

*(reserved for recording information)*

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA  
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS RESOLUTION ZBA #2026-001

A RESOLUTION BY THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS OF THE CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA, APPROVING A VARIANCE REQUEST AT 2150 DECLARATION ST.

WHEREAS, Nexus Outreach LLC (the “Applicant”) are the owners of a parcel of land located at 2150 Declaration St. in the City of Northfield; and

WHEREAS, the above-referenced property is legally described on Exhibit A, which is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference (the “Property”); and

WHEREAS, Northfield City Code, Chapter 34, Section 3.2, Table 3.2-7: Dimensional Standards for the C2 District, of the Land Development Code (“LDC”), sets the maximum building height at 50 feet; and

WHEREAS, Northfield City Code, Chapter 34, Section 3.1, Subsection 3.1.6 Height Measurement, Limits, and Exceptions, of the LDC establishes that the maximum allowable height shall be measured as the vertical distance from the natural grade of the site to an imaginary plane located at the maximum allowed number of feet above and parallel to the grade; and

WHEREAS, the Applicant desires to and has requested a variance to construct a multi-family apartment building, portions of which exceed the 50-foot maximum height limit by up to 4 feet; and

WHEREAS, Minnesota Statutes, section 462.357, and Northfield City Code, section 8.5.15, establish the procedures and criteria for consideration by the Zoning Board of Appeals of a requested variance to the LDC and shall be subject to the Type 6 review procedure as established in Northfield City Code, section 8.4.9, Type 6

Review Procedure (Quasi-Judicial Decision by the Zoning Board of Appeals);  
and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 462.357, subd. 6, and Northfield City Code, section 8.5.16, the Zoning Board of Appeals may only grant applications for variances where practical difficulties in complying with the LDC exist and each of the following criteria are satisfied:

- (a) The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of this LDC;
- (b) The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan;
- (c) The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by this LDC;
- (d) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner; and
- (e) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality; and

WHEREAS, the Zoning Board of Appeals held a public hearing, following required public notice thereof, on February 19, 2026, and has reviewed the requested variance and has considered the required statutory variance criteria identified in the Staff report and proposed findings with respect to such criteria.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS OF THE CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA, that the Northfield Zoning Board of Appeals has duly considered the required criteria contained in state law and the LDC as applicable to the above-requested variance regarding the property legally described in Exhibit A, and hereby adopts the findings of fact contained in the staff report regarding the same, which is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference as Exhibit B.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the requested variance is hereby approved and granted, based upon the above-referenced adopted findings, to allow portions of the multi-family apartment building to exceed the maximum height limit by up to 4 feet, subject to the following conditions.

1. The pedestrian and bicycle entrance on the south façade of the building shall receive additional architectural treatments, including but not limited to glazing, protective roofing, and other elements as approved by the City Planner to emphasize the entrance.
2. Additional landscaping shall be installed in the setback areas between the building and sidewalks along Jefferson Road and Heritage Drive to mitigate the visual impact of the exposed wall of the underground parking.
  - a. The landscaping shall have a mixture of shrubs with a minimum height of 36 inches, perennials, and columnar or ornamental trees where feasible and be designed and maintained to screen the wall from view of the street.
  - b. Additional features or furnishings like benches, boulders, and stone blocks shall be included to improve the pedestrian experience along those facades, subject to the City Planner's discretion.

3. Enhanced materials or materials varying in color, texture, pattern, or relief will be used along the exposed wall of the underground parking level where it faces the public right of way to add visual interest and mitigate the impact of the expanse of unadorned wall.

PASSED by the Zoning Board of Appeals of the City of Northfield this 19<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2026.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Member

VOTE:     \_\_\_ KUHLMANN   \_\_\_ SCHROEER     \_\_\_ BUCKHEIT  
          \_\_\_ HOLLERAN   \_\_\_ HOLMES       \_\_\_ NOWAK       \_\_\_ SCHMIDT

**EXHIBIT A**

**PROPERTY LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

Lot 1, Block 2, Locust Development, Second Addition, as per the recorded plat thereof, Rice County, Minnesota.

## **EXHIBIT B**

### **FINDINGS OF FACT**

#### **Findings of Fact:**

Northfield Land Development Code Table 3.2-7: Dimensional Standards for the C2 District, of the Land Development Code (“LDC”), sets the maximum building height at 50 feet, and Section 3.1, Subsection 3.1.6 Height Measurement, Limits, and Exceptions, of the LDC establishes that the maximum allowable height shall be measured as the vertical distance from the natural grade of the site to an imaginary plane located at the maximum allowed number of feet above and parallel to the grade. The applicant requests a variance to exceed the maximum height from grade by 4 feet, creating a building 54 feet tall measured from grade. Analysis of the variance request is addressed below.

Criterion (a) The variance is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the LDC.

#### **Finding:**

The proposed project is consistent with the following general purposes of the LDC:

1.1.3 Encourage growth in infill location as the desired location of development with expansion on the edge of the city a secondary priority

1.1.4 Create residential community areas with strong neighborhood qualities including pedestrian-friendly streets, community gathering spaces, and basic commercial needs within walking distance.

1.1.5 Encourage the development of neighborhoods that incorporate a variety of housing types to serve the needs of a diverse population.

1.1.6 Allow for places with a mixture of uses that are distinctive and contribute to the city’s overall vitality.

1.1.9 Promote an ethic of sustainability in all activities to ensure that proposed development and redevelopment will, at a minimum, conserve energy and natural resources.

1.1.11 Ensure that proposed development is of human scale, primarily pedestrian-oriented to the extent appropriate, and designed to create exceptional streetscapes and pedestrian spaces.

1.1.12 Minimize vehicle traffic by providing for a mixture of land uses, pedestrian-oriented development, compact community form, safe and effective multi-modal traffic circulation (e.g., pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular), and adequate on- and off-street parking facilities.

The proposal is not in conflict with any LDC general purposes. The proposed multi-family project reduces surface parking by including underground parking. Reducing the amount of land dedicated to surface parking has a positive impact on the pedestrian experience, reduces stormwater, urban heating, and other environmental impacts. The project utilizes an infill site that has remained vacant since it was platted in 2008 and therefore makes efficient use of existing city infrastructure and services.

The project is located within walking distance of multiple commercial services, including daily needs, and will therefore contribute to the vitality of the area. The proposed structure includes additional pedestrian and bicycle entrances opposite the parking lot and oriented towards the nearby commercial uses, encouraging walking and biking for transportation and therefore promoting an ethic of sustainability.

A proposed patio/outdoor community space is located on the prominent corner of the structure at the intersection of Heritage Drive and Jefferson Road providing a transition between the public and private realms.

Multi-family housing reduces per-capita energy consumption compared to single-family housing, and makes more efficient use of land, and public infrastructure, and therefore promotes an ethic of environmental and fiscal sustainability.

The project is located between commercial uses to the west, and smaller multi-family uses to the east, which serves to transition between the larger proposed structure and the single-family homes further east.

To promote walkability consistent with the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and LDC, additional architectural and landscape treatments can be employed to mitigate the impact of the increased scale of the building and the exposed wall of the sub-surface parking level by providing transition, buffering, and visual interest.

Criterion (b) The variance is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Finding:

The variance is consistent with the Vision Statement of the Comprehensive Plan, “Northfield is a welcoming city, providing equitable access to a high quality of life.” Additional housing with a diverse configuration of units will provide more people with access to Northfield’s high quality of life.

The variance does not conflict with any strategies or outcomes identified in Chapter 3 - Access, Chapter 4 – Sustainable Economic Future, or Chapter 5 – Resilient Infrastructure. The property is at the edge of an area identified as Mixed Use Residential Neighborhood by the Future Land Use Map, and identified as Transform by the Interventions Framework Map. Transform areas will allow for diverse and abundant housing options, this area is specifically identified for transformation into a denser, walkable, mixed-use area where residential development includes a variety of medium-to-high density housing types.

Specific Comprehensive Plan Strategies supported include the following:

Chapter 3 Access:

- Strategy 2: Develop in a compact, sustainable, and fiscally responsible pattern

Chapter 4 Sustainable Economic Future:

- Strategy 4: Support the local workforce
- Strategy 5: Diversify Northfield's tax base
- Strategy 6: Grow in a compact, sustainable development pattern
- Strategy 8: Build more housing

The additional height requested by the applicant enables the development of underground parking and/or additional units - two elements of the project that contribute to meeting the intent and goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Criterion (c) Property Owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the LDC.

Finding:

The requested variance will result in a reasonable use of the property. Where the natural grade of the site is higher, and the underground parking level is not exposed, the building is approximately 42 feet tall, well below the limit. In the areas where the building exceeds the maximum height limit, the excess height is less than the height of an additional story.

It is also a common, but not universal, practice to measure the height of a building from the average grade of a site. The Minnesota Building Code uses this method, and it can be accepted as a reasonable alternative method. If this alternative approach were applied, the building would conform to the existing height limit.

The scale of the building is consistent with others in the neighborhood. The bank and office building to the west is 46 feet tall, and the apartment building to the east is approximately 44 feet tall.

The rights-of-way adjacent to the facades that are proposed to exceed the height limit are approximately 80 feet wide. The Sustainable Urban Design Handbook by Nico Larco and Kaarin Knudson, published in 2024, recommends a Street Aspect (H/W ratio) of 1:1 to 1:3, with ratios above 1:2 being characteristic of pedestrian friendly streets. The U.S. Green Building Council requires a minimum H/W ratio of 1:3 for walkable streets. The proposed height of 54 feet results in a H/W ratio of approximately 1:1.5 which is consistent with best practices, and the intent of the LDC and Comprehensive Plan, and may therefore be considered reasonable.

Criterion (d) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

Finding:

The plight of the landowner is due to grade changes on the site, which are reinforced by the presence of existing streets and other infrastructure. The LDC directs parking to be located at the rear of the property, directs corner buildings to be placed near the corner, and directs buildings along Jefferson Road and Heritage Drive to "be located in close proximity to the street." In order to provide an accessible, at-grade entrance from the

surface parking area while grading to drain stormwater away from the building, the building's first floor elevation is restricted. Due to the natural grade changes on the site, the established streets, and the directions of the LDC, the level of underground parking is exposed along the east and south-east end of the building. The property owner has used the exposure as an opportunity to further comply with the LDC by adding an at-grade pedestrian and bicycle entrance to the south façade.

Criterion (e) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

Finding:

Granting the variance will not alter the essential character of the locality. The lot is currently vacant, as are the lots to the east and south. The area is therefore without a defined essential character; the proposed building will contribute to defining the area's essential character. Within a quarter mile of the site there is a mix of big-box retail, industrial, auto-oriented small-scale commercial, churches, and multi-family and single family housing, and the proposed building will help create a greater sense of walkability while providing future residents with housing near commercial services.