

Gastonia Planning Commission June 5th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

The Gastonia Planning Commission meeting commenced at 5:31 p.m. on Thursday, June 5th, 2025, in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 181 S. South Street, Gastonia, NC.

Present: Chair Kristie Ferguson, Vice Chair Chad Ghorley, Commissioners Megan Chapman, Carl Harris, Anthony Gallant, Glenn Silverman, and Julie Coffey

Absent: Commissioner Jeff Howe

Staff Members Present: Quentin McPhatter, Charles Graham, Joe Gates, Maddy Gates, Rebeca Mintz, Tucker Johnson, and Brent Ratchford

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Chair Kristie Ferguson declared a quorum for the meeting.

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

No Commissioners were contacted.

Item 1c: Approval of May 8th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to adopt the May 8th, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Silverman seconded the motion. The motion to approve the May 8th, 2025 meeting minutes was unanimously passed (7-0).

Chair Kristie Ferguson read the rules of procedure and the time limitation policy.

Item 2: Public Hearing – 602 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way (File #202500108)

Subject hearing involves a request to rezone approximately 2.0 acres from RS-8 (Single-family Residential, minimum 8,000 sq. ft. lots) to I-U CD (Urban Industrial – Conditional District). The subject property is located at 602 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way and is owned by Paramount Institute of Cosmetic Arts, Inc.

Chair Ferguson opened the public hearing and recognized Maddy Gates, Senior Planner, for staff's presentation. Ms. Gates stated that the applicant is requesting a rezoning from RS-8 to I-U CD to facilitate the development and operation of a cosmetic arts institute. She noted that the proposed use is not permitted in RS-8 and is classified as a "Vocational School" in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). She read the definition of a vocational school as stated in the UDO. The zoning map was displayed. Ms. Gates discussed the context of the surrounding area, stating that there is a large variety of uses and zoning districts in the subject area, which were consistent with residential, office, light commercial, and adjacent urban industrial zoning. She also noted that the existing church building has been designated as a local historical landmark and that the applicant had received a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for the proposed adaptive reuse renovations from the Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The site plan was displayed. Ms. Gates discussed the site layout, the use change, proposed access points, and improvements to the property. She stated that the existing church is proposed to be renovated for adult education classrooms, and that the single-family home is proposed to be converted into the school's office. She noted that the northern portion of the property is reserved for future development, which will be limited to specific I-U uses, as reflected in the agenda. She discussed some of the site layout changes including a one-way travel lane through the development, parking requirements, a 10-foot Type B buffer along the property line abutting residential zoning and the installation of sidewalk along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

Ms. Gates displayed and read the agreed-upon conditions. She noted that staff was requesting a modification to condition number five which was related to allowed I-U uses for the portion of the subject property called out as "reserved for future development" on the site plan. Ms. Gates clarified that staff would like to add language stating that the allowed uses were reflected in "highlighted yellow" and that the applicant was in agreement with this modification. She stated that the applicant held a neighborhood meeting on April 28th, but there were no attendees. Lastly, Ms. Gates stated that the 2025 Future Land Use Map identifies the subject property for parks, open space, and residential uses. She noted that the subject area was conducive to a variety of land uses and that I-U zoning would allow for redevelopment of the property. She stated that after careful review, staff found that a request for a vocational school use would be compatible with adjoining properties and that the recommendation is for approval of the request as presented.

Commissioner Gallant asked staff if the property was already under construction. The Assistant Planning Director, Joe Gates, replied "Yes" and stated that the property owner has an active zoning construction permit for general work, including electrical, mechanical, and plumbing. Mr. Gates clarified that the general work was needed for the overall safety and repair of the building. He noted

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that any additional site work, which was specifically related to the cosmetic school use, would not be able to start until after the rezoning.

Vice Chair Ghorley asked for clarification regarding condition number five, questioning if the only allowed uses for the northern portion of the property would be the highlighted uses in yellow on pages Item 2-10 and Item 2-11 in the agenda. Ms. Gates replied “Yes,” and noted that the language addition to the end of condition number five would state “highlighted in yellow” for clarity purposes.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the church windows and asked Ms. Gates if the property was designated on the National Register of Historic Places to preserve the windows and other unique features of the building. Ms. Gates stated that the property has been designated as a local landmark and that the applicant would be able to answer any related questions.

With no further questions, Chair Ferguson recognized John Russell, 301 S. York Street, Gastonia, NC. Mr. Russell stated that he is representing the applicant, Paramount Institute. He noted that the rezoning request was for a change in use, and would allow for an adaptive reuse of the existing building. Mr. Russell stated that all requirements of the I-U zoning district have been met and are reflected on the rezoning site plan. He explained the history of the building, stating that it was constructed in 1927 as the St. Stephens African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Mr. Russell stated that the church building is not on the National Register but is designated as a local landmark and has received a COA from the Gaston County HPC for repairs and modifications. Mr. Russell displayed photos of the interior and exterior of the building, and discussed ongoing structural, window, door and roof repairs. He noted that a certificate of occupancy (CO) would not be provided until the zoning is approved and all needed site work is completed.

Mr. Russell explained background information on the applicant, Paramount Institute of Cosmetic Arts, stating that it is a nonprofit organization that aims to provide training, grants and scholarships to students within the cosmetic arts field. A survey was displayed and Mr. Russell noted that the single-family home property and the church property were recently recombined into one parcel for this project. He discussed the land uses and zoning for adjoining properties. The floor plan of the proposed school was displayed to provide context on the interior renovations. Mr. Russell discussed the proposed changes to the site to meet fire code and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. Lastly, Mr. Russell stated that although interior changes were being made, the exterior features of the building will be preserved.

Commissioner Silverman asked Mr. Russell if there were any additional issues or concerns that arose during the rezoning process that would be necessary to share with the Planning Commission. Mr. Russell stated that timing for the project was important since the school would operate during the typical school year and intend to open in September. Commissioner Silverman also asked Mr. Russell what level of education was required for students to be eligible to enroll. Mr. Russell stated that enrollment would be for students with a GED or a High School Diploma but that age range could vary.

Commissioner Harris asked if the Gaston County HPC allowed repairs related to water intrusion into the building. Mr. Russell stated that the Gaston County HPC primarily looked at the exterior not the interior of the building. Commissioner Harris asked if the below grade exterior door on the west side of the building was closed off. Mr. Russell replied “Yes” and stated that a new exterior door was installed. Commissioner Harris also asked Mr. Russell if fire sprinklers would be needed. Mr. Gates replied that he was unsure but stated that the determination would be made during the site plan and zoning construction permit review. The Assistant City Attorney, Charles Graham, stated that the Fire Marshal would make the final determination.

Commissioner Chapman asked staff if the agenda, related to this building, from the Gaston County HPC meeting was available. Chair Ferguson replied “No” and stated that the HPC is a Gaston County board. Mr. Graham added that the city of Gastonia supports the Gaston County HPC but that it is not under the city’s purview. As a follow up, Commissioner Chapman stated that she did not have specific question but wanted to ensure that all-important issues were acknowledged and addressed. In response, Mr. Russell noted that once a property becomes a historic local landmark, no exterior changes could be made without a COA or the property owner would be in violation.

Chair Ferguson stated that no other speakers had signed up for this request. She requested the wishes of the board. Commissioner Silverman made a motion to close the public hearing and Vice Chair Ghorley seconded the motion. The motion to close the public hearing was unanimously passed (7-0).

Vice Chair Ghorley stated that he had no concerns with the project, noting that exceptional work was being done to preserve the property. Commissioners Gallant and Harris stated that they were in agreement with Vice Chair Ghorley's comments. Commissioner Harris noted he is glad that the

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building will be preserved and will no longer be vacant. Chair Ferguson stated that she is in support of the project and believes it is a suitable reuse of the property and is sensitive to the community and the history of that neighborhood.

Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to approve the rezoning request as presented with the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Harris seconded the motion. The motion to approve the rezoning request as presented was unanimously passed (7-0).

Vice Chair Ghorley made a motion to adopt the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Chapman seconded the motion. The motion to adopt the statement of consistency and reasonableness was unanimously passed (7-0).

Item 3: OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Gates informed the commissioners that Senior Planner, Jordan Tubbs, has resigned to take a position with Cleveland County.

Mr. Gates updated the Commission on City Council items. He stated that the Fairview Road annexation request was approved by City Council and that the Briar Oaks annexation request was continued to the August 19th, 2025 meeting, pending the outcome of their traffic study.

Mr. Gates discussed the status of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan update. He stated that staff will continue to work with the consultant team and management to determine the anticipated date of adoption. Lastly, he informed the Commission of a future UDO update, if approved in the budget.

Chair Ferguson reminded the Commission about the special meeting scheduled for Thursday, July 10th, 2025.

Item 4: ADJOURNMENT

Chair Ferguson entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Silverman made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Harris seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was unanimously passed (7-0). The meeting adjourned at 6:23 PM.

Rebeca Mintz, Secretary

Kristie Ferguson, Chairperson