

City Of Birmingham
Regular Meeting Of The Planning Board
October 22, 2025
City Commission Room
151 Martin Street, Birmingham, Michigan

Minutes of the regular meeting of the City of Birmingham Planning Board held on October 22, 2025. The meeting was convened at 7:30 p.m.

A. Roll Call

Present: Chair Scott Clein (left 8:11 p.m.), Vice Chair Bryan Williams; Board Members Robin Boyle, Bert Koseck, Daniel Share; Alternate Board Member Duncan Currie, Nasseem Ramin (arrived 7:45 p.m.)

Absent: Board Member Stuart Jeffares, Janelle Whipple-Boyce; Student Representatives Carter Anderson, Olivia Betanzos

Staff: Planning Director Dupuis; City Planner Aldred-Arens

B. Approval Of The Minutes Of The Regular Planning Board Meeting of September 10, 2025

10-57-25

Motion by Share

Seconded by Williams to move the minutes of September 10, 2025 as presented.

Motion carried, 6-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Currie, Share, Koseck, Boyle, Williams, Clein

Nays: None

C. Chair's Comments

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the meeting's procedures.

D. Review Of The Agenda

E. Meeting Open to the Public for Items Not on the Printed Agenda

F. Unfinished Business

G. Rezoning Applications

H. Community Impact Study and Site Plan Review

I. Special Land Use Permits

- 1. 36977 Woodward – Request for Special Land Use Permit for New 3-Story Commercial Building with Commercial Use Greater Than 4,000 sq. ft.**

CP Aldred-Arens presented the item. Staff answered informational questions from the Board.

The applicant team spoke on behalf of the item.

Board members raised the following points during discussion:

- In seeking a variance, the applicant should look at the intent of the ordinance. This is an important site, and as a percentage of the building, the requested variance would be approximately one percent. The proposal does meet the intent of the ordinance.
- There was appreciation for the site being developed in the proposed manner. This would be a beautiful building.
- In terms of the variances, there may not be a way that the applicant could meet the 75% and still use the site. There should not be an issue with granting the proposed variance from a planning perspective.
- For the height, if the BZA finds reason to grant the variance, it would be valuable if that variance could be limited to this particular feature with no future height increases permitted.
- The curb and gutter was well-designed.
- The applicant should still work with the Engineering Department to ensure that vehicles do not stick out into the alleyway. Curb stops could work in these conditions. Increasing the landscaping near the alley might reduce the likelihood of vehicles overhanging into the alley when parked.
- The ADA space will still need to be discussed with the Building Official.
- Given the prominence of this site and its distance from other buildings and residences, the variance for the height could be acceptable as long as it is limited to this set of plans.
- This is such an important building that a variance for the height is likely appropriate in this case as long as it is limited to this single condition.
- The height adds character to the building. It would be positive if the variance were granted in this case.
- Approval of any variances would be limited to the proposed conditions.

10-58-25

Motion by Share

Seconded by Williams to adopt the findings of the Planning Department in the report dated October 22, 2025 related to the approval criteria outlined in Article 7, Section 7.36 of the Zoning Ordinance and to recommend approval of the Special Land Use Permit application for 36977 Woodward Ave – InvestWise Financial – subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Modify the site plan so that at least 75% of the street frontage consists of building façade located within 0–5 feet of the front lot line, or obtain a variance of 21.675 feet from the Board of Zoning Appeals;**
- 2. Lower the overall building height to no more than 42 feet, in accordance with ordinance requirements, or obtain a variance of 3 feet from the Board of Zoning Appeals;**
- 3. Provide 2 (two) bike racks to service the building;**
- 4. The Planning Board grants of a waiver for non-cutoff light fixtures pursuant to Article 4, Section 4.21, D.1 of the Zoning Ordinance; and**
- 5. Comply with the requests of all City Departments.**

Motion carried, 7-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Ramin, Currie, Share, Koseck, Boyle, Williams, Clein

Nays: None

J. Site Plan & Design Reviews

- 1. 36977 Woodward – Request for Preliminary Site Plan Review for new 3-story commercial building.**

Discussed during Item I1.

10-59-25

Motion by Share

Seconded by Williams to adopt the findings of the Planning Department in the report dated October 22, 2025 related to the approval criteria outlined in Article 7, Section 7.27 of the Zoning Ordinance, and to approve the Final Site Plan and Design review for 36977 Woodward Ave – InvestWise Financial – subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Modify the site plan so that at least 75% of the street frontage consists of building façade located within 0–5 feet of the front lot line, or obtain a variance of 21.675 feet from the Board of Zoning Appeals;**
- 2. Lower the overall building height to no more than 42 feet, in accordance with ordinance requirements, or obtain a variance of 3 feet from the Board of Zoning Appeals;**
- 3. Provide 2 (two) bike racks to service the building;**
- 4. The Planning Board grants of a waiver for non-cutoff light fixtures pursuant to Article 4, Section 4.21, D.1 of the Zoning Ordinance; and,**
- 5. Comply with the requests of all City Departments.**

Motion carried, 7-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Ramin, Currie, Share, Koseck, Boyle, Williams, Clein

Nays: None

K. Study Session

- 1. Zoning Ordinance Update Project – Review of RFP Responses**

The Chair stated his recusal from the item, citing a prior business relationship, and departed the meeting.

The Vice Chair introduced the item. PD Dupuis presented the item and answered informational questions from the Board.

Board members raised the following points during discussion:

- It is important to understand that the written evaluation is only part of this process, and that the interviews are a significant part of the evaluation process as well.
- The interviews should be time-limited, likely to a half hour total with a 15-minute presentation period and the same questions for each interviewee.
- No interviewees should be privy to other interviewees' answers during the interview process.
- Staff could circulate a recommended, standard list of questions for the Board to review and provide feedback on. Staff could also recommend the interviewees watch this meeting.
- The interviewees should proactively address whatever concerns were raised. They should also answer why the City should hire them for this specific project.
- Each interviewee should have at least one in-person representative. Other team members could participate via Zoom.
- The Board will plan on being able to recommend a list to the Commission in December.

Comments on Place Strategies

- The firm had an interesting approach. It also seemed too small and inexperienced in the diverse factors that would be relevant to working in and with Birmingham.
- This firm has the leanest proposals and staffing. It was helpful that they had one staff member specializing in process. This proposal had less detail and references, which resulted in lower scoring.
- Their fee was in line with others. Their team had a complex structure, and it was not clear whether they had worked together in the past. There were also questions about who would be in charge from the team. The example projects provided did not align well with Birmingham's needs of this process.
- They had the least municipal experience relative to the other respondents.
- Board consensus was that this respondent should not be interviewed.

Comments on Houseal Lavine

- Hinsdale, Illinois, where Houseal Lavine is located, has similar demographics and business mix to Birmingham.
- The proposed project manager who would be leading the effort joined Houseal Lavine relatively recently. There was some concern about this.
- Their written presentation was excellent, and their experience in midwestern suburban cities is valuable.
- The proposed timeline was shorter than the maximum, and they came in under budget.
- It would be important to get references from the City of Flint, Michigan for Houseal Lavine's work with the city.
- Mr. Houseal has an outstanding reputation in the planning community. It would be important to understand what it would mean to have him participating in an advisory capacity.
- Their listed projects is extensive and relevant to Birmingham's conditions.
- Creating both a policy and a technical committee might result in a fair amount of bureaucracy.
- It will be essential for each interviewed respondent to be flexible in making a process that is most appropriate for Birmingham's context. It is important to be both effective and efficient. Two committees might result in an extended process.
- The detail provided reflected a lot of thought and consideration on the part of the respondent.

- It was helpful to know that the first reference to respond was positive, and that City staff had positive responses to the sign ordinance proposals.
- Other clients' websites were well done.
- It would likely be appropriate to interview this respondent. They have some Michigan roots. They also responded to the Master Plan RFP, and while they scored highly, their charges were on the higher end as well. These charges were more accessible.
- 'Plan and regulation alignment' reflects one of Birmingham's goals for this process.
- Board consensus was that Houseal Lavine should be interviewed.

Comments on Clarion

- It is complicated to have three entities involved in this proposal, and the cost was higher.
- It made sense that this applicant wanted local entities involved in the bid.
- It was not clear who would be in charge of the team.
- Their experience was significant and the Michigan entities involved are highly regarding.
- The proposal was too large, broad, and expensive. Their timeline was also the longest.
- This is a competent group. They have abundant relevant experience in nearby municipalities.
- The references to the 2040 Plan, community outreach, and engagement seemed somewhat superficial.
- It was somewhat surprising that the Smith Group did not submit a proposal on their own.
- Board consensus was that Clarion should not be interviewed.

Comments on Giffels Webster

- Having Public Sector Consultants on the team could be useful for this process.
- Having separate teams running the code rewrite and the public engagement process might engender less defensiveness if there is criticism of the code rewrites. While this would be helpful, it was unclear whether the additional cost would be proportional to the benefit.
- Public Sector Consultants has a good reputation in the field and Birmingham would benefit from its participation.
- It would be important to understand how focused on drafting zoning this team would be.
- The project manager used to work for the City. The Giffels Webster team overall is well known to the City.
- More thought regarding the clear zoning platform would be important.
- Their experience in southeast Michigan is extensive. They are extensively skilled in servicing municipalities.
- Public Sector Consultants may not be necessary for this particular project, because a lot of the proposed changes are relatively standard.
- As team members are added, costs are also added. The question would be whether that could add undesirable complexity as well.
- It would be necessary to understand the point person for this process.
- The estimated timeline was too long. At the same time, that might be negotiable.
- The provided example projects did not necessarily reflect an ability to accommodate Birmingham's needs.
- Some of the graphics were weaker relative to Hausel Levine as well.
- Being local can be valuable and can also bring increased accountability.
- It would be important to understand whether the team members can work well together.
- The proposed community engagement was good, and beginning with Zoning 101 would be appropriate. This would help clarify the scope of this process for residents.

- Birmingham would be seeking both excellent technicians and innovative options. It was clear they would be excellent technicians, and it was less clear whether they would be providing innovation.
- If Giffels Webster were selected, the Chair should not have to recuse himself from the process, per the City Attorney. Once the selection is completed any potential impression of a conflict-of-interest should be resolved. That said, stakeholders might be inclined to ask the question.
- Giffels Webster could be interviewed, though their being over budget was a concern.

Comments on Kendig Keast

- This team has extensive experience in southeast Michigan and comes in under budget.
- The coding system is well regarded.
- This proposal was well done, and a well-regarded zoning professional would be involved.
- This would be an experienced team.
- One of the project team members is presently involved in seven other projects.
- This proposal did not have significant discussion of community engagement. Their indicated willingness to work with Birmingham on this aspect could be positive.
- The proposal demonstrated a good understanding of the 2040 Plan and had an appropriate timeline.
- A significant amount of this team's experience is in the public sector. That may result in a different set of skills versus a team with more consultant experience.
- The team has a member focused on making code work well for staff and applicants, would be a boon.
- Board consensus was that this team should be interviewed.

Comments on McKenna

- It would be important to understand the difference between the project director and the project manager.
- Their proposed timeline has them still doing public engagement towards the end of the process, and then would write the code in one month. This may be too short of a timeline.
- This is a good firm, knows Birmingham very well, and has extensive experience in southeast Michigan.
- The tours demonstrate a sensitivity to the community and would likely make the process more relatable for the general public.
- They demonstrated a good understanding of the 2040 Plan and referenced it throughout their proposal appropriately.
- Their proposal was well done and easy to understand.
- Board consensus was this team should be interviewed.

L. Miscellaneous Business and Communications

- 1. Pre-Application Discussions**
- 2. Communications**
- 3. Administrative Approval Correspondence**
- 4. Draft Agenda**
- 5. Action List**
- 6. Other Business**

M. Planning Division Action Items

- 1. Staff Report on Previous Requests**
- 2. Additional Items from tonight's meeting**

N. Adjournment

No further business being evident, the meeting adjourned at 9:42 p.m.



Nick Dupuis, Planning Director



Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist

APPROVED