

WRIGHT COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Meeting of: February 12, 2026

MINUTES

The Wright County Planning Commission met on Thursday, February 12, 2026, in the County Commissioners Board Room at the Wright County Government Center, Buffalo, Minnesota. Dan Mol, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with members present: Dan Bravinder, Randy Wilson, Troy Beise and Pat Mahlberg. Absent was Jeanne Holland & Charlie Borrell. Brian Wold, Assistant County Attorney, was the legal counsel and Barry Rhineberger, Planning & Zoning Administrator were present.

Chairman Mol introduced & welcomed two new Board Members - Randy Wilson and Troy Beise.

ACTION ON JANUARY 15, 2026, MINUTES

Bravinder motioned to adopt the minutes for the January 15, 2026, meeting as printed. Seconded by Mol.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY Abstained: Randy Wilson & Troy Beise

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. LEONARD E LUEDKE – Cont. 11/20, 12/18 & 1/15

LOCATION: 11093 COUNTY ROAD 17 SE – THE NORTH 447.15 FEET OF THE EAST HALF OF THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION 36, TOWNSHIP 118, RANGE 25, Wright County, Minnesota. (Franklin Twp.) Tax #208-200-362105. Property Owner: LEONARD E LUEDKE

Petitions to rezone from Agricultural/Residential (A/R) to Suburban Residential-a (R-2a), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.047 & 155.051, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Leonard Luedke

- A. Rhineberger had nothing new to add since previous meetings, noting only that at the last meeting the Commission's discussion appeared to be leading toward a split vote. At that time, there were only four members present, so the item was continued for further discussion and deliberation.
- B. Luedke added his comments stating this was the 7th public hearing about this variance. Meaning his neighbors had been notified seven times about the situation. He made the point that neighbors tend to be the first to object to change, yet in the six meetings, not one of them had been present to voice concerns. He said Franklin Township objected based on county guidelines, which they stated they always follow. Luedke felt most obstacles to development are extending sewers, standing water and getting adequate roadways, none of which apply to his project and his septic had already been approved. Luedke said he had a unique parcel as it is surrounded by houses, one behind on each end and seven across the street. He was not asking to split up farmland, but that a large plot be made compatible with the surrounding plots even though those were plotted a long time ago. Luedke's plot now in the middle of those and it is an old neighborhood. Luedke felt the division has nothing to do with what is happening in the rest of the county and is instead a neighborhood situation where no neighbor has objected to it.
- C. There were no public comments.

- D. Wilson asked the applicant if there were any crops currently on the property. Luedke responded that soybeans were planted and that approximately six acres were in cropland. Wilson also asked if there was additional information regarding why the Township denied the request. Bravinder replied that the Township referenced its Land Use Plan, which designates the property and land to the south as Agricultural Residential.
- E. Bravinder stated that taking into consideration the discussion from the last meeting, he did not see a big problem with this division due to the lots around it being divided similarly. However, he noted that the Township should be able to rely on its Land Use Plan as intended, which left him conflicted. Rhineberger added that the Township's response and notes were included in the Commission's information packet for reference.
- F. Mol expressed concern that approval of the proposed division and rezoning to R2A could lead to similar requests for smaller lots in the surrounding area, referencing existing 10-acre parcels identified on the zoning map. He emphasized that the issue was not precedent-setting, but rather consistency with the County's Land Use Plan, which serves as a guiding policy document for the Commission. Mol stated that without clearly defined reasons demonstrating the applicant's situation as unique or rare, he was hesitant to support a deviation from the Land Use Plan.
- G. Mahlberg discussed whether the proposed division could be considered infill or transitional development, noting it would make more sense if the parcel were adjacent to an established residential area with similarly sized lots. Based on the zoning map and surrounding property sizes, he stated he did not believe the parcel met that condition. Mahlberg identified his primary concern as the mixed lot sizes surrounding the applicant's parcel, observing that while a few smaller parcels exist to the east and west, the predominant pattern to the south and northeast consists of 10-acre lots. Although he acknowledged the absence of opposition from neighboring property owners, Mahlberg emphasized that public sentiment is not the main determining factor for zoning decisions, which must instead be evaluated against zoning criteria and development patterns. He reiterated that the key question was whether the parcel truly functions as infill within an already established smaller-lot area. Bravinder concurred with Mahlberg's observations regarding the variation in lot sizes to the north and south of the property and stated that he also found it difficult to determine where the transition in development pattern occurs.
- H. Wilson questioned the proximity of smaller parcels across the roadway in contrast to the larger surrounding properties and asked at what point the development pattern should be viewed as transitioning from smaller residential lots to larger rural parcels.
- I. Motion made by Wilson to close the public hearing and direct the council to prepare findings based on the record and discussion, consistent with the denial of the request and continue the matter to the March 5th, 2026 hearing. Motion seconded by Mahlberg.

VOTE:

Aye: Mol, Wilson, Mahlberg & Beise

Nay: Bravinder

MOTION CARRIED

2. **COLLEEN DAY** – Cont. 1/15

LOCATION: 5511 20TH ST NE - GOVERNMENT LOT 8, Section 25 and part of THAT PART OF GOVERNMENT LOT, Section 24, all in Township 120, Range 25, Wright County, Minnesota. (Buffalo Twp.) Tax #202-000-251204 & 202-000-244100. Property Owner: COLLEEN M DAY & ROBERT W DAY

Petitions to rezone the property referenced from General Agriculture (AG) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2) to Agricultural/Residential (A/R) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.047, 155.048 & 155.057, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Colleen Day and Madison Day (Colleen's daughter)

- A. Rhineberger stated the matter was continued from the previous hearing for a site inspection. The Commission met at the site on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, and staff is now seeking direction.
- B. The applicant had nothing to add, and there were no public comments..
- C. Bravinder referenced Township notes from 2022 regarding road access and road frontage requirements, noting that the Township had indicated it would be willing to construct or assume jurisdiction over a 14-foot-wide roadway to satisfy the required 300 feet of road frontage. C. Day confirmed the accuracy of this information. Bravinder raised concerns about whether the proposed roadway width was sufficient; however, the applicant stated that no additional guidance had been provided by the Township beyond what was previously approved and that the Township required the applicant to maintain the road. Bravinder asked whether the frontage requirements would be fully met. Rhineberger explained that Planning and Zoning staff had worked with the applicant over several years, including under the previous administrator, and determined that the current concept plan satisfies the minimum frontage requirements. He added that roadway construction standards would have to be determined by the Township. Rhineberger noted that the County's acceptance of the concept plan was based on prior approvals, established requirements, and the applicant's time and financial investment in advancing the project was in reliance of those determinations. Based on the longstanding Township support and confirmation that frontage standards would be met, Bravinder stated he would recommend approval of the request.
- D. Mahlberg stated that rezoning standards emphasize rare or unique circumstances where riparian parcels are particularly suited for residential development. While Township support is a positive factor, he asked the applicant to explain how the property meets this standard, noting that the County contains many lakes and water bodies. He questioned what specific characteristics make this parcel especially suited for residential use as compared to other similar properties. C. Day stated that the purpose of the request was to create a separate building site for her daughter. Mahlberg acknowledged that such requests are common but noted that the Commission's rezoning standards do not specifically address personal or family circumstances. He reiterated that the standard requires identifying rare or unique conditions and asked the applicant to identify what distinguishes the property in that regard. The applicant indicated that she was unable to identify specific characteristics that would answer the question.

- E. Wilson said one concern he has with the request is that the property is currently used for crops. He asked about the impact of converting this specific farmland to residential use. The applicant said their plan is to keep as much of the property as possible in the Green Acres program. Wilson also asked whether the applicant had concerns about the road width and whether it would allow adequate access for fire trucks and other emergency vehicles. The applicant responded that the vehicles would be able to reach the residence without issue.
- F. Beise had no concerns with the applicant's request.
- G. Mol said the Commission is guided by the land use plan and that this request goes against it since the property is zoned agricultural by both the City and the County. He explained that changing zoning outside of the plan requires strong reasons to avoid setting a precedent for future requests. He added that the ordinance allows rezoning for lakeshore riparian properties, which is the main reason this request can be considered. Mahlberg agreed that the ordinance allows the request but noted that the Land Use Plan is older and may be updated in the future with new standards for lakeshore development. He stated that while the Commission has approved similar requests in the past, the current standard is to maintain agricultural zoning unless a property is clearly suited for riparian residential use. He added that future requests may not have the same lake characteristics, and in his view, this proposal is stronger than some previously considered by the Commission.
- H. Mahlberg asked the applicant about the topography of the referenced proposal of Lot 1 and how access to the lake would work. Madison Day, the applicant's daughter, explained that the lot has a gentle slope with a trail leading down to the lake and that the proposed home would fit well on the site. M. Day asked what qualities the Commission looks for in riparian residential development. Mahlberg said the property must be shown to be suited for residential use and that his questions were meant to establish that record. M. Day stated that she was unsure why the property would not be considered suitable for residential development and noted that the proposed building plan would utilize the property well, and limit future development. She added that she would not object to a similar request from a neighboring property across the lake. Rhineberger explained that those nearby properties had multiple building entitlements, while this parcel has only one that's been used already, creating the need for rezoning.
- I. Mahlberg noted the lake's recreational features support the request but also complicate his decision. M. Day agreed, stating that it is a very popular recreational lake. Mol said the lot meets the criteria for riparian property and that the applicant has the right to request rezoning based on its lakeshore location, and wouldn't need to demonstrate a rare or unique circumstance for approval. Wilson said this was a difficult decision for him as well, given that the request goes against the Land Use Plan designation of agricultural zoning. Mahlberg then asked Mol to comment on whether the property is productive farmland, noting its location on a peninsula. Mol explained that the parcel is difficult to access for crop farming and is not a typical farming plot. He stated that from a row-crop farming perspective, the land's curved shape, size, and the presence of the house in the back corner make it undesirable for most farmers. He added that the proposed split of approximately 10 acres for the proposed Lot 1 would include a buffer of existing trees along the lakeshore. Mol noted that the applicant is restricted from removing trees larger than four inches in diameter, as discussed during the site inspection, meaning clear-cutting would not occur. Mol also stated that the lake is relatively undeveloped with larger lot sizes and that while he is generally opposed to these

types of requests, he has supported a few similar ones. He further clarified that agricultural zoning does not require land to be actively farmed but rather allows for open land and wildlife habitat.

- J. M. Day stated that the long-term plan is to use the remaining property as an equine operation along with other productive farm animals. She explained that while less of the land may be tilled in the future, more would be used as pasture. She noted that the property would not be solely for recreational lake use and would continue to function primarily as farmland. She also stated that they have had multiple discussions with the Planning and Zoning feedlot administrator regarding these plans.
- K. Bravinder motioned to recommend approval to the County Board of Commissioners to rezone tax parcel 202-000-251204 & 202-000-244100, from AG-General Agriculture with S2-Residential-Recreational Shoreland District overlay to Agricultural/Residential (AR) with S2-Residential-Recreational Shoreland District overlay, because we find the property is aligned with the goals and policies of the Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan and the Township approves. Motion seconded by Beise.

DISCUSSION: none

VOTE:

Aye: Bravinder, Beise, Wilson, and Mol

Nay: Mahlberg

MOTION CARRIED 4 to 1

3. **CAROL LEE** – Cont. 1/15

LOCATION: 4825 PITTMAN AVE SW – part of E1/2 OF SW1/4, Section 28, Township 119, Range 28, Wright County, Minnesota. (Cokato Twp.) Tax #205-000-283100. Property Owner: GALEN M & CAROL LEE

Petitions to rezone the northeast 21.47 acres of the property, as referenced on a survey by Northstar Surveying, under Job No. 2025204, from General Agriculture (AG) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2) to Agricultural/Residential (A/R) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.047, 155.048 & 155.057, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Carol Lee & Myron Klinkner (Carol's Son-in-Law)

- A. Rhineberger stated that, similar to the previous request, this matter was continued for a site inspection. The Commission visited the site on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, and is now considering the applicant's request for deliberation and decision.
- B. The applicant, Lee, had nothing new to add and stated the request was due to the need for 400 feet of road frontage and 300 feet of lakeshore frontage for the referenced lot.
- C. There were no public comments.
- D. Wilson raised a prior question he had regarding the stormwater system or ditch that dead-ends near the City of Cokato. Bravinder explained the history of County Ditch No. 7, which runs along the south end of the property and drains into Dahlgren Slough before reaching the City of Cokato. Bravinder stated he plans to attend a meeting in March, as the community is discussing contributing to a ditch clean-out, and he wants clarification on how drainage will be handled given the current dead-end condition. He added that the property involved in this request would not experience changes in water levels as a result of the ditch, despite County concerns. Wilson responded that his concern stemmed from the lack of a clear drainage outlet and the potential for water buildup on the property, noting that stormwater issues typically raise additional concerns for him when reviewing requests. Bravinder clarified that while water may temporarily accumulate during heavy rainfall, it eventually absorbs into the ground in the back field area of the property which is Dahlgren Slough. Bravinder added that historically the field had been farmed and used for hay by a previous owner. Lee stated that the property had been farmed in the past, but a later owner did not maintain it well, resulting in overgrowth of small trees and brush. She explained that after she and her husband purchased the property, they cleared the scrub trees and restored portions of the land for agricultural use. She added that they planted several acres of crops to improve the land and encourage wildlife habitat, noting that deer and other wildlife are now commonly seen on the property.
- E. Wilson asked about the group responsible for Brooks Lake along the north side of the property and whether there were specific reasons for their opposition to the rezoning request. Mol noted that the group's concerns were included in the meeting packet for Commission review and while each member would determine the relevance of those concerns individually. Bravinder stated he did not believe the issue would be significant, as the proposed home site would be located some distance from Brooks Lake. Lee added that the home would be situated near the golf course on the east side of the property. Bravinder asked Rhineberger to clarify the required setback from the lake. Rhineberger explained that because Brooks Lake is classified as a recreational development lake, the required setback is 100 feet. Bravinder also referenced Soil and Water

notes indicating that the northwest corner of the property contains wetlands that will not be developed, leaving the primary buildable area within the farmland, similar to the previous request.

- F. Rhineberger stated that during the site inspection, the proposed home location did not provide significant lake views and asked whether there were plans to remove trees. The applicant explained that she was not seeking lake views but rather views of wildlife on the property. Klinkner commented that access to the lake could be accommodated by using a side-by-side vehicle. Mol added that during the site inspection, the applicant discussed building the proposed home closer to Pittman Avenue rather than nearer to the lake. Lee confirmed this, stating the home would be located along Pittman Avenue toward the northeast corner of the parcel, near approximately five existing homes and residential properties.
- G. Mol explained that this request is similar to the previous one, where the Land Use Plan shows tillable acreage interspersed with wetlands and located along a body of water. He noted that the riparian portion of the ordinance allows the Commission to approve such requests if appropriate. Based on the site inspection and the Soil and Water maps referenced showing wetland areas, Mol stated that the proposal does not involve rezoning the entire property for large-scale development. Rather, it is for a single-family home with shoreline frontage and compliance with existing Township Road frontage requirements. He said that given these factors, he thinks the request deserves consideration.
- H. Mahlberg asked the applicant what, in their view, makes the property especially suited for residential development. Klinkner responded that the parcel already sits up against homes in the area and would be larger than many nearby properties. He added that it is lakeshore property and would not appear out of place. Mahlberg then asked about the condition of the lakeshore. Klinkner stated that the property has 300 feet of shoreline and that it is in good condition. He also noted that his son installed a small landing to allow access for his duck boat.
- I. Wilson moved to recommend approval to the County Board of Commissioners to rezone the northeast portion of tax parcel 205-000-283100, as shown on the plan prepared by Northstar Surveying, Job No. 2025204, dated December 19, 2025, from AG-General Agriculture with S2-Residential-Recreational Shoreland District overlay to Agricultural/Residential (AR) with S2-Residential-Recreational Shoreland District overlay, because we find the property is aligned with the goals and policies of the US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan. Motion seconded by Bravinder.

DISCUSSION: none

VOTE:

Aye: Bravinder, Beise, Wilson, and Mol

Nay: Mahlberg

MOTION CARRIED 4 to 1

4. **STEVE BRUGGEMAN** – New

LOCATION: 10521 DOUGLAS AVE NW - 42.77 AC NW SW N OF RD & SW NW in Section 9, Township 121, Range 26, Wright County, Minnesota. (Silver Creek Twp.) Tax #216-000-092300. Property Owners: RALPH H & CHERYL M UECKER

Petitions to rezone the property referenced from General Agriculture (AG) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2) to Agricultural/Residential (A/R) with a Residential-Recreational Shorelands District Overlay (S-2), as regulated in Sections 155.028, 155.047, 155.048 & 155.057, Title XV, Land Usage & Zoning of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Steve Bruggeman, son of property owner, and Paul Otto of Otto Associates - representing the applicant & property owners

- A. Rhineberger provided an overview of the request to rezone approximately 42.8 acres in Silver Creek Township from AG to Agricultural/Residential. He noted that the property is identified in the Land Use Plan as both Rural Residential and Resource Lands. During review, it was recognized that the Resource Lands layer was a new addition in the most recent Land Use Plan update, along with specific policies allowing Ag Residential areas to transition to Rural Residential when resource lands are involved. He explained that the Land Use Plan identifies certain resource lands as appropriate for slightly denser development, provided that a Planned Unit Development (PUD) is used to protect existing resources on the property. Rhineberger stated that the current proposal, which he has previously discussed with the applicant and Mr. Otto, does not include a PUD and does not preserve the identified resource lands. He added that while the Land Use Plan serves as a guiding document rather than an official regulatory control, it remains an important consideration for the Commission. Rhineberger noted that no comments were received from neighboring property owners. He also stated that the Township submitted no comments but a notation expressing questions regarding the resource lands designation, but no formal recommendation, and that the matter is scheduled for discussion at a future Township meeting.
- B. Otto stated that he has not previously handled residential rezoning within designated Resource Lands and asked the Commission for understanding on how they intended to proceed if the request moves forward, including what specific resources should be identified and how they would be protected. He noted that the property is identified in the Land Use Plan as Ag Residential where the typical density is one dwelling per ten acres. He explained that if the project were pursued as a PUD, which the applicant and property owners are open to, the density could increase to approximately six units per forty acres. However, the applicants prefer a total of four lots, which aligns with the Land Use Plan. Otto added that the proposed layout utilizes existing road access and includes lots of ten acres or more in size. Otto suggested one of the referenced layouts that would place all land west of the creek into a single lot, with the remaining lots arranged along the creek, resulting in two parcels under ten acres. He explained that this approach could help avoid potential challenges in the future. Otto stated that this configuration could be pursued as a standard PUD, which would not increase overall density and would eliminate the need for creating an outlot. He noted that this would remain consistent with both the Land Use Plan and zoning requirements. While Otto indicated he believed the original layout provided the best building sites, he added that the applicant and property owners were seeking input and direction from the Commission.
- C. There were no public comments.

- D. Mol asked for additional explanation regarding when the resource lands designation was added to the Land Use Plan. Rhineberger stated the update occurred in 2009 and that the property had already been identified as Rural Residential at that time. He explained that the resource lands layer was developed using multiple data sources, including DNR information on important wildlife corridors, large wooded tracts, and remnants of native woodlands. Based on this collected data, several properties, including the subject parcel, were designated as resource lands. Rhineberger pointed out on the referenced map a large area identified under this designation. Mol asked whether the property had previously been designated as Agricultural/Residential. Rhineberger responded that it had already been planned for development, and the intent was not to remove development potential, but to ensure that development occurred in a way that preserved the identified resources. This was the reasoning behind the PUD provision in the Land Use Plan. Rhineberger explained that if the land were divided into individual lots, the resource lands could be split among separate owners, and there would be limited ordinance protections preventing tree removal or habitat disruption. He noted that while restrictions could exist, they are more difficult to enforce across individually owned parcels. In contrast, a PUD allows the resource lands to remain as common open space with shared ownership, where specific provisions can restrict tree removal and habitat disturbance. He stated that once such resources are removed, they cannot be restored. He added that under a PUD structure, whether four or six lots are created, the common outlot would preserve the resource lands and all owners would have a shared interest and clear restrictions. This policy approach was the result of significant discussion and is outlined on Page 75 of the Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan. Mol wanted to confirm whether ten-acre lots would have been allowed prior to the resource lands overlay. Rhineberger confirmed that the concept plan would have been permitted prior to the 2009 update.
- E. Mol asked the Commission if there was any interest in going out for a site inspection of the property.
- F. Bravinder expressed concern regarding Silver Creek Township's questions on the Resource Lands designation and stated that he preferred to wait for the Township's response before proceeding. He made a motion to continue the request to the March 5, 2026 meeting for a site inspection and Township input. Motion seconded by Wilson.

(Motion later rescinded.)

- G. Mol stated he wanted the Commission members to have more discussion about the resource land and if it should be a PUD or more condensed and to give the applicant a little bit more thought from the commission members. Wilson asked if the reasoning was due to the creek going through the parcel. Mol confirmed that it was due to the Silver Creek on the referenced map of the parcel, stating it was a lower area up to the northwest corner and having a lot of nice building sites and potentially the development for even more development up in the northeast corner of the property. He questioned the Commission if they would like to make sure there would be more preservation of the resource land and more consolidated home sites. Mahlberg thought that the resource land and Policy 6 of the Land Use Plan suggested more of a PUD for the property. Mol clarified he was not speaking against the plan but would like more of a feeling of the commission member's thoughts. Mahlberg said he felt the planned united development would be more consistent with the standards.
- H. Otto noted that clarification is needed regarding the PUD standards, as the zoning code includes two types. He explained that a standard PUD does not necessarily require land to be set aside as common open space but is typically structured as a trade-off to preserve certain features. He stated that one proposed layout reduces the size of two lots so individual owners would not control property on both sides of the creek, noting this as an alternative approach. Otto added that this option would not create common open space but would maintain the total number of lots at four. He

explained that if lots were made even smaller, additional density would be required to achieve the same overall development potential. He also pointed out that Douglas Avenue is a County Road and questioned whether access for five lots would be permitted without constructing an additional roadway. He questioned what would be better for the protection of the resource land, whether increasing density to preserve a central resource area is preferable, or maintaining larger, more agricultural-style lots while dividing ownership along the creek through a standard PUD. Otto added that either approach could still meet the criteria of the zoning ordinance. He stated that when the applicant returns to the Township for further discussion, they will be seeking feedback from the Commission regarding the direction of the request. He explained that the Township is currently viewing the proposal as potentially not allowed, and that guidance from the Commission would help clarify expectations and allow the applicant to respond with an informed plan.

- I. Rhineberger recommended rescinding the current motion, and second, to allow continued discussion without procedural complications. Bravinder made a motion to rescind the previous motion. Motion seconded by Wilson. Mol confirmed the motion was withdrawn.

Motion to rescind carried

- J. Rhineberger asked Otto to clarify how the referenced standard PUD layout would preserve the Resource Lands. Otto responded that the intent was to prevent individual property owners from owning land on both sides of the creek, similar to the configuration used on the two lots at the southern end of the parcel where the creek serves as the boundary. Rhineberger stated that he did not anticipate owners crossing the creek under either of the proposed layouts for the upper lots, referenced lots 1 and 2, noting that any such activity would require approvals that would likely prevent it. He added that in developments of this nature, the Planning Commission typically designates building sites, which would likely not be located across the creek due to fill requirements and other development constraints. Additionally, Rhineberger referenced prior discussions with Otto regarding the southwest corner of the parcel and its historical use. He explained that the area west of the creek, with access from County Road 39, had historically been a gravel pit based on aerial imagery from the 1950s and 1960s, meaning the land had already been disturbed and is now in a regrowth phase. He noted that depending on how lots are configured, that area could potentially support additional building sites if higher density were pursued. Rhineberger stated that if a PUD redesign were considered, coordination with the Highway Department regarding access would be necessary. He did not believe the currently proposed layout posed major access issues but noted that if four or five lots were developed on the eastern side of the parcel accessing Douglas Avenue, multiple driveways would be required. He presented this information for the Commission's consideration. Otto clarified that his earlier comments did not suggest construction across the creek, but rather that ownership on both sides of the creek could lead to informal crossings and disturbance, such as ATV trails for activities like hunting. He stated that separating ownership would reduce the likelihood of people entering and impacting the resource area. Otto added that he anticipated all homes would be located along Douglas Avenue on higher ground, with west-facing walkout designs.
- K. Bravinder stated that it would be important for the Commission to receive a recommendation from the Township, as the property is within their jurisdiction and they should have the opportunity to provide initial input on the request. He added that the Township could also consider whether the proposal should proceed as a PUD or as a consolidated homesite.

- L. Mol stated that he would like to have further discussion to provide guidance to the applicant regarding whether a Planned Unit Development (PUD) should be considered or whether the Commission is comfortable with the concept plan as currently proposed, given the additional understanding of the Resource Land designation. He asked what direction, if any, the Commission could offer at this meeting before continuing the matter to a future date, particularly if revisions to the plan or additional discussions with the applicant and property owner would be necessary. Otto agreed that receiving guidance from the Commission would help the applicant and property owners determine how to proceed. He stated that they may return with the same proposal and explain why alternative options are not feasible, but if the current approach is not aligned with the Commission's expectations, they would need to reevaluate. He added that they appreciated any direction the Commission could provide. Rhineberger reminded the Commission that the current request is limited to rezoning and does not include approval of a subdivision. He added that the future concept was being presented for informational purposes and hopefully provide the applicant with a general direction. Mol suggested that Otto develop an alternative option showing how the applicant and property owners might preserve portions of the creek bed and the lower wooded area of the property, consistent with ordinance expectations. Otto then asked the Commission whether there were specific preferences regarding common open space versus non-common open space and whether that distinction was a significant factor in their review. He inquired whether the Commission preferred preservation through a commonly owned outlot or would be open to evaluating alternative layouts that could achieve similar resource protection. Mahlberg added that because the Commission does not frequently review PUDs, he asked Rhineberger whether the distinction between common ownership and non-common ownership should be a significant concern? He noted that in his experience with PUDs and commonly owned areas, such spaces are often lightly used, which naturally contributes to resource preservation. Rhineberger agreed and stated that this is the intent of most rural PUDs, which include specific provisions to preserve resources. He explained that in rural settings, preservation is typically achieved in one of two ways: through common open space or through agricultural-restricted areas associated with a larger homestead, where multiple lots are created while retaining acreage for farming purposes. He noted that these are the two primary approaches generally used in rural PUDs. Rhineberger further explained that a standard PUD does not include the same preservation requirements. He stated that if a standard PUD were pursued in this case, it should include specific provisions restricting vegetation removal and tree cutting in designated areas along the creek, across all lots. He noted that once property is in individual ownership, resource impacts can occur more easily, and, without protections, the ecological value could be diminished. He added that such restrictions would need to be addressed during the subdivision phase through strict conditions to align with the intent of the Land Use Plan. He also stated that it would be possible for the Commission to approve the plan as currently proposed.
- M. Otto asked Rhineberger whether Silver Creek is designated within the Shoreland District and whether the property includes a shoreland boundary. Rhineberger responded that much of Silver Creek is not designated as shoreland; however, certain segments are included based on Minnesota Statute 103F, which identifies designated water bodies within the County. He reviewed the statute and confirmed that the portion of the creek associated with the property is included within the Shoreland District. Otto noted that due to this designation, shoreline provisions restricting clear-cutting would apply, which could be relevant to future easements or development conditions.
- N. Wilson motioned to move the item to the March 26 meeting for Township review and recommendation. Seconded by Mahlberg.

DISCUSSION: none

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

5. **KNIFE RIVER CORP. – NORTH CENTRAL** – New

LOCATION: 4301 County Road 39 NW – S ½ of NW ¼ of SE ¼ and S ½ of NE ¼ of SE ¼ and S ½ of SE ¼ and N ½ of NW ¼ of SE ¼, except tract described in Book 321 of Deeds, page 439, at the Office of the Wright County Recorder; all Section 8, Township 121, Range 26, Wright County, (Silver Creek Twp.) Tax #216-000-084300 Property Owner: FAY A NAAKTGEBOREN REVTR & CLARK & LOY JAEGER TR
Petitions for an IUP to allow the operation of a seasonal asphalt plant for the 2026-2027 seasons, with associated truck hauling, storage/stockpiling of recycled materials and mining/processing/washing. Hours of operation requested to be Monday - Saturday 7am - 7pm with 6:30am generator warm up, as regulated in Section 155.031, 155.048(D) & 155.100 of the Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Lucy Snowden – Environmental Manager with Knife River

- A. Rhineberger informed the Commission that the applicant for the Naaktgeboren pit missed the Township meeting and subsequently submitted a request to continue the item. He noted that a formal continuation request has been received and recommended honoring that request. He also stated that the staff member who typically receives calls from neighbors or members of the public regarding this item has been out of the office, and therefore he was unable to confirm whether any public inquiries had been received. Rhineberger indicated that some individuals may have been informed the item would be continued. For that reason, he recommended limiting discussion from the applicant at this meeting but advised that any members of the public present should be allowed the opportunity to comment.
- B. There were no public comments.
- C. Rhineberger confirmed with the applicant that the Silver Creek Township meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.
- D. Bravinder motioned to continue the item to the March 5, 2026 meeting for Township review and recommendation. Motion seconded by Beise.

DISCUSSION: none

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

6. **KNIFE RIVER CORP. – NORTH CENTRAL** – New

LOCATION: Portions of the SE & NE 1/4 west of the right of way of State Highway 25 in Section 5, and small parcel west of road right of way that is in Section 4, all in Township 120, Range 25, Wright County, Minnesota. (Buffalo Twp.) Tax #202-000-051102, -042200, -043200, -054101, -054401, -043300.

Property Owners: WILLIAM J & CYNTHIA L HOLTHAUS

Petitions for an Interim Use Permit for an expansion of an existing mining operation in accord with the EAW prepared and approved in 2025 AND a renewal & conversion of the current 2021 Conditional Use Permit to an IUP, to include mining and stockpiling of aggregates, along with the stockpiling and crushing of recycled concrete and asphalt as regulated in Section 155.031, 155.048(D) & 155.100 of Chapter 155, of Title XV Land Usage of Wright County Code of Ordinances.

Present: Lucy Snowden – Environmental Manager with Knife River and John Henry – General Manager of Aggregate for Knife River

- A. Rhineberger provided an overview of the application for an Interim Use Permit (IUP) to expand existing mining operations in accordance with an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) prepared and approved in 2025. The request also includes renewal and conversion of the current 2021 Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to an IUP to allow continued mining and stockpiling of aggregate, as well as the stockpiling and crushing of recycled concrete and asphalt. The property, commonly known as the Holthaus pit, is located in Sections 4 and 5 of Buffalo Township. Rhineberger stated that the initial mining operation on the property was approved in 2006, at which time an EAW was completed for the existing operation. The current request involves expansion into an additional approximately 111 acres, with about 50 acres proposed for active mining. A new EAW was prepared in 2025 for this expansion, the County Board determined that an Environmental Impact Statement was not required, and the EAW was approved. Rhineberger noted the Commission was given the required maps in their staff report, including existing conditions, mining operations, and restoration plans. He added that the staff report outlines several items for Commission review and discussion, such as screening and barriers, dust control, and other operational considerations, which may be set or adjusted at the Commission's discretion. He stated that these topics should be addressed during the hearing process so appropriate conditions can be drafted should the Commission consider approval. Rhineberger further stated that the Township recommended approval of the request. He also noted a neighboring property owner submitted concerns regarding the proposed expansion area, particularly Area 4 shown on the referenced current mining plan map. An additional comment was received requesting denial of the application, along with their supporting information.
- B. Snowden stated she agreed with Rhineberger's summary of the project and was available to address any questions.
- C. Public comment.
- Tammy Grossinger and Brian Kindelspire, residents on 54th Street along a cul-de-sac bordering the west side of the mining property, addressed the Commission. Grossinger offered to read her submitted statement aloud; however, Rhineberger noted that all Commission members had received copies of the letter in their staff report packets. Grossinger requested additional clarification regarding her comments in the letter and asked Knife River to provide further explanation about the mining operations to the south, including identifying the exact

locations on the referenced maps. Mol responded that the Commission could consider her comments and potentially incorporate conditions based on the concerns raised, and that Knife River and the Commission would have the opportunity to respond following the public comment portion of the hearing. He explained that it was a time to gather information and comments to determine next steps, which may include a site inspection or further action at a future meeting. Bravinder then asked Grossinger to identify her property location on the map displayed on the screen.

- Steve Schroeder came on behalf of his parents who could not attend the meeting. Their lot is referenced as the apple orchard just south of the mining property across County Road 113. His parents did send an email with one question and one request. The question was regarding the most recent preliminary staff report and the potential for access from County Road 113. Schroeder noted that while temporary access had previously existed on County Road 113, the current report indicates that such access would not be included going forward. Rhineberger confirmed that Knife River's mining plan does not propose access to County Road 113. He stated that if the applicant wished to pursue access from that roadway in the future, they would be required to return to the Commission for approval, and any conditions of approval would likely address that specifically. He added that under the current plan, the only authorized access to the pit would be from State Highway 25. Schroeder's parents also requested that, if the Commission conducts a site visit to the mining property, members consider visiting the referenced apple orchard property as well to observe potential concerns related to sight lines, dust, and impacts to the residence and orchard operation. Bravinder verified with Schroeder the location of the apple orchard property as shown on the referenced maps.
- Mike and Lori Holthaus, whose property is located at the northwest corner of the proposed mining area, asked for clarification regarding the specific areas where mining would occur and how close operations would be to their home. They stated that a previously received map shaded all land owned by their brother, Bill Holthaus, and they did not believe all of that area would be actively mined, particularly where wooded areas were shown extending north toward their residence on 60th Street. Rhineberger referenced the updated maps displayed on the screen, noting that the active mining area would extend to approximately 300 feet from the Holthaus property boundary. He also advised them to contact the County Assessor regarding any potential impacts on property value related to the proposed expansion.

- D. Mol opened the discussion up to the Commission members and pointed out that since there are a few new members and would suggest that the Commission do a site inspection visit of the gravel pit for their benefit. Wilson had questions about the possible smell and dust of the mining operations. Henry addressed the concern about dust and stated that dust is now regulated even to a further extent with federal statutes that just changed the standards. Knife River uses water and other dust suppression. Henry affirmed that none of the mining will change from what they have done in the past and it will be the exact same operation, which is a fairly small operation by industry standards. The gravel would still be crushed and washed there and the volumes most likely would not change either but that will depend on the economy and be job specific.
- E. Henry spoke to Schroeder's south access road question stating that there are no intentions of using the prior access point and that the current entrance and exit would remain the same since it can be used for the entirety of the mining property.

- F. Henry explained that mining activity could extend to the maximum area identified in the plan, as Bill Holthaus had indicated. He stated that the primary target area for mining is located near the center of the property from east to west, where the highest quality gravel is found. He noted that areas farther west of the current mining operation become increasingly silty and less feasible to mine. He explained that the plan shows potential expansion farther west to represent the absolute maximum extent under the Environmental Assessment Worksheet so that all potential impacts are evaluated.
- G. Henry also noted that in an effort to be a good neighbor, the applicant proposed leaving the southernmost 200 feet of the property undisturbed and not mining that area. He referenced the L-shaped section in the southeast corner near County Road 113 and State Highway 25, stating that although this area contains some of the best gravel on the property, it is being voluntarily excluded from mining. He explained that approximately 500 feet would remain before reaching the main mining area, and that only limited equipment, such as a front-end loader or dozer, might operate there, with crushing activities located farther north within the pit.
- H. Mol asked Henry how much of the operation area would be open during screening operations and whether berms would be installed to provide buffering, pointing out his concern for sufficient height of the screening. He noted that the Commission must consider impacts on the nearby residents. Henry spoke specifically to each area. The south area could be built up with the topsoil that's there right now and would run the berm 200 feet and around the perimeter. He explained the phased mining and restoration process for the property referencing the provided map where the mining would begin in the south section and would not progress north until that area was completed and restored. He explained that operations would move sequentially from south to north, with restoration occurring immediately after each section is mined. Henry noted that once a portion of the property is completed, there is no benefit to continue mining in that area and that the goal is always to return the land to agricultural use when feasible. He stated that the smaller southern section should be relatively easy to restore to farmland, and that clay material from mining operations can sometimes be used for backfilling to level the land. He added that restoration would occur section by section and that it may be several years before mining progresses to the northern portions of the property.
- I. Mahlberg asked Henry to elaborate on the areas becoming increasingly silty toward the west and how that might affect neighboring properties to the west. He inquired whether soil borings had been conducted across the property to determine where silt conditions begin, particularly toward the northern portion of the site. Mahlberg acknowledged that the full extent was shown in the EAW for impact analysis purposes but stated that it would be helpful to understand where mining activity is realistically expected to occur. Henry stated that, in his professional opinion, both the northern and southern areas beyond the currently identified mining line—approximately 200 feet from the driveway shown on the map—contain material that becomes less feasible to mine. He explained that while this material could potentially be used for basic fill in large projects without crushing or processing, it is not cost-effective for typical operations. Henry noted that the highest quality gravel is primarily located near the farmhouse and extends westward about halfway into the field, as well as along the corridor leading south. He stated that the final approximate 200 feet shown on the center referenced map is likely not economically feasible for mining. Henry referenced the left green map displayed and explained that current mining has progressed to a specific point and is stopping there due to material quality. He stated that the gravel becomes too fine beyond that area and does not contain sufficient rock to justify continued mining. He indicated that a line could be drawn from the southern mining area

approximately halfway into the lower field, and that represents the likely western extent of mining in the southern portion of the property. Henry further noted that on the aerial imagery, areas with lighter-colored soil often indicate coarser gravel deposits where crop growth is limited. He explained that this visible distinction generally corresponds with the areas where mining is most feasible.

- J. Snowden added that the Environmental Assessment Worksheet estimates the lifespan of the pit at approximately 20 to 22 years. Henry explained that this timeline is an estimate and can vary significantly depending on project scale and production levels, which could range from approximately 20,000 tons to 500,000 tons per year. Mol acknowledged this variability, stating that mining could be completed in a short period or extended over several decades depending on demand.
- K. Snowden addressed additional concerns raised at the Township meeting regarding the nearby apple orchard, noting that these concerns prompted discussion of the 200-foot setback. She stated that Knife River recognizes the orchard as a sensitive area and intends to be a good neighbor by maintaining open communication with surrounding property owners, particularly during critical periods such as the week of flowering for the apple trees. She explained that while this approach is not included as a formal CUP condition, it is Knife River's intention to proactively coordinate with neighbors to minimize impacts and address concerns as they arise.
- L. Mahlberg inquired about the anticipated total volume of material to be mined over the life of the pit, including estimated cubic yardage remaining in the areas proposed for expansion. Henry provided a rough estimate of the remaining material volume at approximately 1.6 to 1.7 million tons of material on the approximately remaining 50 acres available for mining. He noted that this estimate assumes full utilization of the material, though not all areas—particularly toward the west side of the property—may be economically feasible to mine.
- M. Grossinger, a member of the public, asked for clarification regarding the colored outlines on the referenced maps and how far west the mining operation would extend. Rhineberger directed attention to the middle map, explaining that it depicts the proposed extent of mining activity. He noted that the yellow shading indicates the areas where gravel would be extracted, while the outlined boundary represents the overall proposed mining area. He confirmed that this boundary reflects the westernmost limit of mining, which curves around the wetland areas and then continues northward. He added that, for Grossinger's property in the cul-de-sac, mining up to that point is already permitted under the original permit from 2006 and the five-year extension granted in 2021, and the original EAW. He stated that the current expansion request applies primarily to the green-shaded areas shown to the north and south. Grossinger stated that part of her concern stemmed from purchasing the property in May 2006 without awareness of the mining operation. She expressed that the expansion feels disruptive to the area and that she wanted clarity regarding the exact extent and intention of the mining activities. Henry responded to Grossinger's concern by stating that the area shown on the referenced map represents the furthest west the mining operation will extend and that this section will also be among the first restored. He explained that the area nearest the cul-de-sac is largely complete and will be backfilled as much as possible and restored to farmland. He stated that if the distance to the west property line south of the wetland is approximately 300 feet, then active operations would be roughly 600 feet from the cul-de-sac, creating a buffer that will increase as mining progresses south and east away from that area. Henry noted that limited additional activity may occur in that section if sand sales

require further extraction; however, he anticipated that any such work could potentially be completed by the end of 2026. Following completion, the area would be restored. He emphasized that the expansion plan results in operations moving away from the more populated areas over time. Mol and Wilson stated that this clarification was helpful.

- N. Beise asked whether the plan is to continue using the same driveway for access throughout the mining operation and into the future. Henry confirmed that this would be the case, stating that the existing driveway is ideally located and allows access to all areas of the property for material removal.
- O. Beise motioned to conduct a site inspection and continue the item to the March 5, 2026 meeting. Motion seconded by Bravinder.

DISCUSSION:

Snowden asked what specific aspects the Commission would like to review during the site inspection. Mol responded that several Commission members are new and may not be familiar with mining operations. Wilson stated that he would like to attend the site inspection but may not be present at the next meeting. Rhineberger clarified that the site inspection would occur between the current meeting and the next scheduled meeting, allowing time to accommodate scheduling needs. Snowden confirmed that the applicant would accommodate the Commission as needed.

VOTE: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

SITE INSPECTION

The Commission scheduled a site inspection for Tuesday, February 24th, with the Commission to meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Government Center.

Meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Barry J. Rhineberger".

Barry Rhineberger
Planning & Zoning Administrator
BR:sd

cc: Planning Commission, Twp. Clerks