

**MINUTES OF MEETING
SOUTH ST. PAUL PLANNING COMMISSION
MARCH 4, 2026**

CHAIR FEHRMAN CALLED THE MEETING TO ORDER AT 7:00 PM ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4TH, 2026.

1) ROLL CALL

Present:

- Tyler Fehrman
- Tim Felton
- Geoff Fournier
- Tracy Haye
- Brianne Miller
- Alex Wegehaupt

Absent:

- Andrew Hoffman

Staff Present:

- Michael Healy, Planning Manager

2) APPROVAL OF AGENDA –Motion to approve the agenda as presented– Haye/Miller (6-0).

3) APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 4, 2026 –Motion to approve the minutes as presented– Haye/Fournier (6-0).

4) PUBLIC HEARINGS

A. Ordinance Amendment Updating Lot Coverage and Landscaping Regulations in the Industrial Zoning Districts

Mr. Healy presented the staff report. The City is proposing a minor change to the landscaping regulations in the City's industrial zoning districts. Staff is bringing this ordinance forward at the request of the City's Economic Development Authority (EDA). The EDA has requested an ordinance amendment to eliminate the code provision that buildings in the I- Industrial District and I-1, Light Industrial District cannot have more than 40% lot coverage by building. The City has previously approved developments that have more than 40% lot coverage using the PUD process. The proposed ordinance would also remove the provision in the I-Industrial district and I-1, Light Industrial district codes that development projects with a value of less than \$1 million spend at least 2% of the value of the building on landscaping. This requirement is outdated and is regularly waived because the cost to construct an industrial or light industrial building in 2026 always exceeds \$1 million.

Commissioner Miller asked what landscaping requirements would still apply to industrial and light industrial properties if the 2% requirement was removed. Mr. Healy explained that there would still be a number of

landscaping requirements on the books including that 15% of an industrial or light industrial lot needs to be landscaped, that new developments must prepare a landscaping plan with overstory trees, understory trees, plants, and shrubs, and that the development must provide 1 overstory tree for each 70 feet of lot perimeter.

Commissioner Fournier asked staff to confirm that the ordinance is not reducing or removing any requirements about the amount of landscaping that must be provided but is eliminating a standard about the minimum amount of money that must be spent on landscaping. Mr. Healy confirmed that was the case and emphasized that the City has not been enforcing the code provision that requires a certain amount of money to be spent on landscaping. The requirement has been waived for all projects in recent memory.

Chair Fehrman opened the public hearing.

No one was present to comment on the ordinance. No correspondence was received prior to the meeting.

Chair Fehrman closed the public hearing.

Motion to recommend approval of an ordinance updating the lot cover and landscaping regulations in the industrial zoning district- Miller/Fournier (6-0).

5) NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion on Zoning Regulations for Two-Family Homes in the R-2 -Single-and-Two Family Zoning District

Mr. Healy presented the staff report. The R-2 zoning district covers approximately 27.5% of the community and is the largest residential zoning district. While the R-2 zoning district allows both single family home and duplexes, there are minimum lot width and lot size standards that must be met for a property to be used as a duplex. There are no zoning requirements to convert a duplex home into a single-family home. For a single-family home to be converted into a duplex, it must meet certain lot size requirements, a building permit must be obtained, and at least 3 parking stalls must be provided. The lot size requirements for duplexes have been creating headaches for the rental licensing program because many of the duplexes are “grandfathered” to not meet the current lot size requirements. Many properties will switch between being a duplex and being a single-family home depending on what benefits the property owner most financially. Duplexes that do not meet the current lot size requirements lose their “grandfathered” rights to be a duplex if the property is used as a single-family home for more than 1 year. Many of these single-family homes that were constructed as duplexes are then purchased by a new owner and illegally rented as duplexes since they still contain two separate dwelling units with two separate kitchens. For several years, the Minnesota State Legislature has contemplated adopting zoning preemption bills that would automatically allow certain types of housing such as duplexes or accessory dwelling units in all zoning districts. Draft versions of the proposed Statute would allow cities to “opt out” of some of the zoning preemption rules if cities fix their own zoning codes and allow more housing. Staff requested the Planning Commission discuss and provide feedback on an ordinance that would clarify the existing zoning standards that are already in place for single family homes and duplexes with R-2 zoning, allow duplexes on 50-foot wide lots with R-2 zoning that do not have an alley, allow duplexes on 40-foot wide lots with access to an improved alley, require exterior staircases for duplexes to be in the side or rear yard, and establish a flat 5-foot- side yard setback for interior lots in the R-2 district.

Commissioner Miller asked Mr. Healy to explain the difference between a duplex and a twin home. Mr. Healy explained that a duplex is a home with two dwelling units that are usually stacked vertically. A twin home is a two dwelling unit building where the units are side by side. Commissioner Miller asked about the physical characteristics of a duplex. Mr. Healy explained that each unit of a duplex must have its own kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom with access to the outdoors either from a door just for that unit or through a shared hallway.

Commissioner Haye asked why the City had not considered this zoning reform earlier. Mr. Healy explained that until a few years ago, most of the City's zoning rules did not line up with South St. Paul's historic development pattern. In recent years, the Planning Commission and City Council have embraced South St. Paul's heritage as a traditional walkable town and have been updating the zoning code to align with the community's historic development pattern. Addressing all the zoning code issues at one time would have been an extremely large and complex project. Instead, the code amendments have been made over several years in smaller projects. Many cities are in the same boat and have started to shift back to zoning standards that legalize the community's existing development pattern. Another reason why City Staff has not prioritized updating the R-2 district is that the State Legislature has considered zoning preemption bills each year for the past several years with provisions that would address duplexes with new statewide standards. Staff has avoided spending time on this topic to avoid duplicating efforts.

Commissioner Felton shared his concerns about duplexes being inappropriate on 40-foot lots and the potential for more rental units because of the ordinance.

Commissioner Fournier commented that he was not concerned about allowing duplexes on 40-foot lots and shared that he previously owned a duplex on a 40-foot-lot.

Commissioner Haye asked why it is so difficult to convert a single-family home to a duplex. Mr. Healy explained that if an individual that owned a duplex on a 40-foot lot converts the property into a single-family home and the property is used as a single-family home for more than 1 year, that property loses its ability to be a duplex. The only way the property could be legally used as a duplex again would be with a lot size variance. When the City reviewed a variance request for this exact situation in 2020, the City Council denied the variance despite an approval recommendation from the Planning Commission. The City Council stated at the time that they were not inclined to approve lot size variances for duplexes on 40-foot lots and asked City Staff to actively discourage property owners from seeking this type of variance. There was a general feeling that it was not fair to use variances to allow just some property owners in the R-2 district to have duplexes on smaller lots.

Commissioner Wegehaue asked staff to confirm that a code amendment would be the only option to allow a duplex on a 40-foot lot without a variance. Mr. Healy confirmed it was.

Mr. Healy requested the Planning Commissioners provide feedback about whether they would like to see the ordinance come back for a public hearing. The majority of the commissioners indicated that they would.

6) OTHER BUSINESS

A. Planning Commission Rules of Order

Mr. Healy provided a brief overview of the updated rules of order.

Motion to recommend approval of the 2026 Planning Commission Rules of Order- Haye/Fournier (6-0).

7) STAFF UPDATES

None.

8) ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn- Haye/Felton (6-0)