

City of Duluth Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 14th, 2026 @ 5:00 p.m.
Duluth City Hall Council Chambers

Call to Order

President Andrea Wedul called to order the meeting of the city of Duluth Planning Commission at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 14th, 2026, in the Duluth city hall council chambers.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chris Adatte, Dave Sarvela, Kate Van Daele, and Andrea Wedul

Members Absent: Brian Hammond and Nik Bayuk

Staff Present: Amanda Mangan, Nick Bax, Jenn Moses, Chris Lee [CL], Jason Mozol [JM], Reina Owecke [RO], Christian Huelsman [CH], Ariana Dahlen, and Sam Smith

Approval of Planning Commission Minutes

Planning Commission Meeting Minutes from March 10th, 2026

MOTION/Second: Sarvela/Van Daele approved

VOTE: (4-0)

Presentation of Zenith Awards

Jenn Moses addressed the commission. Each year, Planning Commission presents Zenith Awards to projects that have implemented plans and goals of the city of Duluth. Commissioners have chosen two projects to receive the award this year. The first project is Force on 5th by Titanium Partners, which was an adaptive reuse of the Ordean building in downtown Duluth to convert office space into dwelling units. The second project is the Simco Apartments on Grand Avenue for their infill development on existing infrastructure, which allowed them to bring costs down and offer middle-income rent rates.

Public comment on Items Not on Agenda

No comments.

Consent Agenda

Items PLCUP-2602-0002, PLCUP-2602-0003, PLCUP-2602-0004, PLCUP-2602-0005, and PLSUP-2602-0003 were removed from the consent agenda and placed under public hearings.

~~PLCUP-2602-0002~~ Concurrent Use Permit for Wireless Utility near 2904 Parkwood Ln by Smartlink Group [CL]

~~PLCUP-2602-0003~~ Concurrent Use Permit for Wireless Utility near 5302 Oneida St by Smartlink Group [CL]

~~PLCUP-2602-0004~~ Concurrent Use Permit for Wireless Utility near 5004 Glendale St by Smartlink Group [CL]

~~PLCUP-2602-0005~~ Concurrent Use Permit for Wireless Utility near 5804 Tioga St by Smartlink Group [CL]

PLCUP-2603-0006 Concurrent Use Permit for Paving the Front Parking Lot at 715 101st Ave W by ISD 709 [RO]

~~PLSUP-2602-0003~~ Special Use Permit for Wireless Utility at 2299 Commonwealth Ave by Smartlink Group [CL]

~~PLVAC-2603-0002~~ Vacation of Right of Way at E 4th St adjacent to 415 N Hawthorne Rd by Morgan Morgan [CL]

~~PLVAR-2602-0005~~ Variance from Shoreland Setbacks at 3605 Minnesota Ave by Corey Behlke [CH]

Public: Nicola Scott, 5806 Tioga St – Scott is in opposition of PLCUP-2602-0005. She expressed concerns about proximity of the tower to her home, potential health impacts to nearby residents, and the lack of information and notice from the city.

Michael Peterson, 2904 Parkwood Ln – Peterson is in opposition of PLCUP-2602-0002. He expressed concerns regarding the lack of notice from the city, as well as impacts on the health of nearby wildlife and residents.

Genelle Lemont, 5002 Norwood St – Lemont is in opposition of PLCUP-2602-0004. She is an environmental health specialist and believes that there is not enough information on long-term health impacts on people of all ages and wildlife. She is also concerned that lower-income neighborhoods are being targeted for these types of projects.

Commissioners: Van Daele stated that she will abstain from voting on items PLCUP-2602-0002, PLCUP-2602-0003, PLCUP-2602-0004, PLCUP-2602-0005, and PLSUP-2602-0003 due to a conflict of interest.

MOTION/Second: Sarvela/Adatte approved the remaining consent agenda items.

VOTE: (3-0)

Van Daele abstained

Public Hearings

Items PLVAR-2603-0007, PLVAR-2603-0004, PLSUP-2603-0004, PLSUP-2603-0005 were removed from the agenda.

PLCUP-2602-0002, PLCUP-2602-0003, PLCUP-2602-0004, PLCUP-2602-0005, and PLSUP-2602-0003

These items were removed from the consent agenda and placed under public hearings. These items were all discussed at the same time.

Staff: Chris Lee stated that for the concurrent use permits (CUPs) on the agenda, commissioners are being asked to review the locations for the wireless utilities to be in the right-of-way (ROW). The special use permit (SUP) is an addition that will be going on to an existing tower, which the commission has seen in the past with other SUP applications. Planning commission has seen applications for larger towers previously, and the ones being discussed tonight are small cell towers.

Moses added that the staff reports will show the criteria for the CUPs, which include reviewing whether the ROW can be shared without impeding the flow of traffic and pedestrians.

Commissioners: Sarvela asked the applicant to address the health concerns from members of the public.

Applicant: Terri Clark addressed the commissioners. She works for Smartlink and is a vendor for AT&T. AT&T adheres to the FAA and other government requirements, and these requirements must be met prior to picking a location for the small cell towers. The existing poles will be

replaced with taller poles, bringing some from 25 ft to 35 ft tall. The locations were chosen to serve areas within a 5 to 6 block radius, and they are areas that currently don't have enough coverage. There is no evidence of negative health impacts from exposure to these polls.

Commissioners: Adatte asked if the polls are meant to serve as a cell phone service booster and asked if the exposure from these small cells would be similar to the impacts of someone carrying a cell phone.

Applicant: Clark stated the small cells act as a booster for the larger towers that provide cell phone and internet coverage. There is currently a small cell located at 651 E 5th St in Duluth, which has been there for several years. The purpose of these small cells is to provide better coverage to certain areas in Duluth.

MOTION/Second: Adatte/Sarvela approved

VOTE: (3-0)
Van Daele abstained

PLIUP-2603-0001 Interim Use Permit for an Outdoor Living Site at 1533 W Arrowhead Rd by Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Duluth [JM]

Jason Mozol gave a presentation of the project. Safe Bay operated under an interim use permit in 2023 and 2024 at the Damiano Center and in 2025 at the Vineyard Church, providing safe and secure overnight parking and sleeping places for people living in cars. In 2025, the site served 160 individuals, of which 20 were able to secure permanent housing. On a typical night, 10-12 people stayed at the site with the highest usage night serving 25 people. 20 of those individuals were able to find secure, permanent housing.

This program is only for people sleeping in vehicles (not tents or other sleeping facilities). It will operate seasonally during the warmer months, May through October, and only at night (5:30 pm – 8:30 am). Vehicles will park in the existing, paved rear lot. Other parking lots in the front of the property will provide parking for other uses. Mozol spoke about the program requirements listed in the staff report including screening, staffing, and monitoring of activities that will take place on site.

A number of public comments were received, both in support and opposition to the application. Staff recommends approval with conditions listed in the staff report.

Commissioners: Sarvela asked staff if there are any site layout changes and asked if a permanent fence is required for the permit to be approved.

Van Daele asked staff to comment on the trash screening concerns noted in some public comments.

Staff: Mozol stated that the screening being proposed with the rock berm and the temporary screening material meets the code requirements. The trash screening requirements would be associated with Vineyard Church, not the Safe Bay program, so those requirements are not under the purview of this permit.

Moses added that commissioners can propose mitigations to impacts that they believe would stem from the interim use permit (IUP) by adding conditions of approval.

Commissioners: Wedul asked staff about a public comment that claimed the screening is located off the subject property. Commissioners also asked if there were any complaints received during the 2025 operating year.

Staff: Mozol responded that the screening must be on the subject property, and the berm and temporary fencing appear to be on the subject property. He clarified the boundary lines on the site plan. He does not recall receiving substantiated complaints from last year.

Applicant: Drew Filkins addressed the commissioners. He is a CHUM employee and manages Safe Bay. He is also representing the church. He did not observe any Safe Bay guests wandering off site during hours of operation. The people who use Safe Bay either stay in their cars or utilize the services available to them on site.

CHUM staff are working with volunteer organizations to construct a permanent fence along the north property line this summer. He can't speak to the trash screening since he is not part of church.

Public: Becca Eastvold, 4705 Morris Thomas Rd – Eastvold is a lead pastor at Vineyard church and is in favor of the project. They hosted the Safe Bay program last year and plan to do so again this year. They are hoping to serve vulnerable populations through this program, which aligns with the church's beliefs.

Heather Jellum, 25 Howard Gnesen Rd – Jellum lives directly north of the subject property and signed up to speak in opposition of the project. She is requesting conditions of approval, not for the denial of the permit. Jellum requested that the program offer a no-idling zone for the cars as the exhaust fumes are troublesome to her family. She expressed concerns about screening for sex offenders, vehicles not leaving at the end of hours of operation, and other impacts to her property. She requested that a survey be done if fence permit is pulled.

Commissioners: Sarvela asked the applicant to address Jellum's concerns.

Applicant: Filkins stated that he has had conversations with about idling cars moving to another part of the parking lot. People typically start their cars a few minutes before leaving in the morning. Last year, CHUM staff held monthly meetings with neighbors and were sensitive to their concerns. Additionally, staff also want program guests to have the ability to use their cars for heating, cooling, and to charge their devices. Their staff will ask guests to abide by city ordinances regarding idling on private property.

Commissioners: Van Daele asked the applicant about the attendance at last year's monthly neighborhood meetings and if open communication will continue this year.

Wedul asked about the fence timeline.

Applicant: Filkins stated that approximately 20 people came to first neighborhood meeting last year, and then 2 or 3 people attended the following meetings. He added that some neighbors who were initially opposed in the program ended up shifting to neutral or in favor at the end of the season. CHUM and Safe Bay staff are planning to continue monthly meetings this year. Filkin stated that his cell phone number was advertised for entire season last year, and the same number will be listed this year. Filkins received calls from future clients who showed interest in using Safe Bay, but he did not receive any calls from neighbors.

Their staff are working with volunteers and are hoping to apply for the fence permit by end of May. They will do everything that keeps them in compliance with city regulations.

Commissioners: Adatte asked how it is decided where people park.

Van Daele asked if a fence is required.

Applicant: People check in and then they choose their own parking spots. Guests with idling cars are encouraged to stay closer to the building.

Staff: Mozol responded that a permanent fence is not required because the berm and temporary screening material meet screening requirements. The applicant must obtain a fence permit prior to construction of a fence. He doesn't believe that there is currently any screening around the dumpster, and he does not know if the dumpster has been there prior to current fence regulations going into effect. There is potential that it is nonconforming and permitted.

MOTION/Second: Van Daele/Sarvela approved with the added condition that the current trash screening be investigated to determine if it is in compliance with current regulations.

VOTE: (4-0)

PLEAW-2511-0002-1 Public Comment Period for Downtown Duluth Draft AUAR

Staff: Moses stated that this AUAR project has been underway for the past 6 to 8 months. Staff issued public notice after last month's meeting, so now the project is currently in the public notice period for the draft EAW. Tonight's public hearing is a requirement of the process. Staff will collect all public comments and will prepare responses to each comment. There is no action to be taken tonight.

Public: David Schimpf addressed the commissioners. He resides in the Kenwood neighborhood and is against certain aspects of the project. He appreciates the broad area approach made by staff and is planning on submitting more detailed written comments by the deadline. Schimpf does not believe that the consultant has taken an adequately broad area approach, and the mitigations are identical to what they would be if each parcel were developed in isolation from everything else. He stated that he could not find any information regarding Duluth energy systems in the document, and the consultant projected greenhouse gas numbers as if each individual building would be heating itself. He also believes that parts of document read as if they were generated by artificial intelligent with no corrections.

Other Business

PLOR-2602-0001 TIF District Establishment Conformance to Comprehensive Plan by Sherman Associates [JM]

Moses stated that city staff have been working to create a new TIF district. Planning commission must confirm that the development and its uses align with the comprehensive plan. The memo provided in the packet identifies the proposed uses. The 100,000 sq ft renovation will provide space for working artists, inclusive music programs, a food hall, and 2 large community event spaces. Staff found that the future land use designation supports the proposed uses. The current zoning also allows and supports the identified uses for the proposed redevelopment. Moses spoke about how the project aligns with the other principles listed in the memo. Staff recommends approval.

Applicant: Will Anderson, Director of Development with Sherman Associates, and Caroyln Sundquist, President of the Board of the Armory Arts and Music Center. They provided some handouts on the background of the project and are happy to answer questions.

Commissioners: Commissioners expressed their appreciation of the project and thanked the applicants for their work.

MOTION/Second: Van Daele/Sarvela approved

VOTE: (4-0)

Communications

Land Use Supervisor (LUS) Report

Moses presented a memo to commissioners on the Lester Park Golf Course project. All current project information is posted on the website. In the next phase of the land use study, staff will work with the consultant to begin creating sample scenarios that will be presented at public meetings and to stakeholder groups. More information will be posted on the website, and people will be able to leave comments and feedback. There will be more updates in the coming months.

Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) Report

HPC met on April 13th. There was a presentation on the 4th Street Reconstruction, and there will be an open house for this project this coming Thursday at the Central Hillside Community Center.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:28 p.m.