The People

Planning Staff

Brad Gengler, City Planner
Ryan Brooks, Deputy City Planner & Business Development Mgr.
Andrea Edwardson, Senior Planner
Stephanie Halford, Senior Planner
Jane Beasley, Administrative Specialist, Senior

Planning Commissioners

Andrew Budke, Term Expires 11/01/2023
Cole Johnson, Term Expires 7/06/2022
Peter Kuhn, Term Expires 8/4/2021 (County Rep)
Jamie Lunski, Term Expires 11/1/2023
Frank Matejcek, Term Expires 9/19/2023 (County Rep)
Alex Reichert, Term Expires 12/07/2020 (Vice President)
Meggen Sande, Term Expires 7/06/2022 (Secretary)
Steven Wasvick, Term Expires 3/29/2021 (County Rep) (President)
Vacant Position - Interviewing in January 2020

Paula Lee

Paula Lee joined the Planning & Zoning Commission in 1985 and dutifully served 34 years, retiring in 2019. She was President of the Commission twice during her tenure: 1993-1994 and 2006-2016. She was always dedicated to knowing the details of every project coming through, giving each item her utmost attention and respect. We thank her for her many years of service and will miss her wealth of knowledge.

We wish her all the best!
PLATS
- 1 PLAT FOR SINGLE FAMILY (R1) OR TWIN HOME (R2), RESULTING IN 21 LOTS
- 2 MULTI-FAMILY
- 8 INDUSTRIAL
- 10 COMMERCIAL

VACATIONS

REZONINGS
- 6 PUD CONCEPTS & AMENDMENTS
  - 1 NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING HELD
- 2 CONVENTIONAL DISTRICTS

APPEALS TO DDP (DETAILED DEVELOPMENT PLANS)

ANNEXATIONS
- 124.51 ACRES

CONDITIONAL USE PERMITS

LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE CHANGES

MISCELLANEOUS (SIGN APPEALS, PARKING REDUCTIONS, ACCESS CONTROL)
Maximum Accessory dwelling size limits

Impervious surface

Board of Adjustments

The Board of Adjustments reviews and has final action over conventionally-zoned properties seeking variances. The Inspections Department provides staff support to the board as most of the variances revolve around single family or twin home properties, which directly work with the Inspections reviews and permits. On occasion, there are commercial or industrial projects that need variances, and Planning staff provide recommendations to the Board. These projects are typically related to existing businesses looking to expand in their current location. Planning staff regularly attends Board of Adjustments meetings to stay knowledgeable on issues.

Common items seeking variances for low density residential properties include:
- Maximum Accessory dwelling size limits
  (garage, sheds, out buildings, etc.)
- Impervious surface

35 items acted upon by the BOA in 2019

Multiple requests are often made for each item and are broken down by type:

13 Max Accessory Building size
13 Impervious surface
9 Accessory building setback
8 Parking setbacks & landscaping yards
6 Yard setbacks
2 Delay paving

37% of all Board of Adjustments requests made in 2019 were either for enlarging the maximum allowable size of accessory dwelling units a property can have or increasing total impervious surface allowances.

Planning staff works with Inspections in evaluating the nature of requests to determine if permanent code modifications should be made. Review of code is common when similar requests are made consistently over time, especially if the requests are typically approved. Staff will be consider adjusting accessory sizes and impervious surface code requirements in 2020.

Downtown Design Review Board

The Downtown Design Review Board (DDRB) is given final action authority, via the Land Development Code, regarding exterior modifications to properties within the Downtown Historic District. Andrea Edwardson is the staff assigned to the DDRB and provides input to the board on how the various requests meet Land Development Code and Downtown Design Guidelines requirements.

Alex Reichert serves as the Planning & Zoning representative on the DDRB. Other members include Kate Kvalme, ICON (Architect position), Leah Byzewksi, Myra Museum (Historian), Chuck Flemmer, (Historic Preservation Commission), and Dave Badman (Downtown Owner/Operator). There are two additional positions open for Downtown Owner/Operators. Staff intends to fill these openings in 2020.

DDRB met 7 times in 2019 & acted on 13 items

5 Major Projects (additions, exterior renovations, new buildings)
7 Signage Requests
1 New Outdoor Seating Request

In 2020, Planning staff are contracting with RDG Planning & Design consultants to update and codify Downtown Design Guidelines standards. Keep an eye on your agendas this coming spring/early summer for these updated architectural standards!
Boards

Planning Outreach & Advocacy
These boards are groups that Planning staff participates in and advocates for best planning practices within them on an on-going basis. Staff is always willing to participate in any discussion related to planning and are happy to group meetings when requested.

Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenway Advisory Committee
The Bicycle, Pedestrian and Greenway Advisory Committee is a committee comprised of people with an interest in the Greenway and bicycle network throughout our community. The committee gives input and recommendations on related items; they are our eyes and ears of the network and all Greenway uses. Stephanie Halford chairs the committee, but other city staff from both sides of the river frequently attend the meetings as well. The committee's collaboration with city staff has produced numerous positive outcomes, including: multiple grant applications, city-wide user counts, the successful Bicycle Friendly Community application, and assistance with the update of the Bike and Ped Plan element of the Long Range Transportation plan for the last couple of rounds (available at https://www.bikingtheforks.com/).

Greenway Technical Committee
The group consists of representatives of the four managing agencies and anyone interested in development of the Greenway. The committee meets every other month to discuss Greenway issues, focusing on development and management of the Greenway. This committee is the primary mechanism for routing ideas and concerns involving the Greenway. The Greenway Technical Committee Staff from the four managing agencies meets on the alternate months.

Safe Kids Grand Forks Subcommittee on Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety
The Bicycle and Pedestrian subcommittee acts in an advisory capacity on child safety issues related to bicycling and pedestrian activities in the community, especially the design of children's routes to schools. Stephanie Halford chairs the committee, which also includes representation of various stakeholders from both sides of the river, such as the Police and Engineering Departments, school representatives, and some local businesses.

Live Well Grand Cities
Each year, the Planning Department seeks to make and foster strategic partnerships to advance the goals of the Department and enhance the Grand Forks community. One of the ways this was accomplished in 2019 was by partnering with the Live Well Grand Cities Coalition. The coalition focuses on the health of the community and recognizes the role of the built environment and infrastructure in facilitating healthy behaviors for citizens. The Planning Department will look to further develop this partnership by collaborating on projects and policy that promote health through the design of the community.
Site Plans

Planning staff reviews site plans for residential projects of 4 units or more as well as all commercial and industrial projects, while Inspections staff reviews single family and twin home projects. The site plan review considers all elements exterior to the building and on-site: building location (setbacks), site access, parking lot dimensions, landscaping, storm water, utility locations, refuse collection areas, and many others. Planning staff coordinates the review of the submitted projects by gathering input from multiple departments including: Engineering, Inspections, Fire Marshals, Sanitation Department, and others, as necessary.

66 plans reviewed in 2019
(includes new buildings, additions, and other site modifications)

24 Commercial
23 Industrial
7 Institutional
8 Multifamily
2 Office
2 Mixed Use

Major New Build Projects
Altru Hospital
Memorial Union
Border States Electric
Acme Warehouse Expansion
Empire Townhomes
District Apartments
Edgewood Village Assisted Living and Medical Office Building
Pure Development
South Columbia Medical Park

Site Inspections

The City of Grand Forks has challenges enforcing the various elements of an approved site plan. As a result, the process for the enforcement of those elements, such as landscaping installation or dumpster screens, has become unclear. These elements are important as they collectively contribute to a larger desired community aesthetic that we actively pursue through the Land Development Code and planning best practices. To address the lack of clarity, planners are now conducting site inspections as part of the final Certificate of Occupancy inspection process to ensure all zoning and site elements are being installed as approved on site plans. This will help provide a better level of assurance that everyone is held to the same standards and we are achieving that desired community aesthetic.
Project Highlights in 2019

A few major sectors of Grand Forks began a dramatic transformation in 2019. We had some of our largest employers pursue reinvestment in their facilities, including Altru's new hospital on its existing site, as well as major changes around campus at the University of North Dakota. Downtown momentum continued to accelerate as Demers Avenue saw a reconstruction and Pure Development broke ground with an event attended by North Dakota Lieutenant Governor Brent Sanford. These physical reinvestments in core areas of our community will have a lasting impact, giving us a solid foundation to launch us into the new decade of 2020.

Altru Health System

Altru Health System consists of 3,800 employees and is one of our community's largest employers. We are excited to see one of our major community partners reinvest in our community through the construction of a new hospital on its centrally located campus. The new hospital got underway in 2019 and is located north of the existing building. The new building will look to embrace green space amenities with pedestrian trails connecting the campus to the English Coulee and adjacent Sertoma park. The new hospital is expected to open in 2022 with the demolition of the existing hospital happening shortly after opening. Future phases of the hospital campus expansion include several outbuildings for clinics and other services.

Ground Breaking 2019 - New Hospital 2022
Memorial Union
2019 brought the demolition of the Union and the promise of a new building to herald in a new era for UND. The new Union will be home to many student services and provide event space, casual gathering spaces, and dining options. This flagship building sets the stage for future developments on campus.

Coulee to Columbia
Big changes are planned for the UND campus and the closure of University Avenue for a road reconstruction project from the English Coulee to Columbia Road got things rolling into high gear. The reconstruction project included median and landscaping areas to help funnel pedestrian traffic to specific crossing points, dedicated bus pull-off areas, bike lanes, and the realignment of certain side streets to improve traffic flows. The improvements will provide an enhanced pedestrian experience and will bring a unique character to this prominent corridor.

Steam Plant
While not as flashy as the Union project or the University Avenue improvements, the new UND Steam plant is a significant investment in the campus's infrastructure that warrants attention. The new steam plant, which is located south of the UND Facilities building, will replace the existing plant and utilize modern technologies in the processing and distribution of the campus's heating system.
UND Signage Code Updates
In addition to the University's focus on redeveloping certain areas of campus, they hired a consultant to help with wayfinding around campus. Planning staff worked with the consultants and brought forward an update to the Land Development Code regarding campus signage that was approved. The signage package includes building identification, parking identification, directional, and informational signs.

ATO House
The University is not the only entity making improvements around campus; the Alpha Tao Omega fraternity house got underway on their longtime vacant lot at 3000 University Avenue. The project will house 25 members along with communal living areas and a front patio. Staff anticipates additional private Greek housing projects as campus begins to transform into its next stage.

2020

Nistler College of Business and Administration
UND will continue to see major changes on campus through 2020, as staff anticipates work beginning on the Nistler College of Business and Administration. This new home for the college is still in its preliminary phases, but as fundraising efforts push toward their desired goals, staff anticipates site review beginning mid- to late-2020.

Greek Housing
Staff anticipates additional Greek housing projects coming forward in 2020, bolstering the public investment of the University with private Greek projects.
In 2019, planning efforts continued to provide guidance and drive forward a vision for downtown growth.

**Downtown Action Plan**

After a yearlong collaborative planning and community outreach process, the Downtown Action Plan is complete and available online. With downtown Grand Forks set to experience a multi-million influx of investment and on the heels of the Mayor’s Vibrancy Initiative, the Plan is meant to serve as a roadmap for continuing to drive downtown’s positive momentum. The Downtown Action Plan focuses on four main areas: streetscape, parks and open spaces, development strategies, and wayfinding. The finished product is the result of a process that engaged hundreds of Grand Forks area residents and incorporates their input throughout. The plan is already living up to its name, as several projects it includes have already been put into “action” as implementation has begun. We are proud of the work completed thus far and look forward to the exciting work yet to come.

**Downtown Parking Study**

As a separate but parallel planning effort to the Downtown Action Plan, the Grand Forks East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization and the City of Grand Forks completed an update to the Downtown Parking Plan with KLJ Engineering. The plan confirmed multiple previous studies, finding that we have excess parking and enough capacity to adequately handle anticipated new development over the coming years. However, a strong negative parking perception issue exists that staff can work to address through improved education and access to parking options, as well as increased enforcement efforts. Find the full report online: 2019 Downtown Parking Study.

**Downtown Design Standards**

The Downtown Action Plan highlighted a need to update current Design Guidelines into enforceable standards to ensure any new development proposed is of high quality materials that coordinate with neighboring historic structures. Staff is currently working with RDG Planning & Design to modify the B4 Zoning code into a hybrid form-based code that will codify the standards. Staff anticipates bringing this forward for approvals Spring/Summer of 2020.
Downtown Construction

Selkirk Lofts
The project that jump-started the current downtown revitalization efforts, Selkirk Lofts, was under construction in 2019, with targeted opening goal in February 2020. The site has had multiple chapters in its life. Pre-1997, the site was home to a furniture store, however, after the 1997 flood, the City purchased the lot and demolished the structure due to the damage suffered in the flood. It was then transformed into a temporary pocket park until it was ripe for redevelopment. The site's redevelopment process had some lessons learned, but ultimately, after a public vote in 2018, the project was approved to be redeveloped by Dakota Commercial into a 5-story mixed-use building, with commercial on the first two floors and three floors of condominiums, as required in the redevelopment agreement. The project received Renaissance Zone benefits and has been a catalyst for other redevelopment projects downtown.

Downtown Grocery & Residential Units
Pure Development, located at the northwest corner of 5th & Demers, began construction in 2019 with a kickoff groundbreaking event attended by North Dakota Lieutenant Governor, Brent Sanford. The project will feature a highly sought after grocery store, Hugo’s, an Alerus Financial location, as well as subsidized and market rate apartment units. Surface and underground parking will be provided on site. The project required cooperation and a land-swap with Grand Forks Public Schools, which resulted in the Central High School teacher lot being reconstructed in a new layout. The project also received Tax Increment Financing benefits and is an example of multi-agency collaboration to ensure project viability and success for all parties.

Epic Place
The 2nd floor of 22 S 3rd Street, the building where Ely’s Ivy restaurant is currently located, had been vacant for many years. Epic Companies, a development firm out of West Fargo, purchased the property and transformed the vacant upstairs into 7 market rate apartment units, with a target opening date in early-2020. This is the first major residential rehabilitation of an existing property in several years. Staff hopes to see more of these projects in the future as many of our historic buildings need maintenance and updates.

Demers Avenue Reconstruction
The first phase of the Downtown Action Plan delved right into the design of one of the most prominent roadways in our City’s core. Demers Avenue was fully reconstructed in 2019 from 6th Street to the Sorlie Bridge, yielding new benches, planters, light poles, traffic signals, and other features, in addition to brand new pavement. The construction was expected to impact downtown businesses, something the Downtown Development Association tried to mitigate by working with the Community Foundation on their 20-20 Vision campaign. The campaign was a marketing and goodwill effort to promote the long-term benefits of the project while mitigating the short-term pain of road closures. 20-20 Vision had a variety of events highlighting downtown businesses to encourage shopping while access to the various stores was difficult. While this was a privately-led campaign, staff wants to acknowledge the grassroots efforts of the DDA, its partners, and downtown businesses to support each other and their community as they worked to overcome the challenges of this reinvestment project.
Near Southside Neighborhood Traffic Calming Improvements
City staff and a small group of neighbors from the Near Southside neighborhood have been meeting regarding traffic concerns throughout this area. These discussions have yielded some street improvements and a study completed by the Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). One chronic issue that has been identified by the neighborhood is the perception of speeding vehicles and the use of the neighborhood streets for cut through traffic, particularly Reeves Drive.

In previous years the City installed a bump out at the corner of Reeves Court and Reeves Drive and realigned the intersection at Reeves Drive & 8th Avenues South. In 2019, speed tables were installed along Reeves Drive between the blocks of 4th Ave and 8th Ave South as additional traffic calming features. It was determined that two different types of speed tables would be installed and to be monitored to determine costs and effectiveness such as traffic volume speeds and speeding; a rubber seasonal/temporary type speed table and one built out of asphalt. The neighborhood was pleased with the results of the speed tables. City staff will evaluate the asphalt speed table after a winter season and will be working with the neighborhood on crosswalks in Spring 2020.

Census
The Planning Department has been given the task of establishing what is referred to as a Census “Complete Count Committee” (CCC) in preparation for the 2020 Census. A similar process was undertaken for the 2010 Census. Federal funds, grants and support to states, counties and communities are based on population totals and breakdowns by sex, age, race, and other factors. Our state and communities benefit the most when every single resident is counted. When we respond to the Census, we help our community obtain its fair share of the $675 billion per year in federal funds spent on schools, hospitals, roads, public works and other vital programs. The Greater Grand Forks Complete Count Committees (CCC) is a volunteer committee established by city staff, tribal, state, and our local agencies to increase awareness and motivate residents to respond to the 2020 Census. CCCs serve as state and local “Census Ambassador” groups that play an integral part in ensuring a complete and accurate count of the community in the 2020 Census. Success of the Census depends on community
Housing

Housing is a priority in the City of Grand Forks. In 2012, the City pulled together a team of local housing experts on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Housing to address housing availability at all price levels. We have a growing community and need to ensure we have adequate housing stock to meet demands. We welcome all types of residential units from single family, to townhouses, to apartment complexes. Having a diverse housing stock ensure we are meeting the various demands that our city’s demographic is looking for.

Single Family - Low Density Units

Staff tracks permit and plat data for single family and low-density units to evaluate our community needs. Single family permits for new homes historically average around 100 permits per year. As the chart below indicates, we have permitted 81 new single family homes in 2019.

Staff has also tracked single family lots for the past four years and have seen varying results. The increase in platted lots in 2018 is mostly due to a special assessment deferral option. We saw only one plat in 2019 for single family homes, likely a result of the large influx of platted lots in 2018.

Legislative Actions in response to Housing Stock

After evaluating similar data in 2016, City Council saw a need to increase residential lot supply. Four solutions were approved by Council fall of 2016 and spring of 2017. Some of these changes were permanent and others were only available for a defined period of time, expiring in 2019.

1. Adjusted special assessment time period from 20 to 25 years to decrease annual costs by spreading the amount assessed over an additional 5 years. (Permanent change)
2. Decreased special assessment interest mark-up from 1.5% to 1.0%. (Permanent change)
3. Eliminated up-front bonding requirement for residential developments that required developers to provide 50% of cost of infrastructure as security / collateral. (Expired end of 2018)
4. Deferred special assessments for projects servicing single family homes for a 3 year period. Effective deadline was last summer as projects have to be constructed, completed and special assessments certified for 2019. (Expired end of 2019)
Where are lots available?

Future Growth

City staff have received requests from developers seeking to build south of 62nd Ave S near Belmont Rd. This poses an interesting question of where to target growth next. While there may be willing landowners South of 62nd Ave, a new lift station would be needed to service the area (a substantial public investment). The map to the left shows all the existing and planned lift stations on the edges of town where the City is currently carrying the costs while waiting for development to occur.
Housing

Multi-Family -- Higher Density Developments

Historically, in order to keep up with the growth rate of the community, Grand Forks likes to see approx. 300 multi-family units built each year (the 10-year average in Grand Forks is 288 units). While the graph above shows we haven't permitted 300 units in the past few years, we have multiple project site plans approved and are awaiting permits to be taken out for them.

Projects Approved & Waiting to Begin
District Apartments - 4150 S Washington: 167 units*
Pure Development – 500 Demers Ave: 70 units *
Highland Grove Apartments - 3990 S 15th St: 80 units
Edgewood Village (Assisted Living) 1800 47th Ave S: 145 units
Empire Townhomes – 2022 Fleetwood Dr (42nd St S): 24 units
Total approved, but not yet permitted: 486 Units

* Footings & Foundations permit issued, but no residential units yet.

We graph the Grand Forks Apartment Association’s Vacancy Rate survey results to compare to our permitted units each year. You can see the low vacancy rates have resulted in higher permitted years as the market tries to adjust to the high demand.
Communications

The Planning Department maintains a department webpage through the City of Grand Forks website – www.grandforksgov.com. Through that we offer applications for download, access to the Future Land Use plan and maps, and information on current planning project/initiatives, downtown planning, the Housing Dashboard, and much more.

Current Projects Application
Planning maintains an online application of current projects that shows which site plans are under review, approved, and completed. Approved projects are those that meet all zoning requirements and may be permitted. Completed projects have been granted a Certificate of Occupancy and are cleared to open for use.

Digital Agendas
Most Commissioners prefer to receive P&Z agendas digitally, so staff made an effort in 2019 to compile staff reports using original electronic files to provide clearer maps and images. Going digital allows commissioners, as well as the public, to zoom in, pan, and look more closely at the details with large documents like plats, PUDs, and general plan drawings.

Housing Dashboard
The Planning Department maintains residential permit data that is viewable on the Housing Dashboard. Also included are vacancy rates from the Greater Grand Forks Apartment Association and current year enrollment rates for Grand Forks Public Schools and the University of North Dakota. This information is shared to provide a more complete understanding of our current housing market.

Past P&Z agendas, minutes, and video on the City Website here.

Find a variety of different maps for reference, including maps for subdivisions, annexations over time, recreational maps, streets maps, zoning, and many more. Find them all and our interactive GIS web map at www.gfgis.com.
State Partnerships
North Dakota Planning Association

We have expanded our education efforts to continue staying up-to-speed on statewide planning issues through the North Dakota Planning Association. Some Planning staff have been involved with NDPA since the start of their employment, but most recently, Ryan Brooks has served on the NDPA Board and currently serves as its Secretary. Andrea Edwardson chaired the NDPA conference committee when it was held in Grand Forks in 2018, and now is helping with the upcoming ND Planning Association/ Western Planner Conference in Bismarck in 2020. The NDPA actively follows all planning related legislation matters and helps localities frame testimony in response to various issues that are brought forward. Staff will share any issues with the Commission as they develop during the 2020 legislative session.

Education

We highly value the continued education of our employees and participate in a variety of professional conferences to stay up-to-date on the latest planning best practices. We see immense value in bolstering our state relationships and networks and have made a conscious effort to attend state and local conferences in pursuit of that. This has proven useful for code updates, as our solid relationships with other planners allow us to ask important questions and learn from their experiences.

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<th>Conference &amp; Events Attended</th>
<th>BRAD</th>
<th>RYAN</th>
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<td>AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION - SAN FRANCISCO</td>
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What to Expect in 2020

- Census 2020
- Design Standards
- B4 Zoning Code Updates
- South-End Development Opportunities
- 2050 Land Use Plan Update
- Residential Supply Tracking
- UND Projects
- Olive Ann Downtown Event Center

City of Grand Forks
North Dakota