



City of Durham

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

December 2, 2025

A. CALL TO ORDER.

Planning Chair Susan Deeming opened the meeting at 7:01 PM at Durham City Hall.

B. ROLL CALL.

Commissioners present: Planning Chair Susan Deeming, Vice Chair Matt Winkler, Commissioners Patricia Saab, Krista Bailey, and Cheri Frazell.

Commissioners absent: Commissioners Andrew Mast and Forrest Boleyn.

Staff present: City Administrator Jordan Parente and Administrative Assistant Wyatt Bean.

Visitors: Richard White, Clint Welsh, Brad Henry, Brenda Hancock, Candace White, Jim Shelman, Joan Leigh, Duane Leigh, and Steve Watt.

C. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES.

The Commission first considered approval of the September 9, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Frazell noted that her previously submitted edit had been incorporated and expressed satisfaction with the revised minutes. Upon motion by Commissioner Frazell and second by Commissioner Saab, the minutes were approved unanimously (5-0).

MO120225-01

The Commission then reviewed the October 7, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Frazell identified a correction regarding Commissioner Forrest Boleyn being listed as both present and absent. After discussion, the Commission agreed that the minutes should reflect that Commissioner Boleyn was absent. Upon motion by Commissioner Saab and second by Commissioner Bailey, the October 7 minutes were unanimously approved as amended (5-0).

MO120225-02

D. PUBLIC FORUM.

Chair Deeming opened the public forum and invited comments on items not listed on the agenda. No members of the public wished to speak, and the public forum was closed.

E. TREE REMOVAL REQUEST 826-25 MARSDEN 7872 SW ELLMAN LANE.

The Commission reviewed Tree Removal Request 826-25, associated with a single-family home proposed on Lot 1 of a previously approved three-lot minor partition. Clint Welsh, developer and builder, and Richard White, designer, presented an overview of the proposal, emphasizing efforts to preserve existing trees through site design, arborist oversight, and revised layouts. They described how earlier versions of the plan proposed greater tree removal and how revisions were made to retain additional trees along the frontage and within the site.

Commission discussion focused on the long-term stability and safety of the trees proposed for retention, particularly those that would remain relatively isolated following construction. Commissioners expressed concern that retained trees could become hazardous due to loss of wind protection or root disturbance. Residents in attendance spoke in support of careful tree management, noting prior windstorm damage in the area. Commissioners also emphasized the importance of professional arborist evaluation to assess post-construction tree stability.



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The Commission reviewed applicable Development Code provisions, including Chapter 5 Tree Protection requirements and the criteria for issuance of a Type G permit processed as a Type II application. While finding that the submitted tree preservation plan met code requirements and that canopy mitigation thresholds were technically satisfied, the Commission agreed that additional arborist analysis was warranted to address the long-term viability of specific retained trees.

Commissioner Bailey moved to approve the application with a condition requiring a supplemental arborist assessment evaluating the stability and expected longevity of identified retained trees, including neighboring trees appearing on the provided plans potentially affected by construction, prior to tree removal. Commissioner Saab seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

MO 120225-03

F. TREE REMOVAL REQUEST 828-25 KUNKLE LOT 3 7870 SW ELLMAN LANE.

The Commission next considered Tree Removal Request 828-25, pertaining to Lot 3 within the same minor partition development. Discussion centered on the number of trees proposed for removal and retention, clarification of which trees were located on the subject property versus adjacent parcels, and the relative size and significance of the trees involved.

Commissioners expressed concern about the removal of several large trees that were not strictly within building footprints but could be impacted by construction or future development. The applicant explained that the project arborist had identified certain trees, particularly a large cedar and Douglas firs, as having compromised anchorage due to excavation impacts from multiple directions, creating unacceptable long-term risk.

After extensive discussion, the Commission determined that although the application met canopy coverage standards and did not require inherently require mitigation, the removal of several large and significant trees warranted replacement plantings to maintain neighborhood tree character over time.

Commissioner Frazell moved to approve the request with a condition requiring the planting of two mitigation trees selected from the City's approved mitigation list, with Vice Chair Winkler seconding. The motion passed unanimously (5-0)

MO 120225-04

G. TREE REMOVAL REQUEST 829-25 - 833-25 SHELMAN 7932 SW KINGFISHER WAY.

The Commission reviewed five tree removal requests submitted by property owner Jim Shelman. Mr. Shelman described safety concerns related to five trees on his property, including an ash tree located near the street that is leaning (831-25), two declining maple trees with significant dead limbs (829-25 & 830-25), a hemlock exhibiting trunk decay (832-25), and a Hinoki growing against the house (833-25).

Commission discussion focused on distinguishing between trees that could be classified as dead, dying, or structurally damaging (and therefore eligible for administrative approval) versus those requiring Commission discretion. Commissioners noted the importance of arborist verification when tree health was cited as the primary justification for removal, however, an arborist report was not provided.



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Following discussion, Vice Chair Winkler moved to have the City Administrator follow up with a site visit to consider the hemlock (832-25) as a Type A permit (dead or dying tree) and the Hinoki (833-25) as a Type B permit (tree interfering with a structure) and follow up with processing the permits. Commissioner Frazell seconding. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

MO 120225-05

Regarding the two maple trees (829-25 and 830-25), the Commission determined that additional professional evaluation was necessary to confirm their condition. The Commission stated that these requests should be Type B permits, requiring the submission of an arborist report assessing whether the trees were in a state of irreversible decline. Commissioner Frazell moved to have the City Administrator follow up with 829-25 and 830-25 as Type A permits (dead or dying tree) processing them once an arborist report is received and require one mitigation tree if removal was ultimately approved. Commissioner Winkler seconded. The motion passed with Chair Deeming, Vice Chair Winkler, and Commissioner Frazell voting in favor while Commissioners Bailey and Saab voted no (3-2).

MO 120225-06

The Commission then considered the ash tree (831-25). Given its proximity to the public right-of-way, visible root upheaval, it is leaning, and anticipated vulnerability to emerald ash borer, the Commissioner Frazell moved to approve with one mitigation tree required, with Commissioner Bailey seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

MO 120225-07

H. 2026 MEETING CALENDAR.

City Administrator Jordan Parente presented the proposed 2026 Planning Commission meeting calendar, recommending a shift to the second Tuesday of each month to better align with City Council schedules and staff workload. Commissioners expressed support for the change and noted no conflicts with the proposed dates.

I. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS / REPORTS / STAFF UPDATES.

City Administrator Parente provided an update on the Durham Estates middle housing application, noting that the City had denied the Middle Housing Land Division and reported the applicant has filed an appeal, which will be heard by a hearings officer. Commissioners thanked staff for their work.

J. NEXT REGULARLY SCHEUDLED MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION.

The next regular meeting of the Planning Commission was announced for January 13, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. Commissioners briefly discussed scheduling coordination and quorum considerations for upcoming meetings due to Commissioner's Bailey's planned absence from the January and February 2026 Planning Commission meetings.



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K. ADJOURN.

Chair Deeming adjourned the meeting at 10:15 PM.

Approved:

Susan Deeming, Chair

Attest:

Jordan Parente, City Administrator/Recorder