

Minutes of a Special Meeting of The City Council of the City of Highland Park

MEETING DATE: October 30, 2025

MEETING LOCATION: City Hall 1707 St Johns Avenue, Highland Park, IL 60035

I. Call to Order

At 7:00 PM, Mayor Rotering called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

II. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Commander Curran, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod, Assistant Corporation Counsel Martinez, Representatives from: The Habitat Company (Zak Zalar & Thomas Black), DLA Piper (Paul Hemmersbaugh)

III. Pledge of Allegiance

IV. Mayor's Report

Mayor Rotering provided a statement regarding community support.

V. Business from the Public (Individuals wishing to be heard regarding items not listed on this agenda)

Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska provided opening comments for Business from the Public.

There was no business from the public.

VI. Other Business

R129-2025 - A Resolution Approving a Preliminary Development Plan and a Preliminary Plat of Subdivision (1660 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road)

Mayor Rotering voiced the Council's appreciation for the community's response and questions that were received related to the proposed development at 1600 and 1700 Deerfield Road. She noted that the Council did review communication that was sent to the City.

Community Development Director Fontane highlighted updated information from the previous Special City Council meeting that was held on Thursday, September 29, 2025.

The Council, Development Representatives, Corporation Counsel Elrod, and Staff discussed:

- A request to have the sidewalk continued to Old Skokie with the understanding that it is integrated into the neighborhood but the need for connectivity to the north
- Street names currently in the plan are place holders and staff will review to ensure there are no duplicate names
- The EV Chargers that will be installed will be for the general public and not just for the residents
- An agreement will be entered into with a third party professional group to manage and maintain the EV chargers but the City would be able to contact the property owner if there were any issues
- Concerns with the underlying zoning and potential to allow for greater density; would like a zoning category that does not allow for developing on wetlands
- The development agreement has been created to ensure that no changes to the property can take place without the need for a public process to include public hearings and transparency regarding future changes to the development agreement
- Currently, Section 11(b) of the development agreement provides clarity and a contractual agreement as it relates to what has been approved to be on the property
- Consideration of adding a berm to the south side of the property instead of a fence
- There is a need to not disturb the area and the best way to do that would be to add a fence to allow for clear demarcation of the property lines
- Request for a public benefit that has a greater impact for the community, as there are two variances that are being requested that could be costly: burying of the lines and sidewalk extension on Ridge
- The proposed landscape plan has been extensively been reviewed by PDC and staff that will provide for substantial beautification of area; there will be an implementation of more than triple of what is required for landscaping
- Request to have the overall zoning of the property be R7
- The project has gone through an already lengthy public process with PDC where zoning was a large part of those conversations; changing the zoning now could have a huge impact on the current proposal
- Conversations that have been had with abutting properties, including conversations with the owner of Bluegrass in early October
- Applicant is continuing to work with the City's Forester to understand what type of material can be used on the pathways to ensure it is ADA compliant and will not disturb the current landscaping, including trees; a final determination will be made during final engineering
- The City would pay for the maintenance of an access or easement road but the developer would have to build if the development causes a need for the road
- Continued concerns with regarding traffic impacts to the area
- 227 units is already a large amount of units for the area, there should not be any more allowed as it may cause issues for the neighborhood
- Fire, Police and Public Works have reviewed the proposal and do not feel that an emergency access point is needed; if needed, the applicant will cover the costs to have it built

- The request to converse with the ILCC was brought forward based on comments that were provided and it has been requested that the applicant review the comments that were provided by the ILCC and take those comments into consideration for the final proposal; all information will be reviewed by all engineering consultants for the City and the applicant
- For the preliminary proposal, there is a landscaping island missing from the plan but the easement holder has agreed to allow part of the easement to be covered with evergreens or a type of greenery to allow for closer compliance
- There is no way to guarantee that a Council in the future will not want to make changes to the current property but those changes cannot happen absent the public process; the development agreement is a contractual document that binds the property stronger than it can ever be bound because of a regulatory and contractual agreement

Jim Lederer, business owner and resident, voiced concerns regarding landscaping, lack of green space and recreational space.

Dan Kaufman, Highland Park resident, voiced appreciation for all of the time that has been spent by the Council, staff and the public. He noted that there is a huge need for middle market housing for the community and these units would bring more housing to the community. He explained that traffic concerns have been raised and there is information within the packet that answers those questions and addresses the concerns; there have been other developments that have raised concerns with traffic where nothing precipitated after the development was in place. He noted that due to the public input, this plan has gotten better. He recommended to those advocates on either side to take the proposal as a win for the community.

Lisa Radin, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns with the information that has been shared at meetings and voiced concerns with the different variances that have been requested by the applicant. She discussed affordable housing and the number of units that the applicant is proposing to be affordable. She agreed that there have been a lot of meetings but there is a sense that the applicant is not listening to the concerns of the community.

William Dixon, Highland Park resident, noted that he did not receive a letter as it relates to the fence or a confirmation of the location of the proposed fence.

Eileen Turnoff, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns that the neighborhood has missed information for the project. She noted that information was received regarding conversations with the ILCC through a neighbor.

Michael Turnoff, Highland Park resident, noted that safety is not the only issue with the railroad crossing, but that the crossing and rail corridor is not part of a quiet zone; there will be implications in the future if the City wishes to designate the crossing as a quiet zone. He noted that he does not believe this project should move forward until all issues have been corrected to address comments provided by the ILCC coordinator.

Zac Zalar, Habitat Company representative, noted that the plan is to work with City staff regarding the comments provided by the ILCC during final engineering and develop solutions

that will meet the City's intentions for safety. He stated that the ILCC's website indicates that there has not been an accident in this area and was the main roadway for Solo Cup when it was in business.

Anne Flannigan Bassi, Highland Park resident, voiced her appreciation for the work that has been dedicated to this project. She discussed how this development allows for attainable and affordable housing for the community. It allows for those who work in our community a chance to live in this community and our parents who retire in the community can stay in the community. She noted that this project has come so far with the invaluable input from the community and the changes that have been made will make this an asset to the community.

Susanna Miller, Highland Park resident, shared her immigration story to the US and when her family moved to Highland Park. She discussed how bringing in 227 families will break the balance of the community and will change the neighborhood. She requested that the number of rental units be limited to the same percentage of affordable units. She voiced concern as it relates to traffic and how it is scary to her.

Dan Wagner, Highland Park resident, voiced concern about the number of rental units that will be available on the property. He noted that he is not concerned about the tenants but concerned about the landlords. He requested that they all be for sale.

Len Tenner, Highland Park resident, discussed traffic impacts on the neighborhood from when he moved to Highland Park through today. He noted that there will be heavy implications regarding the traffic that will be traversing the area.

Sandy Lurey, Highland Park resident, voiced her appreciation for the comments that have been made by Councilmember Lidawer regarding zoning. She noted that the zoning that is being requested allows the developer to put more density in the area than what is necessary. She discussed the master plan that has been put in place. She stated the understanding for the pathway to be ADA compliant but the units themselves are not ADA compliant.

Mike Laxner, Highland Park resident, discussed the variances being asked for as it relates to the sidewalk and the burying of the lines and requested that if the variances are being granted, there should be information provided as to the cost of that relief. He discussed how the property should be zoned R7 and that the community needs to understand if the property can be zoned as R7. He noted that the development should not have been allowed to proceed until the master plan was updated, as the current master plan does not allow the Skokie corridor to have residential zoning.

Scott Small, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns regarding an increase in traffic that could potentially impact the area. He stated that he has not seen a traffic study that will affect those homeowners that live directly on Ridge Road.

Janet Swartz, Highland Park resident, discussed the process and number of meetings that have taken place to discuss the proposed development. She noted that she is pleased by the conversation that has taken place tonight as it relates to the possibility of down-zoning the

property.

Kenneth Tads, Highland Park resident, stated that hearing that town homes were being proposed means an increase in young families that potentially will include kids and the possibility of two cars per household. He voiced concerns regarding the increase in traffic that will impact the neighborhood. He noted that there will be no relief for the south-west quadrant in the area as it relates to traffic concerns.

Mayor Rotering thanked the public for their input and noted that what they have communicated has been heard.

The Council, Development Representatives, Corporation Counsel Elrod, and Staff discussed landscape planning for the portion of the property that abuts Bluegrass and how more information will be provided for the final landscape and engineering plan; it will be relatively dense landscaping to address the “head lamp” issues. They discussed how any future requests to change the zoning of the property from what it is currently being proposed will need to go through the public process once again

Councilmember Blumberg confirmed that he hears the concerns of the community as it relates to density but this is a complicated property to develop. He stated that he does not want the property to remain zoned as Industrial as that would have a greater impact to the area. He explained that this proposal is an opportunity to bring in a large number of residents to live and shop in Highland Park that will have a positive impact on the community. He noted that it is impossible to know what is going to be developed on the Toys R’ Us property and whatever that proposal may be will also have to go through the public process. He feels that the overall benefits of the inclusionary housing is going to be very important. He stated that the developer has a known history of being responsible for developing successful properties throughout the country and interactions from individuals within this community may not be the same. He confirmed that he feels the traffic concerns were adequately addressed and will continue to be addressed if issues arise in the future. He stated that he is in favor of the project.

Councilmember Lidawer voiced her appreciation for all of the work done on this project. She noted that this is the last big piece of property available in Highland Park. She stated that what is being proposed is what is front of the Council tonight. She opined on the positive impact of additional residential and inclusionary housing that would be coming to the community. She stated that this process has become much better because everyone has worked together to get the project where it is today. She believes the zoning is a philosophical question and would like to see the development changed to an R7 zoning in totality. She indicated that due to the requested variations, there needs to be a larger public benefit offered.

Councilmember Tapia voiced his appreciation for the community and staff. He noted that this is a classic paradox of preservation versus growth. He understands that individuals have purchased their homes and they know their neighborhoods but cities that don’t grow will wither. He noted that the community needs more residents and with that need will come more density; this will benefit both the community and businesses within the community. He stated that this doesn’t mean more density without the management of that density; the applicant has done a good job of

managing this density. He feels that the tension and pull of the project may not land with all wishes being granted but the outcome provides for compromises by all parties. He voiced concerns with traffic impact to the neighborhood but the traffic studies have taken into account all of the concerns that have been expressed. He explained that the proposal does provide for a couple dozen affordable units within one area, as the need for middle income housing continues to increase. He voiced his concern with the length of time changing the zoning to R7 may have on the project, even though that zoning would allow the developer the footprint they have created.

Corporation Counsel Elrod noted that what he has heard is that the community would be interested in having the property zoned R7 and then would like the proposal to change to fit the parameters of R7 zoning, not that the property should be changed to R7 with what is currently being proposed. He explained that this has been a bifurcated process as tonight's agenda item is a preliminary plan proposal but if the zoning were to change to R7, there would need to be another public hearing before the PDC, as well as a lot of variations to get to the current proposal.

Mayor Rotering and Councilmember Blumberg discussed the request to change zoning and how the PDC considered the zoning for the proposed development.

Councilmember Ross stated that she is delighted about the volume of inclusionary housing. She noted that she is not worried about other developers being turned off from developing in Highland Park, if the zoning were to change for this project. She stated that she doesn't believe the City would need to start from square one from what she has heard but that it would only be an additional meeting and the public hearing could take place during that meeting where PDC would be making a final decision.

Councilmember Bruckman stated perfect is the enemy of good. She voiced her appreciation for the work and input that has been provided for this project.

Councilmember Center voiced his appreciation for the countless hours by staff, fellow PDC advisors, Councilmembers, the applicant and the public. He noted that he echoes what Councilmember Tapia has already stated. He recognizes that change is hard but it can be positive. He voiced that what is attempting to be accomplished is a project that is being proposed is what will actually be developed. He understands that the City will be in a better position the way that the resolution has been drafted versus attempting to go back and change the zoning.

Mayor Rotering voiced her appreciation to the public, Habitat Company, Staff and Council colleagues. She noted that this started as the Solo Cup property and there have been many different proposals along the way. She stated that this is a great project and it will assist with the need for middle market housing. She explained that the City will continue to provide the neighbors with information and amendments as it relates to traffic that may need to be addressed; the City will continue to work with the applicant on storm water management. She stated that this needs to be the development of a place and not just an area on a map. She voiced her support for the project.

Councilmember Blumberg moved to approve a Resolution Approving a Preliminary Development Plan and a Preliminary Plat of Subdivision (1600 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road. Councilmember Bruckman seconded the motion.

Councilmember Ross noted that the bottom line was to get the best project out of the process and she appreciates the changes the developer has already made. She recognized there was not a majority for parallel tracks but she doesn't want to be the one to hold up or go against the project because she is demanding a different process that is not possible.

Councilmember Lidawer asked that there be additional public benefits considered in the form of either a monetary increase relative to landscaping. She requested that the project also be considered as an R7 zoning in tandem as the project moved forward.

The Council, Developer Representatives, Corporation Counsel Elrod, and Staff discussed the proposed plan for landscaping, traffic concerns, and R7 zoning.

Corporation Counsel Elrod noted that there is a statement in the Resolution that they will be required to conduct another traffic study when they are at 90% occupancy or at the discretion of the City Manager; if any necessary changes are needed, the developer will have to make those changes.

Councilmember Blumberg noted that he would not agree to the recommendations related to a monetary increase for landscaping or R7 zoning consideration.

Councilmembers Blumberg and Bruckman noted they would accept an amendment to the resolution that would require the applicant pay for any changes to traffic patterns if the traffic study necessitated changes.

Councilmember Lidawer moved to amend the motion by Councilmembers Blumberg and Bruckman allow for the inclusion of a \$50,000 public benefit increase for landscaping and the property to be considered with R7 zoning.

The motion failed due to the lack of a second.

Councilmember Tapia moved to amend the motion by Councilmembers Blumberg and Bruckman to allow for the inclusion of a \$50,000 public benefit increase for landscaping. Councilmember Lidawer seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the motion failed.

MOVER:	Councilmember Tapia
SECONDER:	Councilmember Lidawer
AYES:	Councilmembers Ross, Tapia, Lidawer
NAYS:	Mayor Roterling, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Blumberg

Councilmember Blumberg moved to approve a Resolution Approving a Preliminary Development Plan and a Preliminary Plat of Subdivision, as amended to include the requirement that the applicant pay for any changes to traffic patterns if the traffic study necessitated changes. Councilmember Bruckman seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed.

MOVER:	Councilmember Blumberg
SECONDER:	Councilmember Bruckman
AYES:	Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg
NAYS:	None

VII. Adjournment

Councilmember Tapia moved to adjourn the City Council meeting. Councilmember Blumberg seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, Mayor Rotering declared the motion passed unanimously.

The City Council adjourned its meeting at 10:12 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Palbitska
Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk