The St. Louis Park Planning Commission is an 8-member advisory body made up of citizen volunteers appointed by the city council. The planning commission reviews and makes recommendations on comprehensive plan amendments, development projects, land use studies and zoning amendments. It also holds public hearings where the public can give input to commission recommendations.
commissioners
Matt Eckholm, chair
Jessica Kraft, vice chair
Jim Beneke, school board representative
Lynette Dumalag
Courtney Erwin
Claudia Johnston-Madison
Carl Robertson

Outgoing members
Lynne Carper
Allana Franklin, youth representative
Lisa Peilen
Joe Tatalovich, school board representative

staff
Karen Barton, community development director
Meg McMonigal, principal planner
Sean Walther, planning & zoning supervisor
Gary Morrison, assistant zoning administrator
Jennifer Monson, planner
Jacquelyn Kramer, associate planner
Akua Opoku, intern
Executive summary

The planning commission is an eight-member advisory group of citizen volunteers appointed by the city council. The 2019 members included Matt Eckholm (chair), Jessica Kraft (vice chair), Jim Beneke (school board representative), Lynette Dumalag, Courtney Erwin, Claudia Johnston-Madison, and Carl Robertson. Outgoing members included Lynne Carper, Allana Franklin (youth) Lisa Peilen and Joe Tatalovich (school board representative).

Commissioners pride themselves in their thoughtful consideration of applications. Commissioners review detailed staff reports, conduct fair and civil public hearings, discuss complex issues in study sessions and provide sound recommendations in a timely fashion.

2019 accomplishments:

Key duties:

- Review development projects, and planning studies and zoning amendments.
- Hold public hearings and make recommendations to the city council.

2019 activities: The commission reviewed 22 applications in 2019, including:

- Development review of Best Cleaners, Bridgewater Bank PUD amendment, Via Luna & Fairfield Hotel, Benilde-St. Margaret’s, Parkway Residences, and Holy Family Academy.
- Amend the zoning map and rezoned over 70 properties based on the 2040 Comprehensive Plan future land use map.
- Review of code amendments related to the mixed use zoning district, C-1 retail and service size requirements, small cell wireless ordinance, home occupations, accessory dwelling units, ground floor window transparency, inclusionary housing, and parking in Historic Walker Lake.
- Review of planning studies for the Historic Walker Lake, Texa-Tonka, and Sam’s Club areas.

2020 work plan:

Review development applications. Hold study sessions and hearings in order to make informed recommendations to city council.

Long range planning activities. Review and provide input on several studies.

- Land use study of former Sam’s Club property.
- TexaTonka Neighborhood Commercial Node small area plan
- Historic Walker-Lake revitalization plan
- Food access study
Zoning code studies

- Accessory dwelling unit requirements and adopt ordinance revisions
- Home occupation zoning requirements
- Billboard ordinance revisions
- Single family building scale
- Form-Based Code for Transit Oriented Development District
- Architectural materials requirements and adopt ordinance revisions
- Transitional industrial zoning district

Racial equity and inclusion

- Identify strategies to broaden participation and reduce barriers to public participation. Review notification methods, online opportunities to submit input, and consider when providing translation services, transportation or child care may be warranted.
- Participate in racial equity training, possibly jointly with other boards and commissions like ESC and police advisory commission.

Opportunities for collaboration

- If commissioner training occurs, include other bodies like the Environment and Sustainability Commission.

Strategic Priorities: How is the commission’s work supporting the strategic priorities?

Much of planning commission’s work deals with development and the built environment. The commission primarily promotes strategic priority #3: *St. Louis Park is committed to providing a broad range of housing and neighborhood-oriented development*. Through review of development projects and new city policies, our work also supports strategic priorities #1: *St. Louis Park is committed to being a leader in racial equity and inclusion in order to create a more just and inclusive community for all*; and #5: *St. Louis Park is committed to creating opportunities to build social capital through community engagement.*
Applications Reviewed in 2019

APPLICATIONS REVIEWED

- Comprehensive Plan Amendments
- Conditional Use Permits
- Planned Unit Developments
- Rezoning
- Subdivisions/Plats
- Variances
- Zoning Code Amendments

Chart showing the number of applications reviewed each year from 2009 to 2019 for different types of applications.
Development Activity in St. Louis Park

Legend

Projects Under Consideration
1. Beltline Blvd Station Site
2. Parkway Residences

Approved Projects
1. 10 West End
2. Arlington Row East
3. Arlington Row West
4. Bais Yaakov Girls' High School
5. Bridgewater Bank
6. Elan West End
7. Luxe Residential
8. Plalia Place
9. The Elmwood
10. Urban Park Apartments II
11. Via (Place)
12. Westwood Hills Nature Center

Completed Projects
13. Park Village
14. The Block
15. Yeshiva Jewish Boys' High School

Source: City of St. Louis Park, Nov. 2019

Updated November 2019
Proposed developments

Beltline Boulevard Station Site

Location: 4601 and 4725 Hwy. 7 and 3130 Monterey Ave. S.

Description: On Feb. 5, 2018 the St. Louis Park Economic Development Authority (EDA) entered into an agreement with Sherman Development Associates LLC to develop a mixed-use, transit-oriented development at the Southwest Light Rail Transit (SWLRT) Beltline Boulevard Station Site.

Developer: Sherman Development Associates LLC

Parkway Residences

Location: West 31st Street between Inglewood Ave. & Glenhurst Ave.

Description: Sela Investments proposes a new development, Parkway Residences, located along West 31st Street near Glenhurst Avenue South. The proposed development includes four new multifamily buildings with 223 units, as well as the rehabilitation of three existing apartment buildings that contain 24 units, creating a total of 247 residential units. The development will also include the removal of 12 existing buildings.

Developer: Sela Investments
Approved developments

Luxe Residential

**Location:** 5235 Wayzata Blvd.

**Description:** DLC Residential has received city approval for a planned unit development (PUD) for a new six-story apartment building in the West End, at the current Olive Garden site. The project will include 207 units ranging in size from studio to three-bedrooms and two levels of underground parking. The site will also include a new pocket park along 16th Street and pedestrian improvements connecting the apartment to the rest of the West End.

Construction will start spring 2020.

**Developer:** Robinson Zamorano, DLC Residential

Westwood Hills Nature Center

**Location:** 8300 W. Franklin Ave.

**Description:** In the late 1950s, the city had the foresight to acquire 160 acres of open space that is now the much-treasured Westwood Hills Nature Center, located south of I-394 and east of Highway 169 just minutes from downtown. The center allows visitors of all ages and backgrounds to learn about and connect with nature through a variety of programming.

However, the aging interpretive center no longer meets the needs of visitors. Programming, staff operations and public needs have outgrown its small spaces, and it's difficult for more than one programming activity to take place at any one time. The remote location of the interpretive center – removed from the parking lot and at the top an uphill walk – presents challenges to visitors with disabilities, parents with small children and others. Providing more space and making the center accessible to the parking lot will allow a wider audience to enjoy the nature center for a variety of activities from passive to active.

The existence of the nature center, as well as construction of a new interpretive center, allows the city to showcase its leadership in environmental stewardship. The proposed project will connect people to nature through the site and building design, while also exhibiting innovative energy-saving measures. Those measures will provide a teaching tool for residents as well as providing long-term maintenance savings to the city.

Construction of the new interpretive center began in spring 2019.
Urban Park Apartments

**Location:** 3601 Phillips Pkwy.

**Description:** The city council approved an application for construction of a second apartment building at Urban Park Apartments. The new building would have 61 market rate apartments, two community rooms and a fitness center. The site would also include a pool and improved outdoor amenity space as part of the project.

Construction started in spring 2019 and is expected to last a year.

**Developer:** North Shore Development Partners

Bridgewater Bank

**Location:** 4424 and 4400 Excelsior Blvd. & 3743 Monterey Drive

**Description:** Bridgewater Bank has approvals to construct a four-story, 84,000-square-foot office building with a 7,000-square-foot bank branch, 7,000 square feet of retail and service space and three levels of structured parking. The first floor will include Bridgewater Bank’s customer branch and retail space. The second, third and fourth floors will include the bank’s executive offices and opportunities for co-working entrepreneurial space. There are also plans for a plaza at the corner of Excelsior Boulevard and Monterey Drive with outdoor seating, space for public art and landscaping.

Construction started fall 2018 and is expected to be complete summer 2020.

Platia Place

**Location:** 9808 and 9920 Wayzata Blvd

**Description:** The proposed development at the former Santorini’s restaurant site includes a 149-unit apartment building and a 6-story, 112-room hotel at the northwest corner of I-394 and MN 169. Final approval of the plat and PUD are anticipated in early 2018.

The developer expects to close on all project parcels in early 2020 and begin construction soon after.

**Developer:** SLP Park Ventures, LLC
**Bais Yaakov Girls’ High School**

**Location:** 4503 and 4509 Minnetonka Blvd.

**Description:** The City of St. Louis Park has approved an application for a conditional use permit and variance for Bais Yaakov Girls High School. The school will be located at 4503 and 4509 Minnetonka Blvd., in the RC high-density, multiple-family zoning district. Educational facilities with more than 20 students are allowed in the RC district by conditional use permit. The school is requesting a variance of five feet to reduce the front setback from 30 feet to 24.8 feet. This will bring the existing building in compliance with the zoning ordinance. The school proposes adding a third story and new lobby to the existing building, as well as a student drop-off area in the parking lot.

Construction will be complete in 2020.

**Developer:** Anthony Construction

**Via**

**Location:** SE quadrant of Hwy 7 and Wooddale Ave

**Description:** PLACE, a non-profit developer, has approved plans to construct a mixed-use, mixed-income transit-oriented redevelopment at the southeast quadrant of Highway 7 & Wooddale Ave called Via. The plans include 218 apartment units, a bike shop, a makers’ space, e-generation and greenhouse and approximately 1-acre urban forest.

The proposed development incorporates a mix of renewable energy sources, including an anaerobic digester, a wind turbine and solar panels, which will provide 90% of the heat and power for the development. The entire development is designed to achieve LEED certification.

Demolition of the former McGarvey building was complete in November 2017. Construction is anticipated in 2020.

**Developer:** PLACE
The Elmwood

**Location:** 5605 W 36th St

**Description:** 36th Street LLC, the owner of the 36th Street Business Center/American Legion at 5606 W. 36th Street, has approved plans for a 5 story, 70-unit mixed-use development called The Elmwood. The building will be marketed toward residents aged 55+ who lead active lifestyles. The development will be located on a 1 acre parcel at the southeast corner of Xenwood Avenue and 36th Street West. The Elmwood consists of market rate and affordable apartments, and approximately 4,400 square feet of leasable office/commercial space. The development includes on-street, surface, and underground parking and 1/4 acre of outdoor amenity space.

The building is expected to open summer 2020.

**Developer:** 36th Street LLC

10 West End

**Location:** 1601 Utica Avenue S

**Description:** The Excelsior Group and Ryan Companies have approved plans for an 11-story, 335,710 square feet Class A office building within The West End area. The building is Phase IV of the Central Park West and will include the building and one half of a planned parking structure, providing 1,200 stalls.

Key features include approximately 5,000 square feet of shared outdoor amenity space, 3,500 square feet of covered retail at ground level, a fitness facility, public locker rooms, and an indoor bike room that can be accessed from the linear civic space. The design of the building incorporates mostly Class I materials and provides a modern take on the durability of a brick warehouse building.

Construction will start winter 2020.

**Developer:** The Excelsior Group and Ryan Companies

Arlington Row East & West

**Location:** Intersection of Wayzata Boulevard and Texas Avenue

**Description:** Melrose Company received approval to develop two properties near the 7700 block of Wayzata Boulevard and Texas Avenue. The west parcel will be developed into two three-story apartment buildings with 34 units and off-street parking covered by a solar power carport. The east parcel will be developed into a three-story apartment building with 27 units and surface parking to the north.

**Developer:** Melrose Company
Completed projects

Park Village

*Location*: 5400 Excelsior Blvd. (former Mann Theater)

*Description*: The city approved a planned unit development (PUD) amendment to renovate the Mann Theater building. The application proposes medical office use on the entire first floor of the existing Mann Theater building and proposes to keep the second floor vacant in the near term. A future phase may include renovating the second floor; while the future uses are unknown at this time, it may be some form of medical office.

Building renovations to the first floor were completed in 2019.

The Block

*Location*: 7007 Walker Street

*Description*: The city approved a conditional use permit and variance to allow a building expansion for The Block, a new 112-seat restaurant with 50-seat patio.

The restaurant opened in 2019.

Yeshiva

*Location*: 3118 Ottawa Avenue South

*Description*: The Yeshiva proposed an addition to the existing school in order to increase the number of students from 50 to 200. The addition includes a gymnasium, classrooms, student housing, and offices.

The project is nearing completion. The school is open while the finishing touches are being completed.
**Planning studies**

**Historic Walker Lake**
Activation and revitalization efforts for Historic Walker Lake have been a city priority for several years. In October 2018, the city began a process to create a small area revitalization plan and design guidelines for the Historic Walker Lake study area. The small area plan provides development concepts and project ideas that enhance the area’s identity, activity, appeal, and economic vitality. The study includes a parking analysis with land use and policy recommendations and recommended design standards to guide future investments. The plan identifies opportunities for public art, wayfinding and placemaking. Finally, the study includes an implementation plan with cost estimates and potential funding sources.

Planning commission discussed the plan in study sessions in 2019. Additional steps for the commission include proposed amendments to the zoning ordinance, specifically relating to parking, use, building size, setbacks and massing requirements.

**Sam’s Club land use and development study**
The Sam’s Club store on the 3745 Louisiana Avenue closed in January 2018. Previous planning efforts within the area had not considered a change in land use for the property, as the building was relatively new and closure was not foreseen. The closure of the store called into question, among city staff and officials, whether the city’s official comprehensive plan future land use map and zoning ordinance provisions were still adequate for the now vacant property. In August 2018, the city council adopted an interim ordinance establishing a moratorium on the use and development of the building and lands located at 3745 Louisiana Avenue South.

The moratorium gave the city time to study and analyze future land uses for the property, and to implement any official city controls needed. The project team studied the property, explored previous planning efforts in the area, conducted a market feasibility analysis, and tested land uses scenarios.

Planning commission reviewed the study in July 2019 and recommended approval of a comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning based on study recommendations in August 2019.

**Texa Tonka small area plan**
In May 2019, the city began working on a small area plan for the commercial properties near the intersection of Texas Avenue and Minnetonka Boulevard, also known as Texa-Tonka. The scope of work includes conducting a market overview, creation of a concept site and building plans, design guidelines, a traffic capacity analysis, and a parking study. Planning commission discussed plan findings and outreach activities in October 2019, and reviewed the final draft of the plan in December 2019.
Zoning code amendments

Mixed use zoning district revision
In August 2017 staff kicked off the process to update the existing M-X District to provide a zoning district that allows a citywide standard for mixed-use developments that are site and context sensitive. Over several study sessions in 2017 and 2018, staff presented options to the Planning Commission for determining building orientation, building height, transitions between residential districts building setbacks, bonuses, building articulation standards, façade details, and screening options. In 2019 planning commission recommended approval to the revisions to the M-X district.

C1 retail and service size requirements
In an effort to avoid big box and junior box stores in certain areas, and promote smaller businesses, the city council recommended reviewing size limitations for retail and service uses in the C-1 zoning district. Based on this guidance, planning commission recommended approval of a zoning ordinance limiting permitted retail and service uses to 7,500 square feet in the C-1 district. The amendment includes a provision allowing the 7,500 square foot limitations to be increased to 10,000 square feet if approved by a conditional use permit.

Small cell wireless ordinance
On May 30, 2017, Governor Mark Dayton signed a bill amending the state’s Telecommunications Right-of-Way User Law. This law restricts the city’s ability to control installation of small cell wireless technology in public right-of-way. Under the new law, cities may continue to require a permit to install small wireless facilities, however, the law significantly limits the city’s ability to deny the proposed installations.

Planning commission recommended approval of a zoning amendment in response to changes in state law. This zoning amendment clarified existing regulations, and created additional regulations intended to further define where equipment can be installed, expanded upon co-location requirements, and created additional design criteria.

Home occupations
The city council directed staff to prepare an ordinance that prohibits firearm sales as a home occupation. Staff drafted a narrowly focused amendment to update the land use description to add firearm sales to the list of uses that do not qualify as home occupations.

The planning commission held a public hearing September 5, 2018 and tabled action on the item after raising concerns about the proposed amendment and the existing restriction on retail sales. Following planning commission study sessions on the topic, another public hearing was held April
3, 2019 on a somewhat broader ordinance that allowed retail sales under certain conditions. The home occupation regulations are repeated in each residential district, so the text is amended in multiple locations of the city zoning code. Planning commission voted 5-1 against adoption of the proposed ordinance.

**Comprehensive plan related zoning map amendments**
The 2040 comprehensive plan sets out goals, strategies and direction to carry out the city’s vision for its future. It includes specific plan sections on land use, housing, mobility, parks, water resources, racial equity, climate and energy, community health and other elements required by state law. Planning commission made formal recommendations to city council on December 5, 2018, and council authorized submittal of the plan to the Metropolitan Council for review on December 17, 2018.

Updates to the future land use map in the comprehensive plan resulted in a number of parcels throughout the city with a mismatch between their new land use guidance and their existing zoning district. The city completed a comprehensive rezoning of 72 of these parcels at once in summer 2019, in order to bring the zoning districts and new land use designations into alignment.

**Accessory dwelling units**
An accessory dwelling unit (ADU) is a self-contained residential unit with its own living room, kitchen, and bathroom. ADUs are permanent installations that are legally part of a larger property that includes a standard single-family house. This housing is designed to be flexible and can generate rental income for the homeowners. ADUs have the potential to meet some of St. Louis Park’s housing goals in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update, as well as help fulfill the following city council strategic priority: *St. Louis Park is committed to providing a broad range of housing and neighborhood-oriented development.*

Planning commissioners discussed policy questions and potential zoning ordinance changes around ADUs throughout 2019. Topics included the size and number of ADUs allowed per lot, the type of ADU allowed, setbacks, building height, parking, design components, the type of approval that would be required, and other issues. Staff will continue to refine the proposed zoning amendment and present the changes to planning commission in early 2020.

**Ground floor window transparency**
One of the city’s goals is to allow people inside buildings to easily observe street life and improve public safety. Ground floor transparency regulations are particularly important in areas where there is high pedestrian traffic, as transparency can help create a vibrant and safer street. Ground floor windows and transparent doors may also strengthen the commercial viability of a use by attracting customers and adding to the enjoyment of the pedestrian’s experience on the street.
In summer 2018, city council directed staff and the planning commission to consider zoning standards for ground floor window transparency to increase vibrancy along the city’s commercial streets. The planning commission and city council have since discussed the importance of ground floor transparency requirements and have provided feedback on a draft ordinance during several study sessions. In October 2019 the commission recommended approval of a zoning ordinance that meets the city’s goal of providing safe and active pedestrian realm and vibrant streets, while also providing flexibility, especially for small businesses and existing buildings.

**Inclusionary housing**
The city council revised the inclusionary housing policy on April 15, 2019. The policy previously applied only to developments that received financial assistance from the city. Two of the three recent amendments that now require compliance with the policy when there is a planned unit development or comprehensive plan amendment. The third change was that if existing naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) units exist on a property, the NOAH units must be replaced.

This policy is in effect and the city is enforcing the policy on all new applications. It is the advice of the city attorney and city staff that it would strengthen the city’s position if elements of the policy were also codified through the zoning ordinance. The commission reviewed the policy in 2019, and an ordinance will be presented to the commission in 2020 to accomplish the goal of bolstering the new policy.

**Rezoning C-2 to C-1**
On February 20, 2018, the city council directed staff to consider options for limiting the size of businesses within commercial districts. The intent is to avoid big box and junior box stores in certain areas where they would be out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood, and to promote smaller businesses. Since then, the city passed a zoning amendment limiting retail and service sizes in the C-1 district. The next step in this process was to rezone 87 properties from the C-2 General Commercial district to the C-1 Neighborhood Commercial district. Planning commission recommended approval of this action in November 2019.

**Historic Walker Lake parking ordinance**
The commission recommended approval to revisions to the parking ordinance in order to update parking regulations in the district. This amendment to the parking ordinance creates regulations specific to the Historic Walker Lake and establishes additional regulations that apply to all properties in the city. The ability to remove the minimum parking requirements is unique to the Historic Walker Lake due to the presence of ample on-street parking and municipal parking lots. This change further supports the goal of reuse and revitalization buildings in the district.

The commission will review a new zoning district to implement additional recommendations of the small area plan through the second quarter of 2020.
Appendix A: Full List of 2019 Applications

Zoning Code Amendment – Ground floor window transparency
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 18-70-ZA

Zoning Code Amendment – Small cell wireless facilities
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 19-04-ZA

Conditional Use Permit, Variance – Best Cleaners
Location: 8105 Minnetonka Boulevard
Applicant: Best Cleaners, Robert Colehour
Case No.: 19-02-CUP, 19-03-VAR

Zoning Code Amendment – Home occupations
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 18-43-ZA

Zoning Code Amendment – Mixed use text amendment
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 19-08-ZA

Zoning Code Amendment – Mobile uses
Applicant: Bridgewater Bank
Case Nos.: 19-11-ZA

PUD Major Amendment – Bridgewater Bank
Location: 4400 Excelsior Boulevard
Applicant: Bridgewater Bank, Peter Brodd
Case No.: 19-13-PUD

Rezoning – Comprehensive rezoning
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 19-09-Z

Zoning Code Amendment – C1 district retail & service use size restrictions
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 19-05-ZA

Zoning Code Amendment, Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Rezoning – Sam’s Club
Location: 3745 Louisiana Avenue South
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park
Case No.: 19-18-ZA, 19-19-CP, 19-20-Z

**PUD Major Amendment – Via Luna & Fairfield Hotel**  
Location: 5950 West 36th Street – PLACE Via Luna  
Applicant: PLACE E-Generation One, LLC  
Case No.: 19-21-PUD

**Conditional Use Permit – Benilde-St. Margaret’s addition**  
Location: 2501 State Highway 100  
Applicant: Benilde-St. Margaret’s, Paul May  
Case No.: 19-31-CUP

**Rezoning – C-2 General Commercial to C-1 Neighborhood Commercial**  
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park  
Case No.: 19-26-ZA

**Zoning Code Amendment – Parking ordinance amendment for Historic Walker Lake**  
Applicant: City of St. Louis Park  
Case No.: 19-32-ZA

**Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Preliminary and Final Plat, Planned Unit Development, – Parkway Residences**  
Location: West 31st Street between Glenhurst Avenue and Inglewood Avenue  
Applicant: Sela Investments  
Case No.: 19-27-CP, 19-28-S, 19-29-PUD

**Conditional Use Permit, Preliminary and Final Plat – Holy Family Academy**  
Location: 5925 West Lake Street  
Applicant: Church of the Holy Family  
Case No.: 19-34-CUP, 19-35-S

**Study Session Reports and Discussions**
- Mixed-Use zoning district
- C-1 retail and service site requirements
- Small Cell aesthetic requirements
- Historic Walker Lake
- Home occupations
- Comprehensive Plan related zoning map amendments
- Accessory dwelling units
- Board of zoning appeals by-laws
- Planning commission by-laws
- Ground floor transparency ordinance
- Sam’s Club land use and development study
- Planning commission training with city attorney
• Inclusionary housing zoning code amendment
• Elections
• Efficient buildings ordinance
• New housing policies and programs overview, including fair housing update
• Historic Walker Lake parking ordinance
• Texa Tonka small area plan
• 2020 Census
• Rezoning C-2 General Commercial properties to C-1 Neighborhood Commercial
• Parkway Residences development and environmental assessment worksheet
• Arts and culture strategic framework focus group
• 2020 work plan