



Planning & Zoning Board Work Session Minutes

June 24, 2025 at 12:00 PM

Chapman Room
401 S. Park Avenue

Present

Alex Stringfellow, Jason Johnson, Bill Segal, Charles Steinberg, Michael Dick, Vashon Sarkisian

Absent

David Bornstein

Staff Present

Director of Planning & Zoning Allison McGillis, Asst. Director of Planning & Zoning/Zoning Official John Harbilas, Planner II Nicholas Lewis, Planner I Corinna Lundgren, Deputy City Clerk Kim Breland

1. Meeting Called to Order

Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

2. Discussion Item (s)

a.

- Overview of West Fairbanks Policies (attached)
- Discuss pickleball regulations and general updates to Sec. 58-71 and Sec. 58-84

A brief discussion ensued about ensuring that the Board's concerns and questions are completely satisfied and addressed before obtaining a Board vote on a hearing item.

Mrs. McGillis began discussion on updating the city's outdoor recreational area regulations since public interest in private pickleball courts on residential properties has increased. The current regulations require a 10-foot setback for the side and rear of a court. To address public concerns regarding noise, the setback was updated to 20 feet. Mrs. McGillis indicated that some of the City Commission members expressed interest in potentially adding a time limitation. A brief discussion ensued about possibly setting the limit to no activity after 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. The possible pros and cons and ideal timeframe of the limitation were also discussed, with a primary focus on addressing the noise issues associated with pickleball courts, especially when placed in residential areas. It was acknowledged that pickleball, compared to sports like tennis or basketball, creates a distinctive noise, particularly due to the repetitive "dink" sound, which can travel far and disturb neighbors. This led to a broader conversation about

potential solutions, with noise regulation being identified as the primary concern.

A key suggestion was increasing the setback for pickleball courts to limit their proximity to neighboring properties. While a 10-foot setback might not be effective in reducing noise, increasing it to 20 feet was considered a more viable option, although this would limit the number of properties where pickleball courts could be built. However, it was noted that a 20-foot setback could face legal challenges, with opponents arguing that it might be seen as a capricious move to prevent the sport on smaller lots.

Another potential solution discussed was a ban on residential pickleball courts, which some Board members felt could be the most effective way to address the issue. However, others raised concerns about this being an extreme measure and questioned whether the pickleball noise could be justified as significantly different from other sports like basketball. The consensus seemed to lean against a complete ban but instead toward regulations aimed at mitigating noise through measures like setbacks, time limitations, and noise barriers.

Further discussion led to the idea of requiring masonry walls around pickleball courts to absorb and block the noise. This would potentially reduce the decibel levels and offer relief to neighbors. It was suggested that such walls should be six feet tall and placed around the perimeter of the property, except where there is already a natural barrier, like a lake or nature reserve. The idea of incorporating a masonry wall, along with the setback and time restrictions, seemed to gain traction, though there was still debate about the specific details of these proposals.

The discussion also touched on how to apply these rules to commercial areas. A suggestion was made to require setbacks of 100 feet from residential properties for any outdoor recreational courts, including pickleball, and to apply similar restrictions for commercial-to-commercial areas where necessary. However, the group leaned toward focusing primarily on residential areas, where noise concerns are more pronounced.

The Board considered several approaches to mitigate the impact of pickleball noise on residential neighborhoods. While a ban was briefly discussed, the prevailing recommendation was to implement measures like setbacks (up to 20 feet), noise barriers (such as masonry walls), and time restrictions (such as no play after 8 or 9 PM). These recommendations will be further refined and presented for public discussion in a future meeting before any formal decisions are made.

Mrs. McGillis then began discussion centered on updates and clarifications to zoning and development regulations in West Fairbanks, with particular attention to residential and commercial design elements, as well as aligning the Land Development Code with recent comprehensive plan amendments.

Mrs. McGillis led the discussion by highlighting the growing popularity of porte-cocheres (covered vehicle entryways) and a need to simplify existing language to make these structures easier to regulate. The current policy allows for confusing encroachment language, so the revision will mirror porch encroachment rules, ensuring these structures can extend into the front setback within clear limits. Arbors, trellises, and pergolas were also discussed, with a focus on more accurate classification and regulation. It was noted that a pergola should be treated as an accessory structure like a cabana or shed, whereas trellises and arbors are typically smaller, open structures used for screening or aesthetic purposes. More specific definitions of these terms were recommended in the code to avoid ambiguity and prevent misuse, particularly where developers may misclassify pergolas to avoid certain restrictions.

Further amendments involved simplifying regulations for at-grade decks and patios by moving from percentage-based setbacks to a uniform 5-foot setback. The rationale was that decks at ground level do not pose visual or structural obstructions significant enough to warrant complex calculations. In terms of walls and fences, adjustments were proposed to resolve recurring conflicts, especially on corner lots or properties with multiple street frontages. For example, fences near pools would be allowed up to four feet high to meet building code requirements without the need for special variances. Additionally, the requirement that the "good side" of a fence face outward was removed due to inconsistent interpretations and installation challenges—especially with modern horizontal slat designs and neighbor access issues.

In the commercial context, updates were made to require mechanical equipment and waste containers to be screened using materials that match the primary building, codifying a long-standing practice. Cleanup of inconsistencies in alcohol sales language, particularly around Hannibal Square and adjacent commercial areas, was also performed to ensure regulatory consistency citywide.

A substantial portion of the discussion was devoted to implementing new zoning rules for West Fairbanks that align with the 2023 Comprehensive Plan updates. These changes aim to incentivize infrastructure improvements by allowing developers to tap into a finite "density bonus pool" that increases allowable residential units from a base of 17 units per acre up to 25, in exchange for specific community investments. Examples include road upgrades, wastewater systems, public parks (of at least half an acre), and shared stormwater ponds. This pool is limited to about 1,250 units across approximately 50 acres of annexed land, with only 50% of the pool available per individual project. The City Commission will retain discretion to assess whether a proposed improvement justifies a density bonus and to ensure equity over time. There was also discussion about the potential need to add more units to the pool if development outpaces expectations, though the intent is for only a few large developments to tap heavily into it.

Finally, height allowances were briefly addressed. While the comprehensive plan allows for buildings up to six to eight stories at certain corners, final project approvals will still depend on compatibility with surrounding areas, leaving the decision to the Planning and Zoning Board and City Commission. Overall, staff will revise general provisions slightly based on this discussion, but the Fairbanks ordinance will remain as-is for the next formal review.

3. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

ATTEST:

/s/ Mary Bush, Recording Secretary