

**Town of Duluth  
Planning Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
January 22, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm by Chair Justin Osadjan.

In attendance: Justin Osadjan, Ken Peterson, Nate Nesgoda, Kit Grayson.

Absent: Dave Meyer, Tony Mancuso, Andrew Aho.

Also attending: Liz Strohmayer, Planning Director; ArMand Nelson, Town Board liaison to the Planning Commission; Beth Mullan, Secretary; and Laura Herzog, incoming secretary.

Agenda- Nate made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Ken seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

New Business- Variance and Conditional Use Permit Request

**Variance Request-**

The Commission will consider the application of Peter Geyen for a variance to allow access from North Shore Drive to a Commercial Use in Zone District SC-1B on a property to be purchased for the purpose at 57xx North Shore Dr. A CUP cannot be approved without the approval of the requested variance first. Peter and his partner, Danielle, were present.

Liz said that our current ordinance does not list North Shore Drive as an access road for a commercial business. The current businesses with North Shore Drive access have been grandfathered in. The North Shore Scenic Railroad will not grant any more access over the railroad tracks unless it is something significant. Liz said she has spoken with them extensively in the past. Highway 61 also does not allow road access. The proposed access would be through an already dedicated driveway to Tom's Logging Camp. The legal access needed for this proposal is asking for commercial use to be accessible from North Shore Drive.

Peter said they will not have a lot of traffic going to and from the business, and they want to keep it as limited as possible. They have a few product deliveries per week, and they have 4 employees. He stated there is no showroom, and only some pick up and drop offs of product.

Liz read aloud the 5 criteria listed below for the variance request. For the variance request to be approved the commission must find all 5 criteria to be true.

Variations shall only be permitted...

1. When they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the Ordinance.
2. When the variations are consistent with the comprehensive plan.
3. Practical difficulties - the property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance.
4. Practical difficulties - The plight of the property owner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the property owner.
5. Practical difficulties - The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality.

## **DISCUSSION**

Justin asked if the easement to the Tom's Logging Camp road access is legal in the purchase agreement, and Peter stated that yes, it is.

Justin asked Bill Weckman, the owner of Tom's Logging Camp, if he has any concerns with the amount of added traffic coming from North Shore Drive, and Bill said he does not have any concern with that.

Justin asked the size of the delivery trucks. Peter said some are semis, but not very often. It is mostly pickup trucks with 20 ft trailers.

Bill stated that with the 10 ft buffer there is plenty of room with a nice clean shot to the proposed building site.

## **PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

There were three emails read aloud, one was in opposition and two were in favor. Bill Weckman stated that the person opposing the proposal is located over an eighth of a mile away from the property through the woods. Peter said her concerns were valid. Danielle asked if it would help if they paved the driveway.

## **MOTION**

Justin moved to approve the variance as requested. Ken seconded the motion.

Justin moved to split the question to review the criteria individually. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Nate Nesgoda moved that the proposal is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the Ordinance and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan because the property is zoned commercial and North Shore Drive is the only access to the property. Accessing the business from North Shore Drive will not impact the neighbors. Ken Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Justin Osadjan moved that the variance is consistent with the comprehensive plan because the plan encourages local businesses that serve the community and the proposed business serves that purpose. Ken Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ken Peterson moved that the property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance because it is an entry to a commercial business in a commercial district. Nate Nesgoda seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Justin Osadjan moved that the plight of the property owner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the property owner because there is limited access across the railroad tracks and from the Scenic Highway, and sharing the entrance with the logging camp is the best solution. Ken Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Kit Grayson moved that the variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality because it will not impact neighbors and the visibility from the road will be minimal. Ken Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Justin Osadjan moved that the proposed variance is a use that is allowed under the Planning and Zoning Ordinance. Ken Peterson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

With approval of the criteria, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion on the table to approve the variance as requested.

### **Conditional Use Permit Request-**

The Commission will consider the application of Peter Geyen for a Conditional Use Permit for a commercial use, Great Lakes Wood, a wood burning business, in Zone District SC-1B on a property to be purchased for the purpose at 57xx North Shore Dr. The property is the parcel located adjacent to Tom's Logging Camp at 5797 N Shore Dr.

Liz read aloud the definitions of SC-1B zone district, and Commercial Use from the Ordinance shown below.

**Shoreland Commercial SC-1B** -This district is intended for concentrated, locally based, commercial development along the shores of Lake Superior, for uses consistent with providing goods and services for the local community, and incidentally for the locally based tourism industry. This district supports a light level of development intensity.

**Commercial Use** – The principal use of land or buildings is for the sale, lease, rental, or trade of products, goods, and services, the nature of which is not covered by more specific definitions (e.g., highway commercial).

### **DISCUSSION**

Peter explained how they burn wood siding. The process is called Su Sugi Ban. He said that it is only a portion of the wood they process. They are also bundling up varied species of wood in a closed conveyor. Peter said as far as the smoke goes it is all thermally modified, which is done in a kiln at 600°F causing it to burn out the glucose sugar that feeds rot, so there is pretty much zero smoke with all the moisture content being eliminated.

Liz stated she was on their current site while burning was taking place and she did not witness any smoke.

Peter said all the wood is pre-milled, and they put the wood packages together. He said there is some hand finishing, but not done with spray machines, it is all done indoors, with most of the products being water based. He said they are currently operating at their house in a 4,000 sq ft area. They want to grow the business somewhat. They currently have 4 employees and would like to add a couple more in the future. He said it is not mass production, and that they have been doing it for 10 years, with their hours being in the 7am-5pm range, and no weekends. He also said they will have architects swing by from time to time. He stated the lights would be conscientiously managed and they would keep to low level lighting and motion lights after closing. He said they would like to put up a nice building that is not an eye sore, and they would have vegetation to screen it from North Shore Drive.

Justin asked if the property is mostly high ground and not wet. Peter said there is one small ditch that runs down into the highway ditch, and that most of it is flat and dry.

Justin asked how large the lot is, and Peter said it is 4.5 acres.

Justin asked what the planned dimensions of the building are, and Peter stated 80 ft x100 ft, or so, but said that it would be up to what gets approved, and they would possibly start building this summer. He said they plan for it to be a combination of sheet metal, windows, and wood, and that they want to put up something nice that displays some of their own siding.

Justin asked if the trees by the proposed entrance would be removed, and Bill Weckman stated that some of those were dead and fallen and had already been cleared out.

Peter said they plan to plant white pines.

Liz explained that they did not submit actual applications yet for the Land Disturbance and Land Use Permits, and that they needed to see if the Variance and Conditional Use Permit were approved first.

Justin asked what kind of waste material they produce and how they get rid of it, and Peter said very minimal waste material is produced, and that they currently use a regular garbage can.

Kit asked if all of this would take place inside, and Peter said they would have one covered area outside to wrap bundles, but there would be no production outside. He said the burner is covered with sides and an open end, and that they plan to have it covered to protect it from the elements.

Kit asked if they brush the wood, and if there is any water or ash, and Peter said it doesn't get brushed, but some are lightly burned and brushed for esthetic, and that makes a small amount of dust that is collected with a portable dust collector.

Justin asked if they plan to put up a sign, and Peter said there would be a sign at the driveway for deliveries, and that they would like to maybe put one up facing the highway, not a large sign, but something showcasing the business to state what they are.

## **PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

All previously submitted public testimony was already read aloud in the Variance portion of the hearing.

Brad Oaches was present and said he has property at 5780 North Shore Drive, and that he talked to Peter yesterday and everything he is hearing tonight is consistent with that. He said they would like to offer their support, and they look forward to being neighbors. He said they live in Duluth and they use their property out here to cut dead trees and plant white pines. He said they are in favor of the proposed commercial use.

## **Community Participation Report**

There were 15 people for Peter to contact, and he was able to reach 6 of them, with 5 positive comments, and 1 with some concerns. The person with concern was Brad Oaches and he spoke during public testimony and felt his concerns were addressed and was now in support of the proposed use.

## **MOTION**

Ken made a motion to approve the proposed application for a Conditional Use Permit. Nate seconded the motion.

Ken moved to split the question to review the criteria individually. Justin seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Nate moved that the proposed use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and within the spirit and intent of this Ordinance due to being a commercial use next to another commercial use in an area zoned for commercial use. Ken seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Ken moved that the proposed use is compatible with the existing neighborhood because it utilized the same driveway as another commercial use property. Nate seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Ken moved that the proposed use will not impede the normal and orderly development and improvement in the surrounding area of use permitted by right in the zone district because it utilizes the same driveway as another commercial use property. Nate seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that the location and character of the proposed use is considered to be consistent with a desirable pattern of development for the area because it is already zoned commercial and provides a service to the local community. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Kit moved that the proposed use will comply with the wetlands requirements in Article III, Section 6 of this Ordinance because there will be minimum tree removal, the space is already grassy and non-wetlands, and there is adequate drainage. Ken seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Nate moved that the total amount of impervious surfaces will not exceed that allowed in the zoning district where the conditional/interim use would occur since it won't exceed that in the building size being adequate and that the lot has already been cleared. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that the topography, vegetation, and soil conditions are adequate to accommodate the proposed use because this is light industrial use on an already cleared lot on high ground in an area that currently exists. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that the proposed use will not impact public waters during or after construction or impact wetlands without appropriate mitigation measures because the petitioner has proposed using silt screens if necessary to protect the ditch from runoff and the business itself will not result in any type of soil disturbance when operating. Nate seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that adequate utilities (water supply, wastewater treatment), access, drainage, stormwater retention, and supporting facilities have been provided or are being backed by appropriate financial assurance because the owner will use the North Shore Sanitary sewer for waste and will presumably get water from a well. Also, the proposed construction does not propose much moving of earth to disrupt the storm water flow. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Nate moved that the proposed use will not create potential health and safety, environmental, lighting, noise, signing, or visual problems due to having an adequate buffer and minimal smoke from the process, and minimal waste which has historically been taken care of appropriately. Also, the commission is proposing restrictions on lighting. Justin seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that the location of the site is appropriate with respect to existing or future access roads by using an easement that already exists, so there will be no additional entrance from a public road constructed and being that the variance was just granted. Nate seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin moved that existing public services, such as police and fire protection, solid waste disposal, schools, road maintenance, sewer and water facilities, are adequate to meet any increased demand of the proposed use can be met because this business employs few employees, produces minimal waste, and no residence on the property that would affect schools. Kit seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Justin made a motion to amend the original motion with the following specific criteria. Ken seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Special Conditions-

- One lighted sign will have downcast light. It can be illuminated between the hours of 6am and 9pm.
- Motion lights are the only lights that can be used outside of business hours.
- Require a 10 ft buffer of vegetative barrier along the southern border of property that will consist of dense tree cover.
- A 10 ft buffer of vegetative barrier on the north property line, excluding 100 ft opening where the business could place a sign.
- Business hours are between 6am and 9pm.

Peter stated they will not cut the already in place tree buffer along the highway and said they may put a sign up in the open space that is already there.

Bill stated that between the two parcels there was already some clearing with an open field.

With the approval of all the criteria listed above, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion on the table to approve the conditional use application.

Liz stated there is a 15-day appeal period, and once that lapses the permits will be sent out.

#### **St. Louis County memo for county ordinance update-**

Liz mentioned this as a reminder for the Commission to look at, and if they have any formal comments then someone can volunteer to put that together and submit it to the county. That would be due on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January. Otherwise, they can go to the hearing or just wait and see what they decide.

Ken said he doesn't want to pass our ordinance updates until we see what the county changes are. All agree.

Old Business- Review of SC-1A and SC-1B matrix changes from C (Commercial) to P (Permitted) from last month.

Liz stated that currently a commercial use requires a Conditional Use Permit, which is what we did in tonight's hearing, but in the last meeting the commission decided to change that in the matrix so that it is just permitted use. She said their main reasoning was that it is zoned commercial. She said one thing to consider is that it has been zoned commercial for a long time and has also needed a Conditional Use Permit for a long time. She said there are a lot of residential areas around there, and that change would no longer allow the Commission's input.

Ken said he still thinks it should be allowed without having to go through this process of a permit since it is in a commercial zone.

Liz said she thinks that change for SC-1A and SC-1B would have a bigger impact on the residents, and that the Commission would need a lot of reasoning behind it for a change like that to be made.

Nate said having conditions like we did tonight is useful for the area.

Ken said that is what commercial is with location of the road, the highway, and the railroad in those zones.

Ken asked for clarification what Liz is proposing is that SC-1A and SC-1B are shoreline residential with conditional use commercial. He also asked why even have these as separate zones. He said if we reroute the verbiage then the zoning would be the same as SSUR-1, stating that it is all residential area, not commercial, since we are allowing the same thing in both areas, but just defining it differently.

Liz said the way she sees it is if someone wants to have a business in SSUR-1 it must fit into residential character, but if someone wants to have dense commercial space then that would be in SC-1A and SC-1B. She said she would like to see growth in business but would like the community and Commission input on the type of proposed business.

Justin said he would like to address this next meeting. All agree.

#### Approve Minutes-

Nate made a motion to approve the December 2025 Planning and Zoning Meeting Minutes. It was seconded by Kit. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Directors Report-

Liz said if the Zurchers sell their house then they do not need to meet the requirements set by the township, but they would be imposed on the new owner.

ArMand asked if they have to put that in their sale disclosure, and Liz said yes, they will need to.

Liz gave the update that Dave Meyer decided to resign from the Commission effective today. Liz said that leaves the Commission with an open seat to be filled. She expressed gratitude to Dave for the time he spent serving almost 2 terms on the Commission.

Concerns from the Audience-

None.

ArMand said we are now exempt by the state from the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4), and that we are no longer required to be in it.

Ken made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Nate seconded the motion. It passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:21pm.