



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

**August 25, 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-Excused; Ken Brittain-Here; Jessica Fisher-Here; Evan Frazier-Here; Eric Knable-Here; John Stechmann-Here; Terrence Woodman-Absent.

Members Absent: Pradeep Bhat (Excused)  
Terrence Woodman

Staff Present: Emily Schmitz, Community Development Director; Samantha Pierret, Senior Planner; Kelly Becker, Associate Planner; Crystal Raleigh, Assistant City Engineer; Justin Olsen, City Council Liaison.

**3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

***Brittain made a motion to approve the agenda. Fisher seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (5-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. Pine Hill Addition - Cases SP/CUP/V2025-016**

Wold Architects and Engineers, on behalf of South Washington County School District ISD #833, has applied for a Conditional Use Permit and Site Plan Review for building additions at Pine Hill Elementary, 9015 Hadley Avenue South. The additions include approximately 13,300 square feet for a six-classroom addition with a storm shelter area, a small gym addition, and an enclosed freezer addition. Additional interior improvements include renovations to existing special education classrooms, accessibility-toilet upgrades, minor renovations to the kitchen, and long-term

**facility and maintenance work. The applicant also applied for a Variance to expand the classroom addition space into the required 50-foot property line setback.**

Becker 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, none were asked, then Frazier said he had a question. Frazier said he read in the materials that there was a Neighborhood Meeting, and I know per City Code we send out notices of this hearing. I just want to confirm we didn't receive any feedback since in the compilation of the report, we still haven't heard anything back about neighborhood members or people affected by this within the 500 feet. Becker replied that's correct, we haven't gotten any additional verbal or written comments. Frazier said thank you very much.

Fisher said I have a question about the northeast corner with the new infiltration basin. You said right now, there's currently drainage, there's a pipe there that goes into the sewer. Are there any concerns, as that's going to be vacated, with standing water like when it does fill up, having standing water on the school grounds? Will it be fenced or is there any consideration for that? Becker replied great question, but I will refer to Crystal Raleigh, Assistant City Engineer. Raleigh said good evening, Mr. Chair and Commissioner Fisher, that existing pipe will actually remain in place. It would just become part of the School District's Stormwater Management system, so it will still take the water away from their pond, but their pond will be on site there with that existing pipe as an emergency overflow. But it proposes an infiltration basin, meaning it will be dry, it won't have water. Fisher said I misunderstood when it said vacated, I thought that meant that pipe was going away. Raleigh replied no, it's currently within an easement, and the easement will be vacated. Fisher said okay, thank you for clarifying.

Frazier asked if there were any further questions for staff, none were asked. Frazier asked if the applicant would like to speak, and he declined, stated Kelly did a good job and he didn't have anything else to add. Frazier asked if there were any questions for the applicant, none were asked.

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

Frazier asked if there was any discussion by commission.

Stechmann said I was just going to say I noticed there was a recommendation to try to encourage the traffic to move further to the north, a drop-off area. There was some talk about the feasibility of that, which would be preferable, like on Page 207, there was a recommendation of closing the southernmost access point. To avoid the closure of that access point, maybe they could have someone serve as like a traffic marshal to like encourage the people to move forward, kind of like when you go to the airport to pick up people, you have the traffic cops moving people forward. That was just my thought, maybe a recommendation. Frazier said okay, thank you.

Fisher said I was just going to say it's pretty straightforward, and I know at our school, the teachers are out there kind of trying to push everybody forward, you know, trying to get people to come in. It's a little like herding calves, I think, because everybody's in their own little world and doing their own thing, but it has gotten better over there, I think, since they've changed the way, you know, when they took out all the trees and stuff, so I think it's good.

Knable said I guess I would just like to say that I think it's good for Pine Hill to get this development, too, since we developed that whole area down there recently and got a lot of stuff going up, it's going to be I think really good for the community down there.

Frazier said yeah, and I guess I'll just say as far as the Variance goes, obviously it is within the 50-foot setback, as I think Kelly had on her slides and also in the staff report, there's already a portion of the building that's within the setback that's required by City Code; this is going to be less intrusive of that than those parts that's already in that building. We haven't had any concerns from the surrounding property owners that this is going to impact their ability to use their property. I mean, it's a school building that primarily will be used between 7:00 in the morning and 4:00 in the afternoon, and so it's unlikely to change the surrounding neighborhood. So, I would agree that there are findings of fact that are sufficient to grant a Variance in this case.

Frazier said if anyone else doesn't have anything, I would look for a motion then.

***Fisher made a motion to approve the Site Plan Review, Conditional Use Permit, and Variance based on the findings of fact and subject to the conditions stipulated in the staff report. Stechmann seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (5-to-0 vote).***

### **B. Park Grove Library – Cases SP/CUP2025-021**

**Alliance, on behalf of Washington County, has applied for a Site Plan Review application for a building addition, façade remodel, and exterior site improvements at Park Grove Library, 7900 Hemingway Avenue South. The addition will be for a new second story for utility and mechanical equipment. Additional site improvements proposed include interior remodel, parking lot reconfiguration, and landscaping improvements.**

Frazier said before I hand this off to Sam, I'm going to give the floor to Commissioner Stechmann.

Stechmann said thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know, I'm married to a Washington County Commissioner, and so I've given some consideration to this, and I think it would be important for me to recuse myself from any participation in the discussion or the voting on this matter. So, this is out of an abundance of caution, so I can avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest. So, I'm going to step away just for this agenda item. Frazier replied all right, thank you for making that record and for making that decision. And, so, Commissioner Stechmann will be recused, we still have four members on the commission here tonight so we do still have quorum to decide this. And, so with that, we will give it to Sam.

Pierret summarized the staff report and recommended approval, subject to the conditions stipulated in the staff report.

Frazier asked if the commissioners had any questions for staff, none were asked. Frazier asked if the applicant would like to add anything additional and asked them to state their names and their business address, please.

Mandy Leonard, Project Manager for Washington County on this project, said **Drew Riley**, Deputy Director for the library, was also with her tonight, so if there are any questions, he can also answer those. Leonard said she just wanted to review some of the high-level things they were looking at in design on this project. We did an extensive amount of high-level design, had meetings with the public, online surveys, in-person meetings. We met with City staff, County staff, and library staff, just wanting to get feedback from everyone, and so these are some of the kind of inspirational images that were highlighted throughout that design. It's very important to make sure that this library represents the community that it's in, not just Washington County as a whole. So, we really want to make sure that we're here to represent Cottage Grove. Nature was very, very important to the community, and so we're bringing that together as part of this plan. One of the main features was the fact that the confluence, which is south of us, is an area of kind of meeting, joining, and gathering, and that's what we want our library to be. We want it to be a space for people to meet, gather, and kind of join, like communities to join together for us. So, that was really important in some of our design factors, and you'll see that throughout the design.

The library space itself, we really wanted to maintain this existing site, but be able to basically enhance it as much as possible by adding additional parking; it's not only about the parking, it's about the safety of the pedestrians coming into our lot, making sure that we have accessible access for everyone around us and better than what we have now. So, we designed it so we have both a north and a south access, entering in from the sidewalks, making sure we thought about those pedestrian routes, that they're clearly defined and easy to get people safely to the front door of the building.

It was very important for the community, when they talked to us about this, that they wanted outdoor spaces. Being able to put that Storytime Berm in on the outside, being able to maintain the boulders that are in that space, along with the natural trees that already exist there that are really important, but we've been able to add a West Reading Terrace. We've lost a lot of trees over the last few years on that west side, and we are going to be able to plant back a number of those trees to really enhance that entire space, I believe for not only for us but also for our neighbors. We really want to be good neighbors to the community, and that also adds to us bringing the parking off of that five-foot setback that we currently were; we're bringing that off and giving us more of a buffer between us and the neighbors to the north, so there will be better landscape between us but still have access to our space, which will be really nice.

We've spent a lot of time looking at the materials on this facility, trying to match up the brick but not necessarily bring the older brick back. We want to make sure that we're bringing brick in that matches the existing facility site, but has some of the features of it, but actually modernizes it. So, we're going to bring in some of the brick to kind of ground and bring the new section matching the older section but make it a more modern feel. We also looked at bringing metal panels to that new second floor mechanical

system; the metal is actually kind of a Shaker style that they're going to put into a diamond pattern, and they're going to use multiple panels, kind of creating a reflection of the light and river, almost like on the water, you know when you see the lights sparkling. So, there will be a number of different textures and colors to that, to enhance that space. We ended up adding a large window with a really beautiful light fixture that will have kind of like almost glowing pebbles hanging from it; and we really wanted to look at that as a beacon of light that people are going to be drawn to that front door, they know where to go when they get to our site, and it draws them in, it brings in the natural elements of the wood ceiling as well through that. So, we're really looking at this site as a whole new holistic approach to this front area, and giving ourselves a really nice area for the customers to come in. We know that Dunkin' Donuts is across the street, I think there's like three coffeeshops within about a mile, so we know there are going to be people picking up their coffee, walking in, wanting to go sit on the Reading Terrace, wanting to sit in the garden areas. We want to make this a welcoming area for the community to kind of join and come together here. We're really excited about the children's berm area, bringing in all that natural landscaping, but also creating a nice buffer between us and the neighbors to the south, but creating this space where people can come in, enter the gate, and have this really nice sanctuary to enjoy. Also, inside the building, I know we're focused a lot on the outside, but on the inside, because of the fact that we're adding that second-story mezzanine for our mechanical systems, we're gaining a lot of space on that first floor to enhance the spaces and available uses inside. So, some of the areas that we're bringing into this library that we don't have at other existing facilities is a private Teen Gaming area, where kids can be a little bit louder, the doors can be closed, but they have their space. We're also looking at the Learning Lab, which currently is a contraction club, but we're looking to expand that because crafts, you know, sewing clubs, the maker spaces are all very important to this community, so we added an expanded Learning Lab for multiple use. We have added a ton of quiet Study Rooms, so individual Study Rooms, medium Study Rooms, and then a Quiet Study Hub, so it gives people the variety of spaces that they're looking for in a variety of different ways. And we're really excited, we're adding a number of restrooms, we're adding a family restroom that will be assisted, that will have changing tables in it, so we're adding to the ADA experiences well to help make more family needs in this community. So, we're very, very excited about this entire plan, and we're hopeful to move forward with this; and just last, but not least, this is an interior rendering of what we want and what this is anticipated to look like. We have some really great spaces in the children's area with colorful niches, windows, seating areas, and much-lower shelving so that you can see across the spaces and get a better view of more of the building as a whole.

Frazier said all right, thank you. Are there any questions for the applicant?

Brittain said nice presentation, this all looks great. A question I had about the Storytime Berm and the picture that you had of it; it shows some wording on the Storytime Berm and it appears to be 3D. Is that really going to stick out from the berm, or is that just a graphic as you were describing it. Leonard replied it's just a graphic at this time. So, we will have to identify what that will be and how they would integrate it, as to whether that is going to be carved into the concrete, whether it's a statement from a book itself, or what that's going to be; that's yet to be determined, but it is something that we're looking at. Brittain said carved in sounds great, painted sounds great if it protruded from it because that seems to be one of the options you're considering, it would be a little bit. Leonard said that would be challenging and I think it would be challenging for maintenance as well. So, we would be looking at something more of a carved in or painted type of applique vs. something that expands out that children will knock off or a foot will knock off when they're climbing on these areas. Brittain said okay, it's good to hear that you're not completely set on that. Leonard said it's not fully developed at this time, but we will be keeping that heavily in mind when we're doing it. Brittain said okay, thank you, nice presentation.

Fisher said a follow up to that, was it that first word? I cannot figure out what that even says. Leonard asked the first word? Frazier replied on the image, yeah. Fisher said I can make out "goes here," but what does? Leonard replied oh, it's truly a generic, I think it just says a sentence or some kind of graphic goes here; I think it says something about a graphic goes here. So, I don't think it's been identified yet. Fisher asked so, what is the phrase that's going to go there? Leonard replied we don't know that yet; so, that has not been finalized yet. Fisher said we could have like a community contest or something; Leonard replied that would be very fun to do, actually. Fisher said I was just curious.

Frazier asked if there were any further questions for the applicant, 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 was any further discussion by the Commission.

Brittain said I would just like to thank staff for including the sight line graphic in the staff report, it helped me better understand any potential safety issues or lack thereof that was going to exist at that intersection, so, thank you.

Council Member Olsen said Mr. Chair, I have something to add. He said our County Commissioner is watching this at home, and so she just sent me a message that she wanted me to compliment the staff on the presentation and let them know how much she appreciates that.

Frazier said all right, thank you. I will add my thank you for that as well, for both City staff and County staff. I know that the library as it is right now is a big asset to the community, and one that obviously we know has its challenges with the amount of parking we have on the spot being overcome by the amount of people who want to go to that place. I think even with the additions that we're talking about here, it's going to be even more popular than it already is, so, it's nice to see that we're going to have a more functional space for both library staff, as well as the community. We're also, as a City, kind of rethinking what we can do on our end with the street parking and trying to think of how we can kind of make that a nicer neighborhood to be able to walk in, but also just use our convenient City resources. So, a very nice job by both City and County staff working together on making this presentation, I appreciate it.

***Brittain made a motion to approve the Site Plan Review for a building addition, façade remodel, and exterior site improvements at the Park Grove Library, 7900 Hemingway Avenue South, subject to conditions stipulated in the staff report. Knable seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (4-to-0 vote).***

Brittain said while we're waiting for John to come back, do you guys have a timeline on construction and how long it will be closed? Leonard replied we are actively working on construction documents right now, especially the design and we're going through all that detail. The hope is to be bidding this fall, basically by November we'll be getting everything out for bid; and hopefully, February we'd be starting to empty out the library and starting on things that we can, and we'd like to be finished by February 2027. Brittain said okay, thank you.

## 7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

### A. Approval of the July 28, 2025, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

***Knable made a motion to approve the July 28, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes. Fisher seconded. Motion passed unanimously (5-to-0 vote).***

## 8. REPORTS

### A. RECAP OF AUGUST 2025 CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Schmitz summarized the actions taken at the August 6 and August 20, 2025 City Council Meetings:

Schmitz said with that, Council Member Olsen is here if he has anything additional to add, and I know he's always open for some questions as well.

Council Member Olsen said as always, I'm here for you, so if there's any questions you might have, I'd certainly welcome those. There are just a couple things that I want to share with you in case you weren't glued to your television for last week's Council Meeting:

- We did have a pretty robust dialogue about tobacco and cannabis paraphernalia, and the question posed to us was can tobacco shops sell paraphernalia that could potentially be used for cannabis. We had a couple of applications that came in from tobacco shops, asking whether or not that's something that the City would allow. After much review by City staff and the City Attorney, the City Council was presented with some options. We voted unanimously to allow for that paraphernalia to be sold in both cannabis-only shops and tobacco shops, but that does not mean anybody with a tobacco license can sell this paraphernalia; it's strictly if you are a tobacco shop, which we have a limited number of here in town, or a cannabis shop. So, that does tie in a little bit to your low potency thing that you guys talked about here a couple weeks back.

- As you know, we also have been working on our budget. We think we've landed on what we feel is a very fair number for investment back into the community for 2026. It's going to meet all the expectations our residents have for maintaining our enhanced service delivery. This is kind of that time of year where we're kind of looking to see what everybody else is doing to identify whether we're on the right track. One of the things we take a lot of pride in, here in the City of Cottage Grove, is we have a Financial Management Plan (FMP) that we try to work very hard to maintain; that FMP essentially guides us to roughly \$100 per year on the average home in the City of Cottage Grove, as far as an increase in the levy, and that gives us a pretty narrow lane to drive down. With this budget, if it stays as it is, because it could get lower, it won't go any higher, we're at about \$103 on the average house over the last three years, in terms of maintaining our FMP, which is pretty doggone good; and the reason that we choose to do that is because we want to maintain our AAA Bond Rating, that's very important to us, that saves millions of dollars to the taxpayers every year when we go out to bond for various projects. So, I think we've got a good number, we've figured out what the County's evaluations are going to look like, and that came in very favorable for us. It appears we will continue to be the second lowest tax, per capita, in Washington County, behind the City of St. Paul Park, who is the lowest; but the big difference is there's some Local Government Aid that they receive, to the tune of about \$1.5 million, that we don't get. So, we're pretty good in terms of squeezing those dimes, and I think we did a nice job with it this year. More to come on that as the final votes come forth on that budget plan. Like I said, it can't go any higher, it could potentially go lower.

So, with that, I'll turn it back to the Chair, and if there are any questions that you have, I'm certainly open to that. I know there's been a lot of rumors floating around about certain developments in the area, even as far as the Tank's Farm and so on and so forth. So, if you have any questions, I'm open to that.

Frazier said all right, thank you; any questions for Council Member Olsen?

Stechmann asked how long has the City of Cottage Grove had a AAA Bond Rating? Council Member Olsen replied we are going on, please don't quote me because I may be wrong, but this is year 2025, and I believe we achieved that in 2020 or 2021. I have the certificate at home on my wall, I'd have to look at, but it was something that we really strove to achieve, and we had to do a lot of different things as a Council and as a staff, in terms of our budgeting, including establishing that FMP, to ensure that we not only achieved it, but more importantly, maintained it. Cities of our size rarely, if ever, get a AAA Bond Rating, it just doesn't happen; usually, you need to be 60,000+ to even have a shot at it, but you know, we are very fortunate that we have such a good Finance staff and staff overall that we were able to make that happen probably four years or so back. Stechmann said thank you for being a good custodian of the public treasury. Council Member Olsen replied well, we certainly try. Thank you for that.

No further questions were asked of Council Member Olsen, and Frazier thanked him for being here tonight.

B. RESPONSE TO PLANNING COMMISSION INQUIRIES - None.

C. PLANNING COMMISSION REQUESTS - None.

## 9. ADJOURNMENT

***Stechmann made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Fisher seconded. Motion passed unanimously (5-to-0 vote). The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.***