

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
December 4, 2025
FINAL

Members Present: Michelle Audette-Bauman; Thomas Kostrzewa; Zack Wilson; Brian Pittelko; Roland Bissonnette; Jennifer Swan

Members Excused: Wendell Tolber; Mitchell Curtiss; Christine Dascenzo

City Staff: Bobby Durkee, Assistant City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Charlie Bear, Assistant City Attorney; Nolan Bergstrom, Community Planner

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Pittelko called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Planner Durkee proceeded with roll call and determined there was a quorum.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Kostrzewa, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, moved approval of the December 4, 2025 Planning Commission agenda. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Kostrzewa, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, moved approval of the November 6, 2025 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. An update to the Planning Commission on Kalamazoo Safe Streets for All and Safety Action Plan

Planner Nolan Bergstrom gave an update on the Safe Streets for all (SS4A) Safety Action Plan. He explained that the plan and its implementation were the result of grants the city had obtained. The focus of this plan is to make it safer for vulnerable roadway users (anyone outside of a motor vehicle).

Planner Bergstrom reviewed the plan elements: Intersection Upgrade Safety Improvement Plan, Pedestrian Safety Improvement Plan, Sidewalk Safety Improvement Plan, and Lighting Safety Improvement Plan. Planner Bergstrom shared that consultants were brought on (Alta Planning & Design and AECOM), and a Safety Task Force was created. To create the plan, they used a Safe Systems Approach which acknowledges the vulnerability of humans. Planner Bergstrom stated that speed is a key component which makes us vulnerable.

This plan prioritizes high-crash corridors and underserved neighborhoods. It also helps to unlock federal and state grants, leverage local match funds, and integrate safety into current projects. Planner Bergstrom gave examples of pilot projects that included different paint in crosswalks, flexible bollards with reflectors.

Planner Bergstrom mentioned there are gaps in education for safety projects. They hope to help people become more involved in understanding these projects. He reviewed alignment between the SS4A Action Plan and the policies and plans of the City. Planner Bergstrom spoke about the engagement used to create the plan. They used an online mapping tool, a community event, and online webinars.

Planner Bergstrom said there were five priority intersections identified through their process. The intersections identified are as follows: Gull Road and Riverview, East Michigan Avenue and AmVets Memorial Parkway, W Michigan Ave and S Howard Street, Kilgore and Lovers Lane, W Main Street and Picadilly Road. The community identified intersections are as follows: West Main and Drake, Stadium and Howard, Michigan and Rose, Gull Road and Riverview Drive, Portage and Lovers Lane.

Planner Bergstrom said they found that a lot of bus stops lack safe crossings, shelters, and/or ADA boarding areas. He also shared some common issues for intersections: high-turning speeds, visibility challenges, complex signal phasing. High risk intersections overlapped with deficiencies at bus stops and lighting. Planner Bergstrom reviewed plan recommendations for priority intersections, sidewalks, lighting, and bus stops. He spoke about the benefit of pilot safety measures that can be adjusted before a full reconstruction.

The grant was accepted in 2022, RFP put out in 2023, and they started work in 2024. The next step is to present it to the City Commission for adoption.

Commissioner Kostrzewa asked how much ice and snow removal in key corridors comes up in conversation. He referred to people walking in the middle of streets because sidewalks are not cleared. Planner Bergstrom said a pilot project had been done to identify key corridors for snow removal and City staff would clean the corridor. He stated he didn't know the status of the pilot program, but they would continue to monitor needs over the winter season. Commissioner Kostrzewa asked if they have data of people being hit by a vehicle during snow/ice season. Planner Bergstrom indicated they have access to data from the State of Michigan's police reporting system. This data includes a narrative, location of vehicles, conditions of the road, time of day, and speed. Commissioner Kostrzewa indicated that Kalamazoo could improve efforts to clear sidewalks of snow. He hated seeing kids or elderly trying to navigate the snow.

Commissioner Wilson asked if the 1200 crashes in Kalamazoo included cars hitting pedestrians. Planner Bergstrom thought it was an all-inclusive number of the crashes in Kalamazoo. Commissioner Wilson asked, as far as pedestrians and bikers, where Kalamazoo ranks relative to other communities in terms of safety. Planner Bergstrom shared that crashes were decreasing overall, but Dennis Randolph from Public Works has those numbers. Commissioner Wilson felt there has been an improvement in last five years. He stated that he is a big proponent of the bike lanes. He wondered how they could communicate that bike lanes help reduce crashes and fatalities. Their purpose is not to make driving more miserable for everyone. Planner Bergstrom agreed that the educational piece is a key component. They must increase messaging about bike lanes and other traffic safety projects and how they help. He gave examples of safety projects that slow speeds of traffic. Commissioner Wilson stated that he is in full support of the effort, but he knows many in community are not. He thinks they just don't understand the benefit this brings to the community. It would be very impactful to show how this is helping make our community safer for everyone. Commissioner Wilson thought that thinking of creative ways to communicate that fact would be very beneficial.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman mentioned that the education component includes everyone, not just City staff. She thought that personal experience in addition to data would be helpful for everyday people to talk to their neighbors.

Planner Bergstrom said they've had discussions about creating a Citizens Academy for understanding transportation. That may help bridge the gap and bring people to the same table.

Commissioner Bissonnette asked if there was any discussion about adding physical barriers between existing bike lanes, sidewalks, or pedestrian paths and high traffic corridors. Planner Bergstrom thought it would come down to a case-by-case basis. Right-of-Way widths, trees, property lines, existing sidewalks, road visibility for drivers would all play a part in a decision like that. Commissioner Bissonnette mentioned the Gull Road/Riverview intersection and Planner Bergstrom agreed that it was a high priority intersection for safety improvements.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Commissioner Pittelko explained how the public could call in and give comments on the cases.

1. P.C. #2025.07 A request for a Special Use Permit to develop a gas station at 918 Riverview Drive.

Planner Durkee explained that a gas station was considered a vehicle service use and was allowed with development standards under the ordinance with a Special Use Permit. He mentioned that there is a separation requirement for packaged liquor sales, which this development did not meet. Planner Durkee reviewed the zoning maps and pictures of the property. He noted that the parcel remains commercial in the future land use map.

Planner Durkee shared that a high-level zoning review shows the development meets or can meet the site plan review standards. He also went through the 10 criteria for a Special Use Permit. Planner Durkee stated that the development met each of the 10 criteria.

He noted the following:

- The proposed location is a high-traffic, auto-oriented intersection.
- Developer will maintain a buffer for the residential property to the east.
- Developer was denied a variance to sell packaged liquor.
- Location/design of the development will minimize adverse effects.
- Site plan review will ensure the development conforms to environmental standards.
- Design team has consulted with city traffic engineers to ensure feasibility of road capacity and safe ingress/egress to the site.
- There is existing utility capacity within the vicinity to service this use.
- Plan demonstrates requirements necessary for access for responding emergency vehicles/personnel.
- Development complies with appropriate development standards including landscaping code.
- Plan demonstrates the ability to comply with laws and characteristics of a gas station.

Mr. Robert Matco, representative of 7-Eleven/Speedway, stated that he attended the meeting because his main specialty was traffic engineering. He mentioned that the Planning Commissioners may have received a letter from residents with petition signatures. Mr. Matco indicated they would try to provide answers in reference to concerns noted in the letter. He showed a map of the area fueling stations including the

proposed fuel station. Mr. Matco said this property had Community Commercial (CC) zoning which recognizes appropriateness of automobile focused uses at this intersection. This is a vacant Walgreens building and vacant McDonalds with a cross-access/parking easement. Mr. Matco said they conducted a traffic impact study dated August which was reviewed by City traffic staff and was approved. He showed pictures of the property and spoke about the disadvantages of having a vacant building. Mr. Matco felt that redeveloping the site will help eliminate blight, create jobs, increase tax revenue, boost economy, and increase property value. He showed site drawings and shared that they would utilize the two existing driveways but would redo the curb cuts. The business will be branded as Speedway, even though the company is 7-Eleven. Because they are unable to sell alcohol, the Beer Cave will be called Drink Den.

Mr. Matco said the traffic impact study counts were done in April while school was in session. They did 12-hour videos and chose the hours of 7-9 and 4-6 as well as any hours requested by City staff. He said they applied a growth rate to bring it up to 2026. They used a conservative analysis. Mr. Matco pointed out that up to 76% of traffic utilizing this development will be pass by traffic. It would not be considered a destination spot. He reviewed the results of the traffic study. Mr. Matco concluded that the impact at the intersection would not be as significant as people might think.

Planner Durkee came forward and stated that the applicant sent notices to neighbors within 300' and mentioned that the petition was provided to Planning Commissioners.

Commissioner Bissonnette noted there wasn't an existing buffer on the current lot. He asked what the landscaping buffer would entail. Commissioner Pittelko said the packet shows canopy trees. Planner Durkee stated that the ordinance will require a percentage (count) of trees/shrubs along each street frontage. Mr. Matco added that they will be maintaining and keeping the retaining wall to the rear. There will also be landscaping along the sides of the property - trees and several shrubs. They intend to meet the code.

Commissioner Pittelko thought concerns about the flood plain would be adequately addressed in site plan review. There is a plan to make sure that the new tanks are all sealed and secure. Mr. Matco agreed and said that if anything was found on this site during construction, it would be taken care of properly.

Commissioner Pittelko mentioned there were some concerns about the left turn onto Gull Road. He noted that it is a commercial zone and commercial area. There are plans with the Developer and the city to increase safety at that intersection.

Commissioner Pittelko opened the public hearing.

There were no in person comments and no call in comments.

Commissioner Pittelko closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Bissonnette, seconded by Commissioner Audette-Bauman, moved to approve a Special Use Permit to develop a gas station at 918 Riverview Drive.

Commissioner Bissonnette thought it was significant that the community felt it important to get a petition going and get that many signatures. He thinks the plan makes a lot of sense, and he likes the precautions being taken, especially this close to the Kalamazoo River. Commissioner Bissonnette was worried about the impact on community who were not speaking at the meeting. He said that gave him pause.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman agreed it was worth pausing when the community expresses concern. She thanked community members for getting engaged and thanked the applicant for their explanation. Commissioner Audette-Bauman felt it helpful to know most trips for this type of use are pass by traffic. A vacant building is not beneficial to the community. She wanted to acknowledge the neighbors who signed the petition, but she felt the applicant did a good job with the plan. It makes sense to approve the SUP.

Commissioner Pittelko agreed there were some concerns with the site. He felt the applicant did their due diligence to address concerns. Commissioner Pittelko acknowledged the effort of the residents. In his opinion, this is a previously developed site, and it is not great to have an empty building on a high traffic corridor. He thought it met criteria for a SUP.

A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

2. P.C. #2025.08 A request for a Special Use Permit to redevelop the utility building on the property for Consumers Energy at 1204 E Alcott Street.

Planner Durkee stated that this case concerns a regulator building with underground gas infrastructure. It is maintained by Consumers Energy. He showed photos, maps, and site drawings of the site. He explained that this development would go on to site plan review, but there were some City ordinances that would be trumped by the gas code (for ex: trees cannot be planted over gas lines). Planner Durkee said that it would be a brick building with a gravel drive for personnel to park. There is a proposed six-foot fence and gravel surfacing covering the rest of the property. The area is zoned single-family low intensity residential.

Planner Durkee reviewed the ten decision criteria for the Special Use Permit (SUP). He noted the following.

- The replacement building is smaller, within the setbacks, with ornamental fencing, gravel surfacing within the fencing, and a six-foot brick wall toward the house to the east.
- Little activity is associated with the site. It maintains small scale intensity.
- There are no development standards for utility buildings in this part of the zoning ordinance. The utility building may have unique safety and code restraints.
- The brick exterior will help reduce noise. There will be a cement wall with brick screening for the house to the east. A gravel driveway will provide off-street parking for personnel. There are no natural features to preserve.
- Staff recommends a tree in a road front yard or to contribute one tree to the neighborhood tree canopy.
- Development will go through the site plan review process. Consumers Energy is equipped to manage the risk and safety of the replacement regulator building.
- There is adequate road capacity. The roads around the property are wide with low traffic.

- The ability to park and secure the truck behind fencing is an additional improvement to the site.
- There are facilities for water and sanitary on site, but there is no need for that. There is an electrical utility that the new building will utilize. The road has capacity for responding emergency vehicles.
- There is a Knox box key system.
- There are no use standards for utility buildings. Staff believe the proposed standards align the site to the scale and form of the residential neighborhood.
- The use will comply with the criteria with staff conditions and review by the Site Plan Review Committee.

Conditions:

1. Gravel surfacing will only be permitted within the proposed fencing surrounding the regulator building and not in excess of the maximum impervious surface of the RS-5 zone.
2. Provide one tree in a street front or contribute a tree to the tree canopy of the Edison Neighborhood.
3. Fencing shall conform to the residential fence standards of Chapter 50 zoning ordinance

Commissioner Pittelko asked questions about the fencing and wall. Planner Durkee confirmed that the decorative fence would be on three sides of the property, and the east side would have a concrete wall with the brick veneer. To meet residential standards, the wall could not go past the house next door.

Commissioner Pittelko asked if they were insisting on planting trees on a property where they would be burying natural gas. Planner Durkee said that the tree would make the development meet the standards of the ordinance. The project will be reviewed in Site Plan Review, and if there is a conflict between the city landscaping ordinance and the utility laws and codes, the utility laws and codes would prevail.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman asked if they approved the SUP without conditions (because there are no use standards for a utility building), to what standard would the project be held. There was some discussion of what would still apply in site plan review and/or requesting a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Commissioner Swan reminded them that an option for planting a tree was to plant it somewhere in the Edison Neighborhood.

Planner Durkee verified for Commissioner Bissonnette that, in addition to a staff recommendation, Commissioners can add conditions to approvals.

Anthony Stepke, Project Manager for Consumer's Energy, gave background on the project and the use of the facility. He explained that it is a gas regulator station. It regulates high pressure distribution gas to medium pressure distribution gas which services homes and businesses. This station cuts the pressure down for a customer to receive it up to their home. Then there is a final cut at the place of residence.

Mr. Stepke said they would be modernizing the station - replacing all the valves, regulators, and building. They plan to add a six-foot ornamental security fence, driveway, communication equipment, and reduce the size of the building. Mr. Stepke said they wanted the valve on the NE corner in the boundaries of the fence. The existing underground pits would be replaced by above grade structures. Mr. Stepke explained

that the gravel added would reduce maintenance and prevent vegetation from growing. They won't have to worry about mowing and damaging above grade assets.

Mr. Stepke mentioned they would be happy to plant a tree somewhere in the neighborhood, but they don't want it on site for customer safety. He stated that they usually install eight-foot fences, but in this case, they are happy to install a six-foot fence. Ms. Katie Gress showed code about fence and wall standards. The site is in a residential zone – which states a four-foot fence, but it is a non-residential use. They believe the six-foot ornamental fence will be appropriate for the use. Ms. Amy Gilpin said they follow TSA guidelines which say to use a seven-foot fence with one foot of barbed wire. For this location and the safety and security of this facility, they would like to do a six-foot fence. Ms. Gilpin showed pictures of buildings, concrete walls, and ornamental black fencing on other sites.

Commissioner Wilson read the staff recommendation regarding fencing and asked about the difference in what they read vs the staff recommendation. Planner Durkee said the developer referenced non-residential use standards whereas he referenced residential use standards.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman clarified that the residential standard was a four-foot fence, and the developer is asking for a six-foot fence. Planner Durkee said there is an ability to put a six-foot fence in because of the setbacks. The condition listed in the packet allows six feet because of the setback.

Commissioner Pittelko stated that they were just as concerned about the safety and security of the site. They didn't want anything to fall on or grow into pipes, and they wanted all the valves protected adequately.

Commissioner Bissonnette asked about zoning rules on fence changes close to property line. Planner Durkee responded that it looked like the valve could be covered by the six-foot fence. The ordinance says it just must be on the property. He stated this is a unique property because it has right of way on three sides. They can put a tall solid wall on one side.

Commissioner Pittelko opened the public hearing.

There were no in person comments or call in comments.

Planner Durkee commented that use vs zone is common. He spoke about conflicts being a reason to apply for a variance. Commissioner Pittelko asked if the Planning Commission could declare the developer can apply the non-residential use in a residential area. Planner Durkee said he could not answer that at that time.

Commissioner Audette-Bauman asked what would happen if they removed the condition of the fencing. She wondered if the project would go through site plan review and they would work it out administratively. There was some additional discussion regarding the fence. Commissioner Kostrzewa didn't want to micromanage the process. Commissioner Pittelko didn't want to block a fence that would adequately protect the site. Commissioner Audette-Bauman didn't want to create a situation that forces the developer to have

to seek a variance for something that would protect the safety of the site while fitting the neighborhood character as much as possible.

Planner Bissonnette asked for clarification on the motion. Planner Durkee reported that it would be a motion with the condition that final site plan will be the site plan approved by the site plan review committee.

Commission Bissonnette, seconded by Commissioner Wilson, moved to approve a Special Use Permit to redevelop the utility building on the property for Consumers Energy at 1204 E Alcott Street with the following conditions: gravel surfacing only permitted within the proposed fencing surrounding the regulator building and not in excess of the maximum impervious surface of the RS-5 zone district, provide one tree in each street front yard or contribute at least two trees to the tree canopy of the Edison Neighborhood, and the final site plan will be the site plan approved by the site plan committee.

A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

None.

G. REPORTS:

1. City Planner's Report

- IK2035 Partners Catch Up

Planner Durkee reviewed the IK2035 timeline; Imagine It! Phase, Plan It! Phase and activities associated with each phase. Planner Durkee went through points of contact; the Vision Statement; and Organizational Values. He indicated that the Strategic Vision framework should be ready in the next few months. Planner Durkee reviewed how they would go from engagement to plan implementation and alignment. He outlined the City of Kalamazoo's guiding principles: Diversity Equity Inclusion, and Accessibility, Economic Mobility, Sustainability, Operational Excellence, Continuous Engagement. Planner Durkee went through the Strategic Goals: Arts, Culture and Placemaking, Community Trust and Safety, Economic Vitality, Effective City Operations, Environment, Housing, Transportation, Youth and Family.

Planner Durkee reviewed the process of adopting the Strategic Vision. There will be a presentation of the draft at a City Commission meeting, a presentation to the Planning Commission, and hopefully a February approval of the final document.

The Master Plan - Design It! Phase starts this winter. They plan to have 13-15 neighborhood meetings, IK Reads!, online activities, and focus groups.

Planner Durkee referred to information on the IK webpage.

2. Site Plan List

No questions.

3. 2026 Planning Commission Meeting Schedule

Planner Durkee passed out an updated list of 2026 meetings.

Commissioner Bissonnette, seconded by Commissioner Swan, moved approval of the 2026 Planning Commission Meeting Schedule.

A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed.

H. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Commissioner Pittelko gave the number for call-in comments.

No in person comments or call in comments.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Praedel stated that the CMO released the proposed 2026 budget. He said they plan to vote on it in the first meeting in January. He encouraged anyone interested to check it out online at kalamazoo.org/budget. He asked people to support local small businesses this holiday season. Events can be found at discoverkalamazoo.com/events. Commissioner Praedel thanked the Public Services team for streets and sidewalk clearing, picking up leaves, and putting up holiday decorations. He also recognized the Public Safety teams and all they do during this time.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Kostrzewa spoke about hosting international professional visitors on December 10, 2025. He said the celebration would be at Martini's on the second floor.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Pittelko adjourned the meeting at 9:53 pm.

Planning Commission

December 4, 2025

Page **10** of **10**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development