

**PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

Wednesday, August 6th, 2025

4:30 P.M.

VIRTUAL MEETING:

Live Streamed @ <https://www.cityofoberlin.com/city-government/streaming-video/>

IN-PERSON MEETING:

**Oberlin Enrichment and Activity Center, 36 S. Prospect Street, Oberlin,
Ohio 44074**

1. Call Meeting to Order:

This meeting was called to order at 4:31 P.M.

Roll Call: Jack Ford, Chair; Jill Sawyer, Vice-Chair; Bryan Burgess, Member; Peter Crowley, Member; Amy Maliza, Member; Ian Anderson, Planning Assistant; Chris Yates, Staff Liaison; Joe Waltzer, City Council Liaison and Carrie Porter, Planning and Development Director.

Guests: Amber Stalcup, 435 W. Lorain Street; Chelsea Kulhanik, 443 W. Lorain Street; Aaron Appell, Bramhall Engineering; Joe Comar, Oberlin College; Kyle Davis, Oberlin College; David Hertz, Oberlin College; Ryan Kozak, SLK Capital Investments; Mallory Masarik, SLK Capital Investments; Kevin Brown, Oberlin College and Laura Baudot, Oberlin College.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the July 2, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting.

Burgess made a motion to approve these minutes as submitted. Sawyer seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Application for Site Plan Approval for a Change of Use from Retail to Institutional at 37-39 West College Street (Former College Bookstore Space), Submitted by James Shannon Smith on behalf of Oberlin College.

Porter described this application as a request for a change of use at the address of 37-39 West College Street. The proposed change would see this property switch uses from a retail use to academic programming space. Porter added that this change of use requires approval by the Planning Commission. This Commission previously approved the proposed use for the second floor of the address listed. This application requests the same approval for the first floor and basement of this structure. City staff had no comments regarding this change of use. Because this building is located in the downtown business district, the applicant is exempt from having to provide parking along with the

proposed change of use. Porter then introduced Kyle Davis and Joe Comar, representatives of Oberlin College, for any questions. Ford questioned if this property would still be classified as a use of the “C-1” Central Business District. “Yes”, replied Porter. She added that, if approved, the applicant will have to file with the building department for a building permit for a change of use and a new occupancy certificate.

Crowley stated that Oberlin College previously agreed that the first floor of this structure would exist as a retail use. He added that the City has been trying to develop areas where citizens, students and visitors can patronize or congregate but, according to Crowley, this has been a struggle. Crowley further added that he realizes that the College needs space to operate, but they have other properties that could be used for institutional uses. Crowley feels that the requested use doesn’t make sense, being that the downtown district has lost several retail venues in the past few years. Crowley stated that he understood that the use requested is one of the listed uses in the “C-1” Central Business District, and that if this Commission were to vote no on this application, the City and the College would have to fight it out in court. “We don’t want to do that,” Crowley stated, “But we feel like there is some bad faith here,” he further added.

Sawyer affirmed Crowley’s statement and added that she has seen the loss of storefront spaces across the entirety of the Oberlin Downtown District. “I really don’t know if there is anything that we can do about this,” stated Sawyer. She added that she is disappointed regarding this issue.

“What’s to be done about it is to say no,” stated Burgess. He also affirmed Crowley’s stance regarding this application. Burgess further added that even asking to change the use of the building in question is an insult. He then reminded the Commission that they begrudgingly approved a change of use application for the first floor on East College Street of the Hotel at Oberlin to facilitate a conservatory program. The retail space at the old hotel was previously used as store frontage that housed a bank, dentist office and a barber shop and a Chamber of Commerce to name a few. Burgess added that the City has lost at least a half dozen storefront spaces on College Street alone. He further added that he will not support this application as submitted.

Ford agreed with Burgess and stated that he sees the property in question as an anchor store. He added that having this property converted to offices just doesn’t feel right. “The downtown district has some real struggles going on without the potential of having another link of the chain taken away,” Ford further added.

Sawyer brought attention to the efforts of the City through the Downtown Strategic Plan and the Comprehensive Plan to bring more money and business to the downtown business district, as well as increase the population

of Oberlin by providing a boost in the local economy. She feels that this application would be adverse to these goals.

Burgess stated that College students will still need a bookstore, if they plan to move the bookstore to the basement of the Mudd Building, why not keep the bookstore where it exists and use the Mudd Building for the use requested in this application.

Comer stated that the bookstore in question will be relocated to the first floor of the Mudd Building. Comar added that he understands the concerns of the Planning Commission, but the new use will bring the opportunity of more foot traffic to the downtown area, being that the proposed use will include media, integrated arts, active art displays and performances. "That storefront aspect has to be retained. That piece must remain so that it melts in with the character of Oberlin and the businesses that are on College Street," stated Comar. Comar further added that he would like to be part of the discussion on how to address the dwindling store front space issue that Oberlin currently struggles with. His belief is that the occupancy in question would further add to the vibrancy of the downtown district.

Ford stated that one of his concerns is the dwindling of retail space related to the downtown business district. He added that spaces that were previously deemed public spaces by the College do not function as so. Comar stated that there are ways to solve that issue.

"It's hard to see that happening with the current situation," replied Ford. Ford then stated that he is afraid of denying this application, being that it will institute a legal battle with the College, but he personally does not agree with the proposed use.

Maliza requested that the College provide additional information regarding the proposed use of the property in question, especially regarding the public use aspect as stated by Comar.

Ford then recommended that this application be tabled. Comer then questioned if the proposed space could be used to facilitate both the needs of the College, and the request for public space as stated by members of the Commission. He added that he believes that these two issues can co-exist under the same roof. Ford affirmed Comar's comment and stated that the building in question could house another bookstore, be rented to a retail entity, or the College could sell the building. Comar stated that the storefront aspect of this building could be retained for commercial use or activity.

Burgess stated that, in the recent past, when the College applied for things of this nature, they provided the Commission with a preliminary review and received feedback from this body. This process, according to Burgess, did not

happen regarding this application. “This isn’t a conversation. This is us being in a position that we have to make a decision,” Burgess further added.

Kulhanik stated that a zoning modification may be the answer to this issue. Ford added that this Commission has been put into a position to decide on the proposed application at this meeting.

Porter then questioned whether representatives of the College are willing to table this application and provide further information regarding this application for presentation at a future meeting. “Absolutely,” Comar replied. He then questioned the specifics on what this Commission would like to see regarding this application. “I guess the question would be how this space is going to interact with the current downtown, how is it going to bring the public in, and how is it going to generate traffic downtown,” stated Ford. He added that he would like to know how students and the public would utilize this space. “We don’t want to see people in there during office hours and then it’s an abandoned building at night,” Ford further added. Comar affirmed Ford’s statement and questioned if this request was appropriate, being that this application meets the building’s occupancy use classification. Comar then questioned Ford regarding the verbiage in the Code that allows this Commission to require that the College elaborate on a permitted use. Ford stated that this language may not exist, but this Commission would appreciate it if the College would further elaborate on the storefront facet of the proposed use.

Waltzer stated that the College should have reached out to the public a year ago when they first began to entertain this project.

Ford then informed Comar that he realizes that this Commission must approve this application. He added that he and members of this Commission would like the courtesy of being informed on how the College plans to use this building in question as a public space. Comar affirmed Ford’s statement and questioned if this Commission would be willing to approve this application with the requests from the Planning Commission being conditions of approval. Ford stated that at this point, the Planning Commission would like to table this application until they are further informed regarding how the College plans to use this building as public space. “It’s not against you,” Ford stated. “It’s just the history of the College working with the City.”

Comar inquired if this application could be revisited at a special meeting before the end of the month. Porter stated that, if approved by members of this body, this application could be revisited on August 20th. Burgess stated that if we table this application, we must revisit within the 90-day period as stated in the code. Members of the Commission affirmed that the stated date of August 20th would fall firmly within the 90-day period. Sawyer stated that

she may be unavailable on the 20th of August. Comar stated that he would like to reach approval of this application before the students return for classes.

Burgess then made a motion to table this meeting until the scheduled Planning Commission meeting of September 3rd. Sawyer seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Application for Site Plan Approval for a Change of Use from Residential to Institutional at 55 E. Lorain Street, Submitted by James Shannon Smith on behalf of Oberlin College.

Porter described this application as a request for a change of use from residential to institutional for the subject property. Approval of this application would facilitate the conversion of former campus housing into art studios for College use. Porter then informed the Commission that the properties listed in this application exist adjacent to one another and are located behind the Allen Art Museum. Staff had no comments regarding this application and there were no issues identified regarding parking for these proposed facilities.

Ford questioned the amount of property owned by the College that exists on the site drawing provided to the Commission. "All of it," replied Porter.

Burgess questioned if the proposed art studios would be used to replace art studio space that currently exists downtown. "Yes," replied Comar. Comar added that the proposed art studios will be a closer commute for students and that the College plans to do all repairs as needed to these buildings.

Burgess then made a motion to approve this application as submitted. Crowley seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Application for Site Plan Approval for a Change of Use from Residential to Institutional at 61 Willard Court, Submitted by James Shannon Smith on behalf of Oberlin College.

Sawyer questioned if the proposed space would accommodate students from the College building that exists on the corner of College and Pleasant Streets. Davis informed Sawyer that the building in question is currently a space for seniors. He added that the proposed building will accommodate 13 students.

Sawyer made a motion to approve this application as submitted. Crowley seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

6. Application for Preliminary Development Plan Approval in a "PDOD"/Planned Development Overlay District for a Proposed Senior Housing Development to be located at 450 West College Street, Submitted

by Ryan Kozak of SLK Capital Holdings, LLC on Behalf of trustees of the Milan and Kathleen DeRuyter Trust.

Porter stated that this application requests preliminary development plan approval for a senior housing development called Oberlin Place. She added that it is the role of the Planning Commission to recommend this application to City Council for approval, disapproval or approval with modifications.

The applicant is currently proposing 60 new dwelling units, a 3-story apartment building and 12 one-story cottage units with attached garages. The proposed cottage units will consist of two duplexes and two fourplexes.

The applicant has addressed a staff comment regarding the number of parking stalls that will serve the proposed development. City staff and the applicant have come to agreement that there will be 76 parking stalls for the proposed development.

Porter noted that 48% to 55% of this property will be open space with an occupied density of 14.8 units per acre, which is lower than or similar to the occupied density of several apartment complexes in the surrounding area. A landscaping and planting plan has been submitted by the applicant for Commission review. Porter further added that a photometric plan that shows light dispersion levels will be needed by the applicant to reach full approval. Staff comments from Public Works, the Fire Department and the City Engineer have all been answered, with replies being forwarded to this Commission for review.

Ford then opened the floor for questions from the public or the Planning Commission. Applicant representatives brought attention to renderings of the proposed duplexes, townhouses and 3-story apartment building. The driveways that service the proposed development were shortened to allow for a larger building footprint. The area of the proposed development that faces the existing ODOT road salt barn will be heavily landscaped to provide a visual barrier between this building and the proposed development.

Porter informed representatives of this application that there may be requests for additional landscape barriers from residents who live adjacent to the proposed development.

Burgess questioned when the applicant intended to break ground on this project. "It could be spring of next year," replied Ryan Kozak of SLK Capital.

Burgess encouraged the applicant to begin this project as fast as they can, as he stated his enthusiasm regarding the proposed development. He added that with the completion of this project, his hopes are that seniors will move from single-family homes and into their housing, which will open up homes for

people looking to relocate to Oberlin. Sawyer added that there is a 90+ person waiting list for residency at Kendal of Oberlin. Applicants affirmed Burgess's and Sawyer's statements and added that there is a nationwide shortage of senior housing.

Sawyer then commented on the removal of greenspace to accommodate this project. She added that Oberlin citizens may not approve of the removal of mature trees and other green space, and the applicant should be mindful while doing so.

Crowley affirmed Sawyer's comments and stated that this will be an ecosystem that will disappear from Oberlin in order to facilitate this project. He then stated that the applicant devise a plan to recover some of the ecosystem that will be lost regarding this plan. He then recommended that the applicant consider the use of white oak trees for this project as they are more resilient to oak blight and other tree diseases. The applicants thanked Crowley for this information. Crowley then stated that the bushes chosen for this plan are not suitable for feeding Oberlin's native wildlife and are inadequate regarding carbon sequestration. He then encouraged the applicant to research plants that can solve both issues. The applicants stated that they will take this request into consideration while further developing the landscape plan for this project.

Crowley then informed the applicants that bicycle riding is very popular in Oberlin with seniors. He then encouraged the applicants to incorporate bike storage into this plan. The applicant stated that part of their process is to engage residents in order to determine what their needs are, and work to fulfill these needs. Ford affirmed Crowley's statements and reiterated the fact that senior biking and walkability should be addressed when developing this type of plan. Representatives of the applicant stated that they will have social workers working with the property management team in order to identify resident needs.

Ford then opened the floor for public comment. Waltzer prompted the applicant to describe the agricultural portion of this application. The applicant stated that there will be a non-profit entity that will provide fresh food, cooking, and nutrition classes for residents.

Waltzer then requested that the applicants be proactive regarding the contacting of people adjacent to the proposed development to determine their thoughts and needs regarding this project. Kulhanik stated that there was a public session regarding the rezoning of the property in question, but there was not a public session for this portion. This has created anxiety among people who live adjacent to the proposed property. She added that she is supportive of this project but would like to see an increase of landscape buffering and a larger setback regarding the proposed structures this application represents. Kulhanik also stated that she hopes the photometric

study linked to this plan will be made public. She then stated that currently, the water from the lot in question pools in her backyard. She hopes that the stormwater retention plan for the proposed development will solve this issue. Kulhanik then questioned if the approval of the use of the property in question will be transferred if the property were to be sold in the future.

Burgess then questioned Kulhanik on what kind of visual barrier she would like to see regarding the separation of her property and the proposed development. "Two rows of arbor vitae would make me happy," stated Kulhanik. The applicant added that they also prefer natural landscaping for this type of use.

Ford added that this application is preliminary and will have to be resubmitted before final approval. He further added that the Planning Commission will almost certainly require adequate landscape barriers between existing properties and the proposed development. The photometric study will also be available to the public before final approval. Ford further added that the Planning Commission has no authority regarding the ability of the applicant to resell the property in the future. The applicant stated that the IRS credits that this entity receives prohibits the applicant from selling the property in question for a period of 30 years.

Stalcup reiterated the concern regarding stormwater drainage. She added that the ODOT garage is extremely loud at night and thinks that the noise in question will disturb residents of the proposed development. Stalcup further added that the existing trees that exist on and around the proposed development assist with privacy and are property investments. Her concern is that the removal of these trees will devalue her property. She then questioned if the proposed duplex that backs up to her existing property line would have windows facing her lot. "I don't want my privacy and safety compromised by who you choose to rent this property to," Stalcup further added. Stalcup also advised the applicant that she does not want any light pollution from the proposed development to enter her property.

Burgess questioned Porter on when this topic would reach City Council for review. Porter stated that this topic would be at the first or second meeting in September of this year. Burgess then encouraged Kulhanik and Stalcup to present these questions to City Council when they entertain this application.

Crowley questioned if there would be a public hearing regarding this application. Porter stated that there will be no public hearing. This item will be added to the City Council meeting agenda, and the public may participate in that meeting.

Kulhanik questioned if the proposed plan would be revised to reflect their concerns before it reaches City Council. The applicant stated that there will be several revisions to this plan before submittal to City Council.

Burgess then made a motion to recommend this application to City Council for approval as submitted. Crowley seconded this motion. Motion carried unanimously.

7. City Council Communications - Joe Waltzer.

Waltzer stated that a preliminary offer has been accepted regarding the position of City Manager. He added that Council met with the candidate earlier this week regarding the contract linked to this position. Waltzer believes that this position will be filled by the 1st of September.

200 Oberlin College students will be moved from residential housing to campus housing. According to Waltzer, these students will be housed in the newly constructed Woodland Street Dormitory.

8. Adjournment.

This meeting was adjourned at 6:27 P.M.

Chris Yates 10/21/25