

PRINCETON TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

July 13, 2026

In Attendance: Town Board Liaison David Patten, Vice Chair Jim Kusler, Dave Hagstrom, Cheryl Schimming, Kathy Stoeckel, and Amanda Hayford

Public Hearing – Serenity Meadows Amended Conditional Use Permit

Public Comments and Concerns

The public hearing revealed strong community opposition based on several key issues:

Zoning and Land Use Compliance

1. Multiple residents, including **Lucas Jirik, Al Bekius, Brittany Jirik, and Nathan Carlson**, argued that building single-family homes on commercial-industrial land is not the intent of commercial zoning ordinances along major highways.
2. **Bekius** cited a nearby property by Federated where a house cannot be rebuilt if destroyed due to being on commercial land, questioning the legality of this development.
3. **Carlson** called the proposal a "clear end around" the zoning code, stating that 11 residential homes do not align with commercial or industrial use.
4. **Gene Stoeckel** emphasized that housing developments are not permitted in commercial zones and questioned why the project wasn't placed in residentially zoned land.

Senior Housing Enforcement and Eligibility

5. **Brittany Jirik** noted that under Federal 55+ regulations, only **80% of units must have at least one resident over 55**, meaning up to **two of the 11 homes** could legally house younger residents.
6. She questioned enforcement mechanisms, noting that compliance checks occur only **biennially (every two years)** and are the responsibility of the HOA, Mille Lacs County, or Princeton Township.
7. Concerns were raised about the practicality of enforcement and the potential for non-compliant occupants, especially if ownership changes over time.

Environmental and Infrastructure Impact

8. **Dan Campbell** from the Soil Water Conservation District expressed concern about the addition of **11 new wells and septic systems**, warning of potential aquifer impacts and neighborhood-wide consequences for water quality and supply.
9. **Jean Loscheider** echoed these concerns, questioning how individual well and septic systems would be tested and approved, given the variability in soil and groundwater conditions across neighboring properties.

Tree Removal and Aesthetic Impact

10. **Loscheider** highlighted that while developers claimed minimal tree removal, the submitted plans appeared to show significant clearing, replacing mature forest with only **three-inch bushes**, which would reduce noise and light buffering and winter wind protection.

Precedent and Long-Term Implications

11. **Stephanie Johnston**, a former Town Board Supervisor, warned that approving this amendment could open the floodgates for similar developments, especially with upcoming infrastructure improvements like the Zimmerman overpass.
12. She cautioned that poor decisions now could lead to future foreclosures and community decline, citing Sherburne County's high foreclosure rate after the recession.

Town Board Liaison Patten spoke regarding the traffic pattern changes taking place now that work has been done in Elk River and most currently in Zimmerman. He discussed ROI and sustainability of a project of this nature. It was zoned Commercial Industrial, as it aligns with the roads. The senior housing in Zimmerman along Highway 169 and the units on First Street in Princeton are apartment complexes, with amenities not likely in individual parceled homes.

Regular Meeting

Vice Chair Commissioner Kusler called the regular meeting to order at 6:30 pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance

Approve Agenda

Commissioner Schimming motioned to approve the agenda as presented, Second by Commissioner Stoeckel, Motion carried 5-0.

Open Forum

No additional comments.

Resignation of Steve Pflgebraar, Post for Letters of Interest

A notice of resignation from Commissioner Pflgebraar was acknowledged. Vice Chair Commissioner Kusler thanked him for his service and wishes him well as they relocated outside of the Township.

Approve Minutes of Meeting – May 4, 2026

Commissioner Stoeckel motioned to approve the minutes as presented, Second by Commissioner Schimming, Motion carried 5-0.

Consider an Application from Serenity Meadows

To review public comments and consider an amendment to the conditional use permit (CUP) for the Serenity Meadows senior housing development in Princeton Township, specifically changing from 22 duplex units to 11 single-family homes and allowing individual lot sales under a newly proposed homeowners association (HOA) structure.

Key Takeaways

13. The amended CUP reduces the number of dwellings from **22 to 11**, transitioning from duplexes to single-family homes on separate parcels.
14. A major change is the request to allow individual lot sales, reversing a prior condition requiring the project to remain under one company's management.
15. Public opposition centers on zoning compliance, environmental concerns (wells and septic systems), precedent-setting, and the appropriateness of residential development in a commercial-industrial zone.
16. Developers cite financing and marketability challenges with the original duplex model as the reason for the amendment.
17. Concerns remain about the enforceability of 55+ senior housing covenants and the lack of finalized HOA and restrictive covenant documents.

Project Background and Proposed Changes

The Serenity Meadows development is located on two parcels—IDs 0200 and 0201—in Section 6 of Princeton Township, situated between Highway 169 and 100th Avenue, south of 70th Street. The land is zoned commercial-industrial, and the comprehensive plan also designates it as such. In fall 2025, the Township Planning Commission and Board approved a conditional use permit for **11 buildings with 22 duplex units** (totaling 22 dwellings) for residents aged 55 and over.

The current amendment proposes:

18. Reducing the number of buildings and dwellings to **11 single-family homes**, each on its own parcel.
19. Creating a **homeowners' association (HOA)** to manage maintenance, snow removal, landscaping, and enforcement of senior housing requirements.
20. Allowing the **individual sale of lots**, which contradicts a previous condition requiring the entire development to remain under one management entity.
21. Each unit will be approximately **1,400 square feet**, slab-on-grade, and include accessory buildings. Individual well and septic systems will serve each lot.
22. One of the 12 subdivided lots will be designated as open space for recreation.

Developer and Planning Commission Discussion

Developers, represented by **Joss Jondahl** and **Jason Betzler**, explained that the shift from duplexes to single-family homes is driven by **financing and marketability challenges**:

23. Duplexes with zero lot lines are rare and difficult to finance, as lenders are reluctant to issue a single mortgage for multiple units on one parcel.
24. Creating separate parcels with individual PIDs makes it easier to secure financing and sell units.
25. Despite allowing sales, the developers intend to retain ownership and operate the units as rentals initially.
26. An HOA will enforce covenants, including 55+ occupancy, maintenance responsibilities, and use restrictions.

However, the **restrictive covenant document** presented was only a draft, and the final version had not yet been completed.

Planning Commission members raised several concerns:

27. **Zoning Administrator Richards** noted a contradiction in the original CUP process: while early materials mentioned HOA, the applicant later clarified they did not intend to create one, leading to the resolution requiring single management and no lot sales.
28. The current amendment directly contradicts that resolution, raising questions about consistency and due process.
29. Several Commissioners expressed discomfort approving the amendment without seeing the final, legally binding restricting covenant document and HOA documents.
30. There was debate over whether individual lot sales would effectively convert the property to residential use, despite retaining its commercial zoning.

Decision and Next Steps

After extensive discussion, the Planning Commission determined it could not approve the amended CUP without reviewing the final restrictive covenants and HOA documents.

Commissioner Stoeckel motioned to continue this discussion at the next meeting on August 3, 2026, Second by Commissioner Hagstrom, Motion carried 4-1.

The motion passed, effectively **delaying any decision** until these materials are available for review. The Commission acknowledged the developer's challenges; however, emphasized the need for legal clarity, enforceable standards, and adherence to prior conditions before moving forward. The developer's financial issues were not considered a hardship, and not a hardship for the Township.

Adjourn at 7:15 pm

Commissioner Stoeckel motioned to adjourn, Second by Commissioner Hayford, Motion carried 5-0.