

CITY OF NORTHFIELD, MN
PLANNING COMMISSION RESOLUTION 2026-003

RECOMMENDATION APPROVING A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT TO CITY COUNCIL
TO MAKE TRANSPORTATION FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS IN THE PERIMETER
TRANSITION AREA

WHEREAS, the applicant, Carleton College (the “Applicant”), seeks a Conditional Use Permit, pursuant to Northfield City Code, Ch. 34, the Land Development Code, Secs. 3.2.8 and 8.5.9, in order to: 1) close that privately-owned portion of College St. north of 1st St. E.; 2) relocate the bus stop and parking spaces from that location to the parcel northwest of the intersection of Nevada St. and 1st St. E.; and 3) expand the existing parking lot north west of the intersection of Nevada St. and 1st St. E. to accommodate the relocated bus stop and parking (the “Conditional Use Permit”), which is within the Perimeter Transition Area of the property zoned CD-S: College Development; and

WHEREAS, the Applicant 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, the City of Northfield Planning Commission (the “Planning Commission”) conducted a public hearing on March 19, 2026, and received public testimony regarding the proposed Conditional Use Permit; and,

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

WHEREAS, following the public hearing, the Planning Commission reviewed the requested Conditional Use Permit at its March 19, 2026 meeting pursuant to the standards and criteria contained in Northfield City Code, Ch. 34, the Land Development Code, Secs. 3.2.8, and 8.5.9, and postponed their decision to the following meeting; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission reviewed the requested Conditional Use Permit at its April 16, 2026 meeting pursuant to the standards and criteria contained in Northfield City Code, Ch. 34, the Land Development Code, Secs. 3.2.8, and 8.5.9.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION THAT:

1. The recitals hereto are incorporated herein by reference as findings.
2. The Planning Commission’s hereby recommends approval to the City Council of the requested Conditional Use Permit, pursuant to Northfield City Code, Ch. 34, Secs. 3.2.8, and 8.5.9, in order to: 1) close that privately-owned portion of College St. north of 1st St. E.; 2) relocate the bus stop and parking spaces from that location to the parcel northwest

of the intersection of Nevada St. and 1st St. E.; and 3) expand the existing parking lot north west of the intersection of Nevada St. and 1st St. E. to accommodate the relocated bus stop and parking, and adopts the findings, which are attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference as Exhibit B subject to the following conditions:

- a. The landscape buffer between the existing parking lot and 1st St. E. be enhanced with a combination of plant materials or other features, which may include raised planters, solid decorative masonry walls, or other screening elements designed to achieve year-round screening of the parking lot from adjacent residential uses without creating additional safety concerns by excessively limiting visibility from the rights-of-way.
- b. The existing light fixtures in the project area shall have the lenses removed to reduce the scattering of light, and new fixtures will be kept to a minimum necessary number, shall not have lenses, and shall be compliant with City Code requirements applicable to outdoor lighting adjacent to residential uses.

PASSED by the Planning Commission of the City of Northfield on this 16th day of April 2026.

Chair

Member

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

EXHIBIT A

LEGAL DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

PID 2231375002

PID 2231375003

PID 2231400001

PID 2231352001

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 the City Council impose such conditions as necessary to make the use compatible with other uses allowed in the same district zone or vicinity. Northfield City Code, Section 8.5.9, 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 uses of surface parking, bus stop, and pedestrian way are allowed either by-right or as conditional uses 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. Portions of the project area are within the Perimeter Transition Area (PTA), wherein any 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 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.
 - Relocation of the bus stop to the proposed locating improves accessibility on and off campus by locating more residences within an estimated 5-minute walk. The impact is likely to be minimal but should generally be positive, based on industry best practices. College students are one of the largest user demographics of Northfield’s transit system.

Ch3 Strategy 5: Design for safe access

- Outcome: Street rights-of-way are allocated and designed for all users and modes of travel appropriate to the surrounding land use including access for people of all ages and abilities, pedestrian scale lighting, green infrastructure, and shade trees.
 - Closing College Street to vehicle traffic reduces vehicle conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists. While College St. sees low volumes of vehicle traffic, pedestrian and bicycle traffic is significantly greater than surrounding locations. The impacted portions of the adjacent neighborhood streets have sidewalks on both sides of the street, and bike

lanes are present 2nd St. E, Nevada St. S and College St. S. City streets are designed to safely accommodate vehicle traffic, and the intersections along 1st St. E. have “bump-outs” installed to calm traffic and improve safety. There is potential for the project to increase traffic on certain segments of neighborhood streets, but those impacts will not be significant.

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.
 - Generally, improved safety for pedestrians and bicycles on College St. can be expected to increase the number of people choosing to walk and cycle (and thus not driving), but the impacts are not likely to be significant. Also, generally, improving the accessibility and utility of transit is expected to increase ridership and reduce car trips, but these impacts are also not expected to be significant.
- Outcome: The city plans land uses and new development to reduce vehicle miles traveled and non-local inputs, including energy sources.
 - This project should generally be regarded as a positive step in this direction, though advances will be incremental and generally not significant.

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.
 - The project uses existing city infrastructure and resources in a reasonable way that balances improving access to jobs and services with actions that can be generally expected to limit or reduce negative climate impacts and preserve natural resources.

The proposed use meets or is expected to meet the following purposes of the LDC without running contrary to any others:

- 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 reduces overall parking supply with the Perimeter Transition Area and implements practices generally understood to reduce demand for single-occupant vehicle use and associated parking by improving access to transit and safety of walking and biking.

The area is characterized by the transition from low-density residential use to college campus use. Compatibility, therefore, is focused on balancing trade-offs and addressing transitions through measures like abundant landscaping, traffic-calmed, neighborhood-style streets, and appropriately scaled structures. These features will not be altered by the project.

The existing parking lot off Nevada and 1st. St. E. includes a 50-foot-wide landscaped buffer, designed to mitigate the impact of the lot on nearby residents. In the winter months, the deciduous shrubs' lack of foliage is inadequate to achieve the intended screening. However, a solid hedge of evergreens may present a safety risk by limiting observability of the parking lot and/or creating locations where individuals may hide. A condition to enhance this landscape buffer to provide year-round screening has been included to address this issue.

d) The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses; The conditional use will not be hazardous or reasonably disturbing to existing or future uses. The additional bus traffic will be minimal, with approximately 1 bus running every hour during normal operating hours Monday through Friday, and 1 bus every 45 minutes Monday through Saturday. City buses have been operating on residential streets throughout the city without complaint for years, and generally safer for both passengers and non-occupants compared to private vehicles. S

Screening, lighting, nuisance conditions, and other potential impacts are addressed via the City Code which regulates impacts and transitions between different zones. Any development in the city is required to comply with the provisions of the Land Development Code (LDC), including this Conditional Use Permit process. The LDC is designed to provide balance between competing interests and needs as the property owners develop their land within the city. This CUP process allows impacted parties to raise additional specific concerns that may not be adequately addressed by the LDC, and the proposed conditions have been developed in response to concerns raised by members of the public.

The existing lighting of the parking lot at the northwest corner of 1st St. E. and Nevada was described as too bright and inadequately screened from the adjacent residents. Recognizing that existing lighting would not meet the existing code, and that a certain level of lighting is necessary for adequate security, a condition requiring the lenses installed on existing lighting be removed and that new lighting be kept minimal has been prepared.

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 and bus stop would be adequately served by essential public services. The property is served by 1st St. E. and a robust street grid with high connectivity to the south including sidewalks and bike lanes. Emergency services will have access from multiple access points. Drainage on site is served by a storm sewer. The project will not have a significant impact on refuse disposal or water and sewer connections.

Public comments indicated concern about increased garbage truck traffic due to the presence of a garbage enclosure structure included in the project. The applicant has clarified that the enclosure will screen existing trash receptacles currently serviced at the same location, and no increase in service activity is anticipated.

f) The benefits of the conditional use outweigh the potential negative effects of the surrounding community;

The benefits of the proposed development outweigh the potential negative effects. This project can generally be viewed as having a positive impact on transit function and access, a positive impact on pedestrian and bicycle safety, and a positive impact, long term, on climate impacts. While generally the traffic impacts to the neighborhood will be minimal, with any increase in traffic being localized to specific street segments due to relocation of existing traffic.

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 costs 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 relocated parking lot and bus stop are not expected to generate noise, smoke, fumes, glare, or odors that are any more excessive than the existing conditions. There will be a localized, minimal increase in traffic, offset by decreases elsewhere. The facility is not a transit hub, and idling vehicles will not 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 and bus stop are 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 and bus stop are within the Perimeter Transition Area because it is adjacent to a residential district, and special consideration is due to this proximity. Concerns raised by the neighborhood have been addressed via the proposed conditions or demonstrated to not be significant.

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.

The primary focus of the compatibility standards is to ensure that new infill development, redevelopment, or building expansion relates to the massing and scale of the surrounding structures. The proposed bus shelters will not be out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood. Screening comprised of vegetation has been installed between the existing parking lot and the street, and the parking is set back approximately 50 feet from the right-of-way creating a park-like setting along this section of 1st St. E. and is compatible with the surrounding areas. Concerns about light, and additional screening have been addressed via proposed conditions.

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

The Land Development Code includes regulations designed to mitigate noise and impacts of outdoor lighting, compliance with these provisions is required for site plan approval. Hours of activity will be consistent with existing conditions. Blue Route buses run from 6:00 AM until 6:00 PM and the Express bus runs from 3:00 PM to 9:45 PM.

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. Improving student access to transit should reduce demand for parking. Carleton College's 2021 parking study concluded there was a need for 806 off-street parking spaces and identified a supply of 980 off-street spaces. The proposed project will reduce net parking by 12 spaces, adding 12 spaces to the parking lot located off 1st St. E. and Nevada St. S. On-street parking in the area is provided and utilized at an acceptable level. Parking is therefore adequate.