

CITY OF CLEVELAND HEIGHTS PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES FOR THE NOVEMBER 12, 2025 REGULAR MEETING

At 7:00 P.M. on Tuesday, November 12, 2025, a regular meeting of the Planning Commission was held in Council Chambers in City Hall.

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEMBERS PRESENT

Jessica Cohen, Chair
Michael Gaynier, Vice Chair
Judith Miles
Ken Surratt
Jessica Wobig
Robert Brown
Leonard Horowitz

PLANNING COMMISSION

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Eric Zamft, Director of Planning & Development
Justin Hines Assistant Law Director
Christy Lee, Recording Sectary
Karen Knittel Assistant Director of Planning & Development
Brooke Siggers, City Planner
Tony Cuda, Mayor

COUNCIL PRESENT

Jim Petras
Craig Cobb

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Cohen called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. and welcomed the audience to the November 12, 2025, regular meeting of the Cleveland Heights Planning Commission.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes for the September 11, 2025 and October 21, 2025 Planning Commission meetings were approved at the November 12, 2025 meeting.

Assistant Law Director Hines swore in all staff, the public, and applicants.

Mr. Zamft introduced Todd Hunt to the Commission and public, making them aware that he will be here as a stand in for Law Director Hannah to which they are Law Partners.

Mr. Hurt gave a small review of his legal background.

Project No. 25-22 Severance Town Center Proposed Zoning Text Amendment (Or No. 226-2025) and Zoning Map Change (Ord. No. 227-2025) referral from City Council regarding the zoning map to create a Zoning Overlay District for the entire Severance Circle properties (inside and outside of the ring road) zoned 'S1' Mixed-Use and adjacent properties (PPNs 683-33-003 and 683-33-004. for review and recommendation per Code chapters 1111, 1115, 1119.

Ms. Cohen asked if Mr. Porter could let the Commission know which page he was on in the presentation so that they could better follow his PowerPoint presentation. She also asked whether the presentation was based on a concept or if it represented the actual vision of the project.

Mr. Porter stated that it may be a little difficult; however, he would do his best. Regarding the concept, he said that, as with all design, there could be modifications to the plans, but this is the base design that the designers are pursuing at this time.

Ms. Knittel went through the current Zoning Amendment as it relates to the proposed project. She further explained to the public and the Commission how this will affect the Zoning Overlay of the area as well as the City as a whole.

Ms. Cohen asked if the Zoning Overlay was the hatched area. She went on to mention the role of the Planning Commission in deciding whether the project should move forward.

Ms. Knittel confirmed and further explained the Zoning Overlay, pointing out the differences between the residential area and the commercial area. She reminded the Commission that this project is a team effort between Impact, the City of Cleveland Heights, and the Planning Department. She mentioned additional meeting dates that the public may attend for more information. She also stated that Mr. Porter had held meetings with the public for comment, which were used in planning for the project. Ms. Knittel advised the Commission as to what actions they could take this evening regarding voting or recommending that the project move forward.

Ms. Cohen opened Public Comment.

Mr. Nowak thanked Mr. Porter for his presentation. He stated that he was part of the Severance Action Group and had several comments about the project as a whole. He stated that form-based zoning concepts are good for Severance; however, he questioned whether this particular form is the right fit for the area. He went on to say that he is a businessman and has no experience with urban planning. He stated that he has concerns with the project and feels that it should not go forward until the new Mayor has taken office. He also stated that the only way to achieve the vision for Severance would be for the City of Cleveland Heights to purchase the land. He was uncertain whether this was a possible option and whether funds were available for what could be a 30-million-dollar purchase.

Jennifer Wintner, 3733 Scarborough, stated that she wanted to echo Mr. Nowak's comments regarding slowing the potential development of Severance until the new government takes office. Ms. Wintner expressed concerns about the language of the Zoning Code, the drawings of the proposed project, the number of possible housing units, and concerns about parking structures. She would like more community discussion before the project moves forward.

Paul Volpe, 2593 Fairmount Blvd., echoed the previous concerns, adding that he had sent all of his comments regarding the project to the Planning Commission, expressing his dislike for particular aspects of the design and zoning codes. He stated that he was unclear why new zoning was needed, expressing that there was no vision—just a concept. Mr. Volpe stated that there should be more community involvement and more ideas shared before the project moves forward.

Susan Tuck, 1518 South Taylor, echoed the previous concerns of the community. She spoke about her personal background and stated that she has been a long-standing resident of Cleveland Heights. She expressed dismay at receiving a notice with the wrong meeting time and stated that she was unaware of any other meetings related to this project. She raised concerns about green space and the possibility of losing wildlife that inhabits the area. She also feels that there should be a pause on the project.

Chad Wiseman, 2725 Hampshire Rd., Unit 25, stated that he was a past intern of the Planning Department and was excited to hear that Severance was being considered for redevelopment. He stated that Severance should become a newly developed neighborhood consistent with the appearance of Cleveland Heights, and he suggested a possible new zoning code called "TC" (Town Center Zoning Code) for this project and others like it.

Michael Bending, 3003 Edgehill Road, expressed excitement for possible new development in Severance Circle, form-based zoning, and other improvements. Mr. Bending provided background on other cities that have changed or modified zoning amendments for new development. He mentioned that zoning should be improved for all cities to allow more modern thinking, development, and expansion.

Chris Brace, 2104 Lennox Rd., #2, expressed strong support for the Zoning Code, encouraging change and stating that it would allow improvement not only to Severance but to the City as a whole. He stated that the concept needs additional work; however, the foundation of the zoning is positive overall. He also provided a handout for staff and the Commission to review.

Harriet Applegate, 1522 Crest Rd., also a member of SAG, echoed previous public concerns, including concerns regarding the overlay zoning proposal and the use of sections that are not owned by the current owner for purposes she believes will not benefit the City's growth, especially near Crest Rd. She would also like to pause the project.

Diane Vitale, 1513 Huntington Lane, stated that she has lived in Cleveland Heights for a long time and was initially excited about the rebuilding of Severance Town Square. However, after listening to comments during the meeting, she is unsure of the actual redevelopment goals.

Mr. Nowak returned to offer additional comments and mentioned designs from Mr. Volpe and the SAG group as possible alternative concepts for Severance Town Center.

Public Comment was closed.

Mr. Zamft and Ms. Knittel reminded the Chair that there was still a staff presentation remaining.

Ms. Cohen stated that there are two ordinances up for review: Ordinance No. 227, which changes the map to the overlay, and Ordinance No. 226, including the redlined zoning code adding Chapter 1149, as well as the appendix being prepared by "Impact" with staff input and extensive detail. Ms. Cohen expressed that she is prepared to move forward with this section of Appendix Exhibit B of Ordinance No. 226 to identify areas that may require changes or modifications, along with staff recommendations for the Planning Department. The staff report outlines suggested changes that may be incorporated into the new language of the code and ultimately recommended to Council for approval.

Ms. Wobig stated that as a Planning Commission member, it is her responsibility to review and provide comment, not to write the code for the applicant. She expressed concern that comments provided by staff have not been incorporated into the current draft issued to the public, and she noted that she has outstanding questions. She stated she does not feel prepared to make revisions to the code at this time.

Mr. Horowitz noted that he had many questions, including the physical layout of the development, the number of properties involved, road extensions, the concept of a "sag," parking locations, building appearance, and potential parking structures similar to Top of the Hill. He stated he is struggling to understand what the completed project will look like and is uncomfortable making a decision with so many unanswered questions. He acknowledged that full building designs do not yet exist, which adds to his discomfort.

Ms. Cohen interjected and suggested pausing to answer questions from Mr. Horowitz and the Commission. She requested additional clarification at this time.

Mr. Zamft explained that conditional use permits—except those assigned to the Zoning Administrator—must first come before the Planning Commission. Strictly permitted uses may proceed directly to a building permit, although some may require ABR approval. With form-based code, uses must also meet form-based standards. The Zoning Administrator, along with the Technical Advisory Committee, will complete that review. If a project complies and is a permitted use, it will proceed to a building permit. If not, it will undergo more extensive review.

Mr. Brown stated that this is a complicated situation and credited Ryan and his team for assembling the project. However, he expressed concern that acting on detailed zoning regulations at a first meeting is premature. He explained that unlike most form-based codes, this proposal also regulates uses in addition to form, which he sees as positive. He added that, since there is not a single developer making a single proposal, putting zoning regulations in place first makes sense, although he does not fully oppose the zoning change.

Mr. Gaynier stated that he is in favor of the form-based zoning presented, but there are still many unanswered questions requiring attention before a decision is made. He agreed with Mr. Brown that zoning should be in place for potential new projects and stated that "the vision is here; we just have to lay the foundation."

Mr. Surratt agreed that zoning should be implemented so future projects can move forward.

Ms. Miles stated that she is undecided regarding the zoning and moving forward. She agreed with most of the presentation but asked about the potential change in government in January 2026 and whether decisions should be made now or delayed until then. She acknowledged Mr. Porter's work in learning the community and Cleveland Heights environment, but expressed concern that timing is rushed.

Ms. Cohen reiterated that nothing will be approved at this time and that this matter will ultimately move to Council for a final decision. She asked that Planning Staff and Mr. Porter answer additional clarification questions.

Mr. Porter explained that the timeline for the project is a 20-month window to have something completed. He emphasized that while this is not the City's or community's deadline, it is his business timeline. He explained the steps taken to bring the concept forward to Planning Commission, the Planning Department, and the public, incorporating public input. He expressed familiarity with form-based code and its long-term benefits and noted that the process will lay a foundation for future investment and development.

Mr. Gaynier asked for clarification on the overlay zone perimeter outside the ring road.

Mr. Porter explained that the site is an underutilized area between residential and commercial districts. Including both areas in the overlay will allow a transition area. The district currently permits buildings between one and two stories. The intent is to buffer existing wooded areas and match density to the residential surroundings. He noted awareness of existing rights-of-way, especially on Crest.

Mr. Brown stated that he previously lived in the area and that vehicular connection between Severance and surrounding neighborhoods would not make sense, although pedestrian connections would. He expressed concern about overwhelming the neighborhood.

Mr. Zamft stated that city staff do not approve projects but only make recommendations to Council based on Planning Commission action. He explained that state law requires that zoning recommendations be in Council's hands 30 days before a public hearing, shifting the schedule to require a decision at this meeting to meet the 2025 timeline. He emphasized that

staff do not take positions on the proposal and that the upcoming change in government requires caution with accelerated processes.

Ms. Cohen stated that the general consensus is that a zoning overlay adds value before recruitment of developers and that this has been reviewed for several weeks.

Ms. Knittel noted that the material was referred to Planning Commission after Council introduced the legislation in November.

Ms. Wobig stated that she received only a flyer and did not receive detailed attachments until the morning of the meeting; this was her first time seeing the documentation.

Ms. Knittel noted that emails are generally BCC'd to limit unnecessary replies.

Ms. Cohen stated she would like to begin with staff recommendations and proceed section by section.

Ms. Knittel and Ms. Siggers presented the staff recommendations, as listed in the notes.

Ms. Cohen asked guest Law Director Mr. Hunt whether each section of the staff recommendations required a separate motion.

Ms. Wobig asked for clarification on public comment and the change from conditional use to zoning overlay relative to public engagement, noting that many members of the public have expressed concerns regarding notification and understanding the need for the zoning change.

Ms. Cohen stated that those concerns will be addressed when permitted uses are clarified. She agreed additional time is necessary and referenced upcoming meeting dates.

Mr. Surratt asked whether this is an optional form-based code.

Ms. Cohen responded that it is.

Mr. Brown stated that property owners may choose to use existing zoning rather than the overlay.

Ms. Cohen confirmed.

Mr. Gaynier clarified that properties outside the ring remain under existing zoning and may opt in or out.

Mr. Porter agreed.

Staff reviewed each section with the Commission, making adjustments as needed. Changes and modifications are available on the Cleveland Heights website.

Ms. Cohen asked for clarification on the "TAC."

Mr. Zamft explained that early input allows developers to understand community expectations along with City departments, including Fire and Public Works. It also involves Planning and ABR before formal board review.

Ms. Knittel added that the TAC process occurs early as a pre-development review before projects move forward. She and Mr. Zamft described the review order.

Further discussion occurred on staff recommendations; revisions are available on the Planning website.

Mr. Hunt reviewed legal provisions in 1149.02(C), Exhibit B, page 1, expressing concern that mandatory alignment with the Master Plan is inappropriate, as the Master Plan should guide zoning but not be binding. He also identified confusing language in section .03(B) that may require exception language.

Ms. Cohen stated that she would like to review a final draft before recommending referral to Council.

Mr. Zamft noted that if the recommendation is to move forward, staff will prepare a detailed list of recommended changes rather than full red-line edits before the December 15 submission deadline.

Ms. Cohen requested materials by December 17.

Mr. Zamft suggested returning to the date issue later.

Mr. Porter stated that completing all requested changes within that timeframe is not possible, as significant review is required.

Ms. Cohen asked whether changes could focus initially on sections Mr. Hunt referenced and keep the Commission informed on additional updates.

Mr. Porter agreed and offered to prepare material in PDF form for additional review time.

Mr. Hunt noted typographical errors that require correction.

Mr. Zamft noted ongoing conversations about the Zoning Administrator role and stated that certain areas would begin with Planning Commission and move forward, similar to parking provisions.

Further discussion followed regarding language changes and administrative responsibility.

Mr. Gaynier said that staff experts should handle language revisions rather than the Commission.

Ms. Wobig asked what specifically is being asked of the Planning Commission, noting confusion about responsibilities.

Ms. Cohen stated that legal counsel identified language requiring correction and asked who should be responsible for changes—staff or the Commission.

Ms. Wobig stated her understanding that authority would shift back toward staff responsibility and that language should reflect that.

Ms. Cohen asked what language should be removed.

Ms. Wobig stated that future street planning review should remain with Planning Commission.

Mr. Horowitz stated that such decisions should be made by the Zoning Administrator.

Further discussion occurred regarding responsibility for zoning language and decision-making for current and future projects. Mr. Zamft and Mr. Hunt provided possible scenarios and actions.

A brief recess was taken.

Ms. Cohen stated that she would like to address civic space, parking, and administration, noting that civic space refers to green space.

Ms. Wobig stated that in its current form she would be unable to vote tonight, as she had insufficient time to prepare, identified many inconsistencies in language and grammar, and noted outstanding questions and lack of public feedback.

Ms. Cohen stated she would like to consider “Option 3,” meaning a vote to recommend forwarding to Council with the right to recommend additional changes following the December meeting. She stated that this approach would allow progress on permitted uses, parking, and administration while giving Council time to review and allowing for public hearing and comment.

Mr. Brown stated he could reluctantly support that approach.

Mr. Surratt agreed.

Ms. Cohen noted that Council retains the right to reject the proposal.

Mr. Horowitz asked whether a denial vote would end the process or whether Council could override. He stated that Planning Commission is advisory and that denial would require a Council supermajority to pass. He expressed discomfort due to the number of unresolved issues but acknowledged that the proposal could serve as a blueprint for the future.

Ms. Wobig stated she would vote “no,” citing public concerns, lack of materials in advance, unanswered questions, and lack of public engagement.

Ms. Miles echoed Ms. Wobig's concerns, stating that additional time is necessary to ensure the best decision for the Commission, the public, and the City.

Mr. Brown noted that some members of the public said they were notified for the first time, while others referenced prior crowd-sourced discussions that were not City meetings.

Ms. Cohen stated that there had been public notice of the meeting and that she also received notice.

Additional discussion followed regarding previous meetings, agenda items, and cancellations.

Mr. Zamft stated that Option 3 would allow the project to continue to public hearing and that after additional review through December 10, the Commission could rescind or modify its recommendation. He clarified that the Commission would not be recommending adoption but would allow the process to move forward.

Ms. Cohen agreed.

Ms. Wobig stated that applicants have been tabled for far less substantial issues and questioned the urgency.

Ms. Cohen acknowledged the concern and stated that Planning staff see value in moving forward.

Mr. Zamft referenced code section 1119.04 stating that failure to respond within 90 days could result in Council determining denial, explaining potential consequences.

Ms. Wobig asked how long the Commission has had the material.

Ms. Cohen responded since November 4. She proceeded to discuss permitted parking uses in Section 1149.21, possible language adjustments, arts and culture comparisons, and data center provisions.

Mr. Zamft suggested possible language revisions based on comparable projects.

Ms. Wobig stated she would not support a data center.

Mr. Porter provided an overview of data center pros and cons.

Ms. Cohen discussed single-family housing in S-03.

Mr. Surratt agreed.

Mr. Zamft noted that townhouses are currently conditional uses and asked for thoughts on duplexes. He suggested this be revisited in December.

Ms. Cohen and Mr. Surratt agreed.

Mr. Porter addressed how single-family homes might function within the district and discussed additional options.

Ms. Siggers continued her presentation regarding district language changes, including shared parking and overnight parking.

Ms. Cohen asked staff about parking concerns.

Ms. Knittel noted questions regarding on-street parking, whether it should be permitted, and whether it should count toward parking requirements considering that overnight parking is prohibited.

Mr. Horowitz discussed existing on-street parking practices and pros and cons of permitting them.

Mr. Porter stated that they would be willing to remove on-street parking from consideration and expressed willingness to work within the process to achieve approval.

Further discussion occurred among the Commission and staff. A motion was made to approve Ordinances 226 and 227 to Council with the condition that review will continue. Mr. Horowitz made the motion and it was seconded by Vice Chair Mr. Gaynier.

Roll Call by Christy Lee:

Mr. Surratt -Yes

Ms. Miles – Abstained

Mr. Horowitz- Yes

Ms. Cohen -Yes

Mr. Gaynier- Yes

Ms. Wobig – No

Mr. Brown – Yes

Motion passed 5-1-1.

OLD BUSSINESS

None.

NEW BUSSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

This meeting was adjourned at 11:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,



Brooke Siggers, Secretary to the Landmark Commission

12/23/2025

Date

Approved,



Jessica Cohen, Planning Commission Chair

12/23/25

Date

