

(reserved for recording information)

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS RESOLUTION ZBA 2026-002

A RESOLUTION BY THE ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS OF THE CITY OF
NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA, APPROVING A VARIANCE REQUEST AT 212 DIVISION
ST. S.

- WHEREAS, the applicant, Rebound Real Estate LLC, 527 Professional Dr. (the “Applicant”) seeks a variance of a parcel of land located at 212 Division St. S. in the City of Northfield; and
- WHEREAS, Manawa LLC 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 (the “Property”); and
- WHEREAS, Northfield City Code, Chapter 34, Section 3.2, Table 3.2-4: Dimensional Standards for the C1 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 mixed-use building, portions of which exceed the 50-foot maximum height limit by up to 11.83 feet along Riverside Common E and 3 feet along Division St. S; 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 June 18, 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 mixed-use building to exceed the maximum height limit by up to 11.83 feet along Riverside Common E and 3 feet along Division St. S, subject to the following conditions.

PASSED by the Zoning Board of Appeals of the City of Northfield this 18th day of June, 2026.

Chair

Member

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

EXHIBIT A

PROPERTY LEGAL DESCRIPTION

That part of River Lots 10 and 11 and the Northeast 35.5 feet of River Lot 9, (the Southwesterly boundary of said Northeast 35.5 feet is measured at right angles to and parallel with the common boundary line between River Lots 9 and 10); and the Southwest 2.5 feet of River Lot 12 (the Northeasterly boundary of which is measured at right angles to and parallel with the common boundary line between River Lots 11 and 12), all in the ORIGINAL TOWN (NOW CITY) OF NORTHFIELD, Rice County, Minnesota, lying Southeasterly of the following described lines: Commencing at the Southeasterly corner of said Northeast 35.5 feet of River Lot 9; thence North 67 degrees 37 minutes 00 seconds West; along the Southwesterly line of said Northeast 35.5 feet of River Lot 9, a distance of 133.99 feet to the point of beginning of the lines to be described; thence North 20 degrees 27 minutes 36 seconds East a distance of 167.60 feet; thence North 21 degrees 06 minutes 05 seconds East a distance of 2.50 feet to a point on the Northeasterly line of said Southwest 2.5 feet of River Lot 12, distant 139.45 feet Northwesterly from the Northeasterly corner of said Southwest 2.5 feet and there terminating.

EXHIBIT B

FINDINGS OF FACT

Findings of Fact:

Northfield Land Development Code Table 3.2-4: Dimensional Standards for the C1 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 11.83 feet, creating a building 61.83 feet tall measured from grade. Mechanical equipment and screening is normally permitted to exceed the maximum height by 3 feet, due to design requirements precluding wall-mounted units, larger equipment is required to serve the building, requiring additional height. The building will be 53 feet tall along Division St. S. and 61.83 feet tall along Riverside Common E. 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

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

1.1.8 Provide for the expansion and diversification of the economic base to assure a strong economy.

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.

1.1.14 Encourage vibrancy in the downtown core and fringe areas.

1.1.15 Ensure compatibility between different types of development and land uses.

The proposal is not in conflict with any LDC general purposes. The mixed-use hotel 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 and therefore makes efficient use of existing city infrastructure and services.

The project is located between commercial uses and is across from the library. The lot has remained vacant for several years and the proposed mixed-use building replaces the historic use of a mixed-use building with hotel and commercial spaces. The project will contribute to the connectivity and vibrancy of downtown, and provide lodging for visitors in a highly-walkable location. The proposal includes patio and deck space along Riverside Common E. which serves as a transition between the building and the riverfront.

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 commercial space will provide economic opportunities for residents, and a new hotel will welcome visitors into Northfield. The project includes accessible public restrooms which can be accessed from both Division St. and the Riverwalk, and the western portion of the lot will be dedicated to the city to expand and enhance the adjacent portion of the Riverwalk, two elements of the project that address equity and improve 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 identified as Mixed-Use Commercial by the Future Land Use Map and identified as Preserve by the Interventions Framework Map. Mixed-Use Commercial future land use areas are based on the essential built form of the city’s Downtown Historic District.

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 1: Strengthen Northfield’s Downtown Core
- Strategy 3: Small business development
- Strategy 4: Support the local workforce
- Strategy 5: Diversity Northfield’s tax base
- Strategy 6: Grow in a compact, sustainable development pattern

The additional height requested by the applicant enables the development of a 4-story building that meets certain characteristic elements of the historic downtown, including taller ground-floor commercial ceiling heights. Compared to the 3-story Nutting Block building adjacent, the proposed structure exceeds the height of that building by an estimated 5 feet, while including an extra story, representing an efficient use of land and resources.

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, the building is flush with street level on Division St. and exceeds the maximum height limit by 6%. As the property slopes downward to the river, the building height needs to be maintained to allow for the continuity of the internal units to be constructed.

The scale of the building is consistent with others in the neighborhood. The building to the south is approximately 50 feet tall. The building to the north is less consistent with the rest of the street at 23 feet tall but is outside of the Historic District. Across the street the library sits higher due to the grade change, which also allows for the proposed building to fit into the neighborhood.

The right-of-way adjacent to the front facade that is proposed to exceed the height limit is approximately 68 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 55 feet results in a H/W ratio of approximately 1:1.2 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 the unique circumstances of the property not created by the landowner. The property naturally slopes towards the river to the west and the ground underneath is bedrock – also because of its location adjacent to the river – makes it difficult to build and follow the slope of the property. Additional hardships unique to the property include an easement used by other downtown buildings runs along the west side of the property. The design standards required for development within the Historic District preclude the use of wall-mounted heating and cooling units typically found on a hotel, and the requirement to fill the site reduces the potential for ground-mounted units. Therefore the roof must be engineered to hold additional weight, and larger units must be used.

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

Finding:

Granting the variance is not expected to alter the essential character of the locality. The redevelopment of the site offers an opportunity for a newly constructed building to meet

modern day advances in accessibility and construction. The height variance is to allow parts of the building to be constructed above the 50-foot maximum to accommodate design restrictions, natural grade changes, and other code requirements. This will still allow for zero-threshold entry along Division St. and will be in keeping with the historic design standards. The Heritage Preservation Commission is responsible for determining compatibility within the Historic Overlay district according to the Downtown Preservation Design Guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and approved a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed project.