shifts, which tend to run nighttime. Odin will still be his partner, but they'll just have a little bit of extra work to do. So, if you get a chance to see Matt around in the community, make sure you say hello and congratulate him. With that, I'll turn it back to you, Mr. Chair. If anybody has any questions, I'm available.

Frazier said all right, thank you. There were no questions for Council Member Olsen. Frazier said thank you for being here.

## B. RESPONSE TO PLANNING COMMISSION INQUIRIES

Frazier said looking at the minutes from the last meeting, there were two inquiries: One was from Commissioner Bhat about the information that we send to the Met Council about affordable housing and the plan for that, and I think staff was going to provide us with part of the Comprehensive Plan, which we have printed off on the dais for us, so that's completed. I think the other one was also from Commissioner Bhat about kind of like a cheat sheet on setbacks for areas, and I don't know where staff is on that. Schmitz replied we really focus in our staff reports to make sure that we're outlining the Code standard and then what the applicant is proposing, right? So, we'll continue kind of providing that clearly in there, but if we need to think about maybe a handout that's helpful, we can certainly do so. Frazier said all right, thank you.

## C. PLANNING COMMISSION REQUESTS

Frazier asked if there were any requests for staff.

Brittain said in the Land Use Plan here, it lists that we have an airport of 6 acres in Cottage Grove. Where is that? Council Member Olsen replied we have an old airport, that is on Jansen's farm, it actually has an airstrip from World War II on it. Brittain said okay, well, I learned something, so that's a good day.

Woodman said an update on the, we had the agenda item last meeting that was pushed out; do we have an update on where that's at and if it's coming back any time soon? Schmitz replied yes, that developer continues to work on their plans, making some adjustments and tweaks to ensure that they're able to meet our minimum standards. Obviously, before we present that item to you, we want to make sure that we've crossed all our T's and dotted all of our I's so that project is complete. At this time, I don't have the timeline for you when they would be back; they have extended their 60-day timeline to be extended indefinitely, therefore we have time to work through that. So, we're still waiting on that developer to make sure that they've got all of their ducks in a row, per se.

## 9. ADJOURNMENT

***Fisher made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Knable seconded. Motion passed unanimously (7-to-0 vote). The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.***