

MINUTES of the Vernal City PLANNING COMMISSION

Vernal City Council Chambers - 374 East Main Street, Vernal, Utah

April 8, 2025

5:30 pm

Members Present: Stephen Lytle, Nick Porter, Samantha Chapoose, Troy Allred, Ryan Balch, Brooke Hamilton, Brittany Young

Members Excused:

Alternates Present:

Alternates Excused: Rebecca Wilkey

Staff Present: Braeden Christofferson, Assistant City Manager; Gay Lee Jeffs, Administrative Secretary.

WELCOME AND DESIGNATION OF CHAIR AND MEMBERS: Chair Stephen Lytle welcomed everyone present to the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM March 11, 2025: Stephen Lytle Chair asked if there were any changes to the minutes from March 11, 2025. The minutes were approved with there being no corrections, *Ryan Balch moved to approve the minutes of March 11, 2025 as presented. Samantha Chapoose seconded the motion. The motion passed with Stephen Lytle, Nick Porter, Samantha Chapoose, Troy Allred, Ryan Balch, Brooke Hamilton and Brittany Young voting in favor.*

RECOMMENDATION TO CONSIDER AMENDING THE VERNAL CITY MUNICIPAL PLANNING AND ZONING CODE TO CONSIDER MAJOR CHANGES TO CHAPTER 16.60, MASTER SITE PLAN - ORDINANCE NO 2025-07

Braeden Christofferson introduced the proposed changes to Vernal City Code 16.60 – Master Site Plan. This ordinance guides how a property owner or business gains approval from the City for site-specific plans involving zoning, landscaping, infrastructure, and use. The current Master Site Plan process has been criticized for its complexity and lack of clarity, especially for small businesses and property owners. Developers have frequently expressed frustration due to unclear expectations, burdensome compliance requirements, and the absence of a structured process for plan review or conditional approvals.

To address these concerns, the City is proposing a tiered approach that breaks the Master Site Plan into three (3) categories: Full Master Site Plan, Modified Master Site Plan, and Change of Use Application.

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The Full Master Site Plan would apply to major developments, such as new commercial buildings or large-scale redevelopments; generally over half an acre or involving significant infrastructure impacts. This tier would require a comprehensive application, including detailed information on traffic, utilities, and landscaping, and would go through a formal Development Review Committee (DRC) process.

The Modified Master Site Plan would apply to existing structures undergoing significant changes in layout, use, or parking that affect site circulation or infrastructure. It is intended to be more streamlined than the full plan but still involves review by the DRC.

The third tier, the Change of Use Application, is designed to facilitate simpler transitions—such as when a new tenant takes over a space and no major structural, parking, or landscaping changes are needed. This process is simplified and guided by a list of seven criteria, of which five must be met. These include factors like the property being occupied within the last year, no increase in impervious surface, no new access points, no increase in parking needs, and the City has an updated plan within the last ten (10) years.

A key component of the proposed overhaul is the formal establishment of a Development Review Committee (DRC). While some informal version of this exists now, it lacks consistency and direct communication. The new DRC would include representatives from Planning, Public Works, and Building, and possibly other stakeholders, such as Ashley Valley Water & Sewer, Uintah Fire District, Tri-County Health, etc. This committee would meet every Wednesday to review applications in person with applicants. This meeting structure is intended to streamline the review process, reduce delays, improve interdepartmental coordination, and enhance communication with developers.

Chair, Stephen Lytle opened the public hearing.

Deena Hatch, residing at 3460 East 1500 South, spoke during the public hearing. She shared her experience, stating that her business had to spend nearly **\$100,000** to move into a building last year. Much of this work had previously been approved under an earlier process, and she expressed frustration with the unexpected costs. She added that many individuals had approached her saying it's "almost impossible to open a business here."

Mr. Christofferson responded that he was aware of her project and explained the intent of the proposed changes was to prevent similar situations by ensuring a more predictable and fair process. He reminded her that her property had been vacant for more than a year which triggered a full master site plan. The revised ordinance would help clarify requirements depending on which tier a project falls under.

The discussion also addressed the one-year vacancy rule, which determines whether a site is considered a noncomplying use under State law. If a property has been vacant for more than a year, it triggers a full master site plan, and the City is obligated to ensure full compliance with current codes, particularly for safety and infrastructure concerns such as stormwater retention and curb and gutter requirements.

Additionally, questions were raised about the flexibility of certain criteria, such as the lot size limit under the Change of Use Application. Clarifications were given that only the requirement for the building to have been occupied within the past year is mandatory; all other criteria are flexible so long as five of the seven are met.

Mr. Christofferson stated that the one-year vacancy rule comes from State law regarding non-complying uses and structures. If a building has been vacant for over a year, the City must reevaluate the site to ensure it meets all modern code requirements, including stormwater management and safety standards.

Chair Stephen Lytle closed the public hearing.

Mr. Christofferson explained that the proposal draws inspiration from other Utah cities such as Lehi and Ogden, where tiered review processes and DRCs are already in place. The goal for Vernal is not necessarily to grow like those cities, but to prepare for future growth and streamline development processes in a fair, consistent, and economically viable way.

Samantha Chapoose moved to forward a positive recommendation for the proposed changes to Vernal City Municipal Planning and Zoning Code to consider major changes to Chapter 16.60, Master Site Plan - Ordinance No 2025-07. Nick Porter seconded the motion. The motion passed with Stephen Lytle, Nick Porter, Samantha Chapoose, Troy Allred, Ryan Balch, Brooke Hamilton and Brittany Young voting in favor.

RECOMMENDATION TO CONSIDER APPROVAL FOR DEBBIE WIDDISON (XVERTUZ) - CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FOR PROPERTY LOCATED AT 1089 EAST HIGHWAY 40 VERNAL UTAH (PARCEL # 05 044 0045) 2025-009-CUP

Braeden Christofferson presented the request for a Conditional Use Permit submitted by Debbie Widdison (XVERTUZ) to operate a State Package Agency at 1089 East Highway 40. The business will involve the retail sale of sealed alcoholic beverages, regulated by the Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Services (DABS). The property is currently zoned Industrial (I-1) and is not located within 500 feet of any residential zone, church, school, park, or another establishment that sells alcohol. Staff explained that Vernal City Code 16.52.040 allows liquor sales as a conditional use in the industrial zone, provided certain criteria are met.

Mr. Christofferson further clarified that the proposed use would take place in an existing approved building, and that the business currently operates at this address, intending to expand services to include alcohol sales. There will be no on-site consumption of alcohol, and no outdoor alcohol displays or signage being proposed. The use is expected to have minimal impact on traffic and noise due to the surrounding industrial nature of the area. Existing lighting and parking conditions are in compliance with Vernal City Code. Although the property is identified as commercial on the future land use map, its current designation remains industrial, which permits this use with conditional approval.

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Debbie Widdison, 2766 East 1500 South, addressed the Planning Commission and explained that she had applied for a State Package Agency license due to Vernal City now meeting the population threshold that qualifies for an additional liquor license. She stated that the business will function similarly to a state-run liquor store and will sell all types of sealed alcoholic beverages. All inventory must be purchased through the State, with pricing and regulation handled by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Services. Ms. Widdison confirmed that the State would oversee all inventory control and operational requirements. She noted that the business is already operating at this location and that she is seeking the Conditional Use Permit in order to proceed with the State licensing process.

Commissioners asked for clarification regarding the type of alcohol that would be sold, to which Ms. Widdison confirmed that the store would offer full liquor, not just beer. Commissioners also asked about enforcement and age restrictions, and Mr. Christofferson confirmed that all regulations concerning age verification, product control, and restricted access (21 years and older) fall under State jurisdiction. The State will also require that no alcohol be consumed on-site and will perform inspections as part of its licensing process.

As part of the approval process, the Planning Commission acknowledged that the applicant must maintain a valid license through the Utah Department of Alcoholic Beverage Services, comply with Vernal City's signage ordinances, and hold a current Vernal City business license. No on-site consumption will be permitted, and all operations must comply with State regulations regarding alcohol sales.

Ryan Balch moved to approve the Conditional Use Permit for Debbie Widdison to operate a State Package Agency at 1089 East Highway 40, (Parcel # 05 044 0045) 2025-009-CUP subject to following all State regulations. Troy Allred seconded the motion. The motion passed with Stephen Lytle, Nick Porter, Samantha Chapoose, Troy Allred, Ryan Balch, Brooke Hamilton and Brittany Young voting in favor.

REVIEW AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF A SIDEWALK EXEMPTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE LUXURY HOMES MASTER SITE PLAN (2025-004-MSP) FOR PROPERTY LOCATED AT 619 & 637 SOUTH 1400 & 1407 WEST HIGHWAY 40, VERNAL, UTAH, 84078 (PARCEL #05 060 0093)

Braeden Christofferson introduced the Luxury Homes sidewalk exemption request. The property is currently zoned CP-2 (Commercial Planned Zone) and is near a RA-1 (Residential Agriculture) zone. The applicant is requesting a sidewalk exemption along the southwest side of the property on 1400 West.

The property was formerly used for RV storage but is now intended for the display and showcasing of manufactured homes. The applicant cited in his application the operational needs for large home deliveries and existing area conditions as justifications for the exemption. Deliveries are conducted from the west side of the lot, involving heavy vehicles that could damage standard sidewalk infrastructure.

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Currently, sidewalk exists only along the northwest side of the property adjacent to Highway 40. There is no continuous pedestrian network present in the surrounding area, including the Esquire Estates subdivision to the south and east. This subdivision lacks sidewalks due to pre-existing conditions.

The exemption request was presented with visual aids depicting the lot, adjacent areas, and the road conditions. The road along the property is not a City road but a private easement used for business access. Mr. Christofferson explained that although the property had been used for RV storage, it did not have a conditional use permit. As such, the City views this as new development, which requires full compliance with the current development code—including installation of sidewalk, curb, gutter, and water retention.

Mr. Christofferson expressed concerns regarding setting a precedent for future exemptions along Highway 40, potentially undermining pedestrian infrastructure goals. The Code allows for sidewalk exemptions in low pedestrian Industrial zones, not along high-traffic commercial corridors such as Highway 40. Without improvements, pedestrians may be forced to walk on the roadway shoulder, raising safety issues.

Discussion followed among Commissioners regarding property lines and where a sidewalk would begin and end. Mr. Christofferson clarified the sidewalk would follow the property line, within the public right-of-way, ending near an existing tree further down the road. Commissioner Brooke Hamilton noted the larger issue may be the narrow streets in the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Christofferson emphasized the desire for uniform pedestrian infrastructure but recognized the potential financial burden for small businesses.

Commissioner Nick Porter asked if there were any stormwater concerns, Mr. Christofferson confirmed the master site plan includes a water retention facility on the northeast side of the property. He also noted alternative materials such as heavy-duty concrete gutters that could withstand large vehicle deliveries and reduce costs.

Steve Palmer, 706 North 2500 West, addressed the Commission and confirmed improvements are being made to the property, including plans for a drainage area and future site leveling to accommodate rotating display homes. The lot is just over two acres. Mr. Palmer emphasized the cost of full frontage improvements, including asphalt and curb/gutter, would be financially prohibitive at this time—estimating up to \$50,000 for road improvements alone. He expressed interest in collaborating with nearby business owners to pursue future grant funding for area improvements.

Mr. Palmer's current plan includes setting up three (3) to four (4) model homes on the lot for customer viewing. He noted no customer parking will occur on the new lot; parking remains at the existing office on the adjacent parcel. A privacy fence is also planned between the commercial and residential properties, consisting of steel posts and cedar slats.

The exemption request applies strictly to the 1400 West frontage. Mr. Christofferson reiterated the uniqueness of each property and the importance of case-by-case evaluation.

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Ryan Balch moved to approve the sidewalk exemption associated with the Luxury Homes Master Site Plan (2025-004-MSP) for property located at 619 & 637 South 1400 & 1407 West Highway 40, Vernal, Utah, 84078 (Parcel #05 060 0093). Brittany Young seconded the motion. The vote was taken by raised hands. Ryan Balch, Brittany Young, Brooke Hamilton and Troy Allred voted in favor. Samantha Chapoose, Nick Porter and Stephen Lytle voted against. The motion passed with a 4 to 3 vote.

ADJOURN: There being no further business, *Nick Porter moved to adjourn. Samantha Chapoose seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote, and the meeting was adjourned.*

Stephen Lytle , Planning Commission Chair