

CITY OF NORTHFIELD
CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2021-089

A RESOLUTION BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORTHFIELD,
ACKNOWLEDGING RECEIVING PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS
MEMO

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission at the August 19, 2021 meeting passed a motion to approve the attached subcommittee's memo and forward it to the council; and

WHEREAS, City Charter Section 3.2 provides that recommendations presented to the council from its duly constituted boards and commissions shall receive consideration within six (6) months of presentation unless otherwise required by law or requested by the presenting body; and

WHEREAS, the City Council will be reviewing several action items related to this project and acknowledge this memo related to actions; and

WHEREAS, any actions of the City Council during this development process will act as the response or not of the Council related to the recommendations.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL THAT:

The City Council acknowledges receiving the Planning Commission Recommendations memo and final actions of the Council during the process review will serve as the response.

PASSED by the City Council of the City of Northfield on this 21st day of September 2021.

ATTEST


City Clerk


Mayor

VOTE:

<u>Y</u> POWNELL	<u>Y</u> GRENIER GRABAU	<u>Y</u> REISTER	<u>Y</u> NAKASIAN
<u>Y</u> NESS	<u>Y</u> PETERSON WHITE	<u>Y</u> ZUCCOLOTTO	

Date: August 19, 2021

To: Mayor Pownell and Northfield City Council

From: Northfield Planning Commission

Re: Kraewood Development recommendations

On July 19, 2021, the Northfield Planning Commission held a public hearing for the consideration of the preliminary plat request for the Kraewood subdivision. After extensive public testimony, a motion to recommend approval of the preliminary plat with conditions was made and seconded. Given the time devoted to public comment, the Commission voted to postpone discussion and decision on the motion until its next regular meeting of the PC on August 19, 2021.

The Commission also formed a subcommittee of Will Schroeer, Bill Kuhlmann, and Betsey Buckheit to draft additional recommendations in writing to the Council on three issues:

- Access and mobility needs
- Climate and environmental concerns
- Parks

After further discussion, the PC approves these recommendations and sends them to the Council. These recommendations call for action beyond the scope of the platting process ranging from immediate improvements to ensure the safety of people walking, rolling and biking to longer term capital planning. We have not explicitly distinguished items which are (1) appropriate to demand of the developer as part of the development agreement or TIF review process, or (2) require additional action by Council at taxpayer expense.

1. Access, mobility and traffic

The preliminary plat meets the LDC requirement that streets “within a new subdivision shall be interconnected and shall connect with adjacent streets external to the subdivision, to provide multiple routes for multi-modal circulation, emergency access, and trips from, to, and within the subdivision. Where street connections cannot occur due to topography, design constraints or some other feature beyond the control of the developer, sidewalks and/or trails shall be extended to connect with other pedestrian access improvements.”¹

Safety and access — within the subdivision and on adjacent streets — are critical. The interior streets must be designed for excellent walking, rolling and biking first and vehicle convenience second; there are also opportunities to build stormwater management into the street. The Council must ensure temporary improvements are made to Lincoln Parkway immediately to slow traffic and create multiple safe, convenient crossings while planning for permanent design changes to carry out City policy.

¹ [LDC 5.B.4.b](#)

A. Internal connections: Kraewood Drive

Connecting Highland Avenue (and preserving the ROW for possible connection to the east in the future) and adding a new north-south connection with Kraewood Drive from Greenvale Avenue to Juniper Avenue will create new ways to reach neighborhood destinations, enable lower traffic bike routes, and establish new “around the block” routes for walking. The plat will establish the street framework for improved walking, rolling and biking, but additional Council action is needed to ensure streets meet the LDC subdivision purpose of providing a pleasant experience and a high degree of safety and convenience.² Newer policies including the Complete Streets policy, Climate Action Plan, and Surface Water Management Plan further guide the City to take action to prioritize people walking and biking, slow vehicle traffic, and use green infrastructure to manage stormwater along Kraewood Drive and within the subdivision.³

Recommendations for Kraewood Drive

Establish clear design priorities: The PC recommends the following priority for design:

- People walking, rolling and biking are the top priority for design. Public space must be allocated to ensure vulnerable users are safe and facilities make walking and biking more convenient.
- Vehicle access to homes should be the primary vehicle traffic within the subdivision.
- Through traffic must be slow and subordinate to other priorities.
- On-street parking is least important.

Engage a professional designer to recommend specific traffic calming facilities on Kraewood Drive to slow vehicles, reduce through traffic volume, and carry out the priorities above. There are many tools demonstrated to slow traffic such as curb extensions (such as Water and 7th Streets), bike lanes, speed humps/tables, raised crosswalks, chicanes, street trees and many more. Because Northfield staff have limited experience in this area, the PC recommends hiring a consultant to design the street to slow vehicle traffic while ensuring traffic calming does not create obstacles, especially to people biking.

Engage a professional designer to recommend low-impact development and green infrastructure solutions to build climate action and stormwater management into the street: As discussed further in the environmental section below, proposed stormwater management for the subdivision requires ponding which removes the natural stormwater system to create an artificial one. Green infrastructure can significantly reduce runoff and treat stormwater within the street right-of-way. In addition, some traffic calming features such as chicanes or curb extensions can also serve as locations for infiltration and other green infrastructure.

B. Lincoln Parkway

At the public hearing, the Planning Commission heard many speakers express fears about both current vehicle traffic on Lincoln Parkway, and the impact of additional vehicles from the proposed development.

² [LDC 5.2.3](#)

³ [Climate Action Plan, RS-2, Surface Water Management Plan](#) (section on incentivizing low impact approaches, p. 53), [Complete Streets Policy](#), [Comprehensive Plan](#) Land Use Principles

Traffic studies — which are limited to a vehicle delay perspective — show Lincoln Parkway can accommodate the projected amount of additional vehicle traffic; the Planning Commission does not dispute this isolated finding.

Rather, the Commission is deeply concerned about what has not been measured, how prior development was not held accountable for its impact on safety, and how the City can take action immediately to improve Lincoln Parkway as well build longer-term solutions into the City's capital planning.

Lincoln Parkway issues

The City has not improved safety as development has occurred. After Lincoln Parkway was constructed a significant amount of residential development and large institutional uses have been built nearby. Given the City's current and past development review process and requirements, there has been no mechanism for requiring developers to address off-site impacts created by their developments, nor did the City act to address them.

The land use context has not been addressed in sufficient detail. Lincoln Parkway serves both as a through route between Highway 3 and North Avenue. It is also the hub for local vehicle access to Greenvale Park School, the Northfield Community Education Center, Kildahl Park Pointe senior coop, and residential areas including the new Kraewood development. Critically, the combination of fast through traffic and turning traffic (especially at school opening and closing) with an elementary school and residential areas make Lincoln Parkway a dangerous obstacle for people - especially children - traveling along and trying to cross to school, parks, downtown by walking, rolling, and biking.

The Bolton & Menk traffic study review fails to consider non-vehicle traffic. The report barely considers walking and does not mention bicycling or rolling at all. Aside from recommending changing the school crosswalk location, the study does not (and was not designed to) evaluate the street design and vehicle speed to make recommendations for safe, convenient, active travel either along Lincoln Parkway and especially crossing the street. Improving bike and pedestrian safety on and across Lincoln Parkway is an immediate need.

Lincoln Parkway Recommendations

- **Immediately install temporary/demonstration projects to slow traffic and enable safe crossing by children** at relevant locations on Lincoln Street between Cannon Valley Drive and the Spring/Greenvale Avenue intersection. Engage the neighborhood north and south of Lincoln to determine where need to cross and locations of most perceived danger. Crossings need to be obvious, accessible, and convenient for families and small children.
- **Install temporary protected bike lanes** (e.g. using plastic delineators) on *both* sides of Lincoln Parkway to calm traffic, eliminate parking and encourage rolling and biking. Further connections to low stress routes (such as making Spring Street south of Greenvale a signed and traffic calmed bike boulevard, adding connections to the St. Olaf bike facilities in the 2022 street projects, etc.) should be planned now, for installation as street projects or budgets allow.

- **Incorporate planning and funding permanent changes into the CIP after evaluating trial projects.** The City should determine a trial period for temporary improvements and collect data and feedback during this period to support permanent changes.
- **Work with the school district to reduce chauffeuring children to school** as part of Northfield's Safe Routes to School plan by improving bike and walk connections and considering limiting vehicle access on Lincoln Parkway at school opening and closing times.

2. Environmental Costs and Benefits

Northfield's Comprehensive Plan land use principles establish the City's commitment to environmental stewardship, especially (Chapter 5):

- The natural environment will be protected, enhanced and better integrated in the community.
- Environmentally-sensitive and sustainable practices will be integrated into new developments and redeveloped areas.

The LDC (Ch. 5 Subdivision) works:

5.1.1(A)(5) To encourage the wise use and management of land and natural resources throughout the city in order to preserve the integrity, stability, and natural beauty of the community;

And

5.1.1(A)(12) To implement the city's Surface Water Management Plan, protect and improve surface water quality, promote ground water recharge, enhance wildlife through proper management of surface water, and minimize public expenditures needed to protect water quality problems.

More recently and with greater specificity, Northfield has adopted its Climate Action Plan to reduce the City's carbon footprint and increase resilience.

A. Trees and habitat

As required by the LDC,⁴ the developers submitted a tree inventory with the plat application indicating a mature forest ecosystem on parts of the site; this was corroborated by public testimony. Mature trees and associated ecosystems provide a wide variety of benefits including: shade and cooling, wildlife habitat, water storage and infiltration, and carbon sequestration. A number of members of the public, including a professional biologist, also gave testimony as to the likely presence of the rusty patched bumblebee on the site which is a federally listed endangered species.

The proposed plat preserves some of the mature trees. However, the increased priority of climate action in the City argues for additional effort to minimize impacts and maximize the amount of value that can be carried forward. With that in mind, the Planning Commission makes the following recommendations to Council.

⁴ [LDC 3.5.6](#) Landscape, screening and buffering standards

Tree and habitat recommendation

Preserve trees on the perimeter of the site to the maximum extent possible. The LDC requires tree preservation (and protection during construction).⁵ The Planning Commission is recommending as a condition of approval that the street width be no wider than 28' with a corresponding reduction in the ROW width. This condition should allow building placement further from the site perimeter, and allow more trees and associated vegetation to be preserved. The Council should require the applicant to take advantage of this opportunity.

B. Stormwater management

The plat shows multiple detention ponds to manage stormwater from the site. The Planning Commission observes that ponding replaces the natural stormwater management system of trees and vegetation with an artificial one which will be dedicated to (and maintained by) the City and asks: can stormwater be better managed with natural systems? Preserving additional trees as recommended above is one tool. Parking lot and street design provide additional opportunities and the applicant and the City should evaluate whether these can be constructed utilizing pervious pavers and/or other infiltration/rain gardens which have been used successfully in Northfield and elsewhere in Minnesota.

Stormwater recommendations

- Hire a consultant with expertise in such designs to plan the parking lot to reduce stormwater.
- The LDC requires parking lot trees and landscaping; it also requires consideration that parking lot design landscape areas “include provisions for the on-site detention of surface water runoff, pollutant cleansing, and groundwater recharge.”⁶ These provisions may be required and the Planning Commission recommends that the City require this design.
- Consider incentives to facilitate better design: The PC recommends exploring any and all incentives to defray costs.

Northfield and the State of Minnesota have a variety of incentives in place to put rain gardens in existing properties; could these or other grants apply in this case? This question is relevant at the plat stage because *if* new runoff could be reduced enough, it might be possible to shrink or possibly eliminate the need to construct one of the proposed retention basins.⁷

⁵ LDC 3.5.6(B)

⁶ LDC 3.5.8(E)(3) Stormwater management

⁷ Calculations would have to be done for this site. Nonetheless, it is clear that reducing impervious surface is a powerful tool not just for reducing runoff, but for adapting to the increasing number of high precipitation events.

“[E]ven a modest reduction in impervious cover ... has the potential to significantly reduce increases in stormwater runoff volume and pollutant loads associated with increases in precipitation.” From: Pyke, *et al.*, “Assessment of low impact development for managing stormwater with changing precipitation due to climate change,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 103 (2011) 166– 173.

C. Environmental assessment

A number of residents have asked that an environmental assessment be conducted for the site. The LDC sets parameters for when an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) is required; an EAW is not required for this project.⁸ The City has the discretion to require an EAW in these circumstances:⁹

A discretionary EAW may be required when it is determined that, because of the nature or location of a proposed project, the project may have the potential for significant environmental effects. The city council may require the preparation of a discretionary EAW if it is determined that a development project may have some significant environmental impact or when there is a perception of such....

On its face, the likely presence of a federally listed endangered species fits the trigger in the LDC: “may have some significant environmental impact or...a perception of such.” During the July Planning Commission meeting, the Community Development Director observed that the EAW is not a particularly useful tool for evaluating a site plan. The Planning Commission agrees that many parts of the state EAW are not relevant to this proposal, or to the questions that residents and Planning Commissioners have raised.

Nonetheless, it would be useful for the City Council to know more about the current environmental services provided by the site as it evaluates the return on public investment in this project. The developer has filed an application for TIF funding from the City. While the TIF process is separate from the preliminary plat process, an environmental assessment would help the City understand the full costs and benefits of any public investments. For example, can the City estimate the costs from removing the existing natural water infiltration system, and how the proposed ponding compares to other stormwater management designs.

Environmental assessment recommendation:

Require or commission a **rapid environmental review of the site’s current environmental assets and performance** to help assess the City’s Return On Investment for public investment and ensure compliance with applicable laws, such as the Endangered Species Act. The Planning Commission is available to support the Council and staff in developing such a Scope if desired.

3. Parks

The concern was expressed at the public hearing that the Third Ward has a relative shortage of city parks as compared to other areas of the city and that the proposed development would exacerbate this problem. At the time the Planning Commission reviewed the preliminary plat, the PRAB had not reviewed and commented as required for major subdivisions under LDC section 8.8.2; the PRAB will review the plan at their August 19 meeting.

Currently, nearby park facilities include Dresden Hills and Cherry Park. Greenvale Park Elementary School, while not a City-owned park, does have a large playground area and significant open space for other youth activities such as soccer. The completion of Kraewood Drive should also improve access to Cherry Park and Way Park for the immediate neighborhood surrounding the proposed development.

⁸ LDC 8.3.9 Environmental review consideration

⁹ LDC 8.3.9(C)(3)

With future development likely in the direction of the hospital, consideration of the impact of the proposed development on the area's parks and renewed planning for the need for parks in this portion of the city in general is appropriate. Consistent with §5.2.6(A)(1) of the Land Development Code (LDC), staff has recommended that cash in lieu of land dedication be used for the proposed development; the Commission is not in a position to disagree with this recommendation. Given the likelihood that some residents of the proposed apartment building will have young children, a small playground as was discussed by the developers at informational sessions with the Planning Commission last year should be considered. Especially for younger children, crossing the wide Lincoln Parkway during non-school hours could be especially dangerous.

Park recommendations

- The developer be encouraged to create a playground area on the site of the proposed apartment building.
- The PRAB study the need for future additional park space in this quadrant of the city and prioritize those needs for capital planning purposes.