

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION 2025-007

RECOMMENDATION DENYING A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT TO CITY COUNCIL
TO BUILD ADDITIONAL PARKING IN THE PERIMETER TRANSITION AREA

WHEREAS, the applicant, Saint Olaf College (the “applicant”), seeks a Conditional Use Permit, pursuant to Northfield City Code, Ch. 34, Secs. 3.2.8 and 8.5.9, to expand a parking lot at 219 Lincoln Street North, which is within the Perimeter Transition Area of the property zoned CD-S: College Development; and

WHEREAS, Saint Olaf College is the owner of the above-referenced property; and

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

WHEREAS, all required notices regarding the public hearing were properly made; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on June 16, 2025, and received public testimony regarding the proposed Conditional Use Permit; and,

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission found that the application does not meet the standards in Northfield City Code, Chapter 34, the Land Development Code, for conditional use; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission has reviewed and recommended denial of the Conditional Use Permit..

PASSED by the Planning Commission of the City of Northfield on this 16th day of June 2025.

Chair

Member

VOTE: ___ KUHLMANN ___ SCHROEER ___ BUCKHEIT
 ___ HOLLERAN ___ HOLMES ___ NOWAK ___ SCHMIDT

EXHIBIT A

LEGAL DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

PID 2236325017

CUP Description:

Those parts of Lots 9 and 10 in the STATE SUBDIVISION OF THE SW 1/4 OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 112 NORTH, RANGE 20 WEST OF THE FIFTH PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, IN THE CITY OF NORTHFIELD, and Rice County, Minnesota described as follows: Beginning at the southeast corner of said Lot 10; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, assumed bearing, along the south line of said Lot 10, 297.00 feet; thence North 00 degrees 51 minutes 34 seconds East, 200.03 feet; thence North 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds East, 327.97 feet; thence North 00 degrees 51 minutes 34 seconds East, 339.06 feet; thence South 89 degrees 08 minutes 54 seconds East, 331.55 feet; thence South 00 degrees 48 minutes 47 seconds West, 21.09 feet; thence North 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds East, 64.13 feet; thence North 00 degrees 48 minutes 21 seconds East, 169.57 feet; thence South 89 degrees 11 minutes 39 seconds East, 200.00 feet to the centerline of Lincoln Street South; thence South 00 degrees 48 minutes 21 seconds West, along said centerline, 366.53 feet; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, 264.31 feet; thence North 00 degrees 48 minutes 47 seconds East, 21.12 feet; thence North 89 degrees 08 minutes 30 seconds West, 131.58 feet; thence South 00 degrees 51 minutes 34 seconds West, 335.87 feet to its intersection with a line bearing North 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds East from the point of beginning; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, along the south line of said Lot 9, 231.00 feet to the point of beginning.

AND

Those parts of Lots 4 and Lot 5, Block 4 and Block 5, CUTLER'S ADDITION TO THE CITY OF NORTHFIELD, Rice County, Minnesota described as follows: Beginning at the intersection of the northerly extension of the west line of said Lot 5, Block 4 and the centerline of St. Olaf Avenue; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, along said centerline of St. Olaf Avenue, 54.36 feet; thence South 00 degrees 51 minutes 34 seconds West, parallel with the west line of said Lot 5 and the west line of said Block 5, 563.90 feet; thence North 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds East, 681.58 feet to the centerline of Lincoln Street South; thence North 00 degrees 48 minutes 21 seconds East, along said centerline of Lincoln Street South, 200.02 feet to the centerline of 1st Street West; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, along said centerline of 1st Street West, 481.56 feet to the intersection with the westerly line of the East 448.50 feet of said Block 5 and the southerly extension of the westerly line of BLOCK TWO, VIKING COURT ADDITION NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA; thence North 00 degrees 48 minutes 21 seconds East, along said westerly line of the East 448.50 feet of Block 5 and the west line of BLOCK TWO, VIKING COURT ADDITION NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA, 165.00 feet to the north line of said BLOCK TWO, VIKING COURT ADDITION NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA; thence continuing North 00 degrees 48 minutes 21 seconds East, along the northerly extension of the westerly line of BLOCK TWO, VIKING COURT ADDITION NORTHFIELD MINNESOTA, 198.87 feet to the centerline of St. Olaf Avenue; thence South 89 degrees 55 minutes 44 seconds West, along said centerline, 145.66 feet to the point of beginning.

EXHIBIT B

PLANNING COMMISSION FINDINGS

Conditional Use Permit Approval Procedure & Approval Criteria:

A CUP follows the Type 4 Review Procedure found in Section 8.4.7 of the LDC. For the Type 4 Review Procedure, the Planning Commission holds a public hearing and makes a recommendation to City Council, and City Council makes the final decision.

In the approval of a conditional use permit, the Planning Commission may recommend that City Council impose such conditions as necessary to make the use compatible with other uses allowed in the same district zone or vicinity. Criterion (a) below must be met and criteria (b) through (n) shall be considered in the review of conditional use permit applications:

a) **The proposed use is allowed as a conditional use in the district for which it is proposed as shown in Table 2.7-1;**

Yes, the proposed use of surface parking is allowed as a conditional use as an accessory to School (Institutions of Higher Education – College, Seminary, or University) and other uses, which are allowed as a conditional use in Table 2.7-1 within the CD-S: College Development zoning district. Section 2.4.2 College Development District divides the zoning in this district into two sub-zones. This area meets the definition of the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA), wherein development is subject to the development standards applicable to Conditional Use Permit criteria, and the Type 4 review procedure with a Neighborhood Meeting Required.

b) **The conditional use will be in accordance with the general objectives, or with any specific objective, of the city's comprehensive plan and this LDC;**

The expanded parking does not meet the outcomes identified in the City's Comprehensive Plan and LDC in the following categories:

Ch3 Strategy 1: Plan for accessibility –

- Outcome: Northfield has a well-connected and well-used transit, rideshare, and carshare alternatives for trips that require a vehicle.
 - Expanded parking in this location will reduce the use of transit, bicycling, walking, and other alternative modes of transportation by the students permitted to park in this area.

Ch3 Strategy 6: Design for resiliency and sustainability –

- Outcome: The city, as a municipal entity, and its residents and businesses have collectively decreased our greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on non-local energy sources through mitigation strategies.
 - Expanded parking in this location will reduce the use of more sustainable modes of transportation by students, increasing vehicle miles traveled and the associated greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on non-local energy sources, and will reduce the efficacy of mitigation strategies.
- Outcome: The city plans land uses and new development to reduce vehicle miles traveled and non-local inputs, including energy sources.
 - Expanded parking in this location will reduce the use of more sustainable modes of transportation by students, increasing vehicle miles traveled and reliance on non-local energy sources.

Ch4 Strategy 2: Develop Carleton and St. Olaf relationships –

- Outcome: The City will work with Carleton and St. Olaf to plan physical development and increase their economic contributions; the city will benefit from college leadership on climate and collaborating with students.
 - Expanded parking in this location will reduce the use of more sustainable modes of transportation by students, increasing vehicle miles traveled and the associated greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on non-local energy sources. The increase in vehicle miles traveled will increase the burden on city services, specifically local streets, through the negative externalities associated with motor vehicles.

Ch4 Strategy 6: Grow in a compact, sustainable development pattern –

- Outcome: Northfield's development and redevelopment initiatives focus on projects that increase tax productivity, preserve natural resources, limits negative climate impacts, improves access to jobs and services, and assess the fiscal impact of the development or redevelopment project.
 - Expanded parking in this location will reduce the use of more sustainable modes of transportation by students, increasing vehicle miles traveled and the negative externalities associated with motor vehicles including negative impacts to natural resources, the climate, and city services.

The proposed use does not meet the following purposes of the LDC:

- 1.1.1 Maintain and enhance the community's distinct small-town character.
- 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.
- 1.1.9 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.
- 1.1.15 Ensure compatibility between different types of development and land uses.
- 1.1.16 Create a comprehensive and stable pattern of land uses upon which to plan transportation, water supply, sewerage, energy, and other public facilities and utilities.

c) The conditional use will be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained so as to be harmonious and appropriate in appearance with the existing or intended character of the general vicinity and that such use will not change the essential character of the same area;

The proposed use increases surface parking area directly adjacent to a residential neighborhood, in an area where large areas of surface parking have not previously existed, increasing traffic, and the negative externalities associated with increased car use and storage, inconsistent with the essential character of the same area.

- d) The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses;
Increased surface parking will result in increased vehicle traffic in the immediate area, which will likely increase the risk of injury due to vehicular crashes.
- e) The conditional use will be served adequately by essential public facilities and services such as streets, police and fire protection, drainage structures, refuse disposal, water and sewer;
The parking lot would be adequately served by essential public services. The property is served by Lincoln St. N. to the east and Founders Dr. to the west. Emergency services will have access from both Founders Dr. and Lincoln St. N. Drainage on site is served by a storm sewer easement. The project will not have a significant impact on refuse disposal or water and sewer connections.
- f) The benefits of the conditional use outweigh the potential negative effects of the surrounding community;
The benefits of the proposed development are unlikely to outweigh the potential negative effects. This project will likely increase vehicle miles traveled by the students who will use the parking, expanded parking will have a negative impact on the character of the neighborhood while contributing to urban heating and stormwater runoff. There is insufficient evidence to suggest the project will meaningfully address neighborhood concerns about the use of on-street parking - a concern that applies only for brief periods throughout the year.
- g) The conditional use will not create excessive additional requirements at public cost for public facilities and services;
The conditional use will not create additional public cost for public facilities or services.
- h) The conditional use will not involve uses, activities, processes, materials, equipment and conditions or operations that will be detrimental to any persons, property or the general welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors;
The expanded parking lot is not expected to generate noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors that are any more excessive than the existing conditions. There may be a noticeable increase in traffic, but it is not anticipated to be excessive.
- i) The conditional use will not result in the destruction, loss, or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features;
The parking lot is not expected to result in the destruction, loss, or damage of natural, scenic, or historic features of major importance as may be established in the comprehensive plan or other city plans related to natural, scenic, or historic features.
- j) The traffic and parking generated by the use will not lower the Levels of Services as described in the comprehensive plan update of intersections within a quarter mile of the site.
The additional trips generated by this use are not significant enough to lower the Levels of Services within a quarter mile of the site.

- k) In residential districts, the use is of a similar height, building orientation, massing, setback, and scale as to be compatible with surrounding uses in compliance with Section 3.5 Neighborhood Compatibility Standards;

The proposed parking lot is within the Perimeter Transition Area because it is adjacent to a residential district, and special consideration is due to this proximity.

- l) In the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA) within the college development district (CD-S) that abut residential and commercial districts, height, building orientation, massing, setback and scale shall be considered in building renovation and/or new construction in order to maintain compatibility with surrounding areas as described in Section 3.4, Neighborhood Compatibility Standards. These neighborhood compatibility standards are to be administered in order to maintain a harmonious neighborhood environment and absolute compliance with these standards is not intended.

Large parking lots have a negative impact on the essential character of the adjacent residential neighborhoods. The existing parking lot was approved in conjunction with the development of additional student housing, and no additional student housing has been constructed since that original approval.

- m) Impacts such as noise, hours of activity, and outdoor lighting have been addressed to mitigate negative impacts on nearby uses.

The increased parking will intensify activity in the area.

- n) Parking is adequately provided for the proposed conditional use.

The LDC requires no additional off-street parking in the CD-S: College Development zone. Instead, it requires a parking study to assess mitigation strategies that will reduce demand for parking. The applicant provided a memo stating that due to increased enrollment, additional parking is needed. However, the study provided by the applicant recommends, “As enrollment and faculty/staff grow, increasing existing multi-modal transportation and working with businesses to provide sustainable alternatives for the community that align with the school’s values and keep demand for parking on-campus low is recommended.” The applicant has not shown that they have endeavored to implement the following alternative actions identified by the supplied parking study:

- Increasing the fleet size of the green bikes program
- Looking into the possibility of buses being equipped with GPS tracking features to allow transit riders to track buses in real time online or on their mobile devices, which leads to a more convenient and pleasant transit experience that can increase ridership.
- Installing transit shelters at frequent stops to protect riders from wind and precipitation while they wait for buses. Transit shelters also offer an opportunity to coordinate shelter design with campus branding, wayfinding, signage, and security features.
- Providing a school resource for ridesharing for faculty, staff, and students.
- Construct bike lanes within existing roadways to reduce bicycle traffic on walkways or construct shared-use paths.
- Educate students, faculty, staff, and visitors on the availability of Lyft throughout the Northfield area and Uber in parts of Northfield.

Additionally, staff suggest the following alternatives not identified in the parking study could also accomplish the applicant's objectives.

- Implement a car share program.
- Raise the price of student parking passes.
- Expand parking in the Internal Development Area of the campus.
- Increasing indoor bike storage capacity, which is currently at full utilization.

The following information shall be provided as part of the Conditional Use Permit application:

- (i) Number of customers, patients, visitors, or other patrons of the proposed use.
3,202 students.
- (ii) Number of full time and part time employees;
900 total staff and faculty.
- (iii) Number and approximate timing of deliveries.
Not applicable