

Gastonia Planning Commission

July 10th, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes

The Gastonia Planning Commission meeting commenced at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 10th, 2025 in the Council Chambers at City Hall, located at 181 S. South Street, Gastonia, NC.

Present: Vice Chair Chad Ghorley, Commissioners Carl Harris, David Wilson, Glenn Silverman, and Julie Coffey.

Absent: Chair Kristie Ferguson, Commissioners Jeff Howe and Megan Chapman

Staff Members Present: Quentin McPhatter, Charles Graham, Joe Gates, Maddy Gates, and Rebecca Mintz.

Item 1a: Role Call / Sound Check

Vice Chair Ghorley declared a quorum for the meeting.

Item 1b: Calls/Contacts to Planning Commission Members

No Commissioners were contacted.

Item 1c: Oath of Office

Gastonia Planning Technician, Rebecca Mintz, administered the oath of office to newly appointed Commissioner, David Wilson.

Item 1d: Approval of June 5th, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Silverman made a motion to adopt the June 5th, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Coffey seconded the motion. The motion to approve the June 5th, 2025 meeting minutes was unanimously passed (5-0).

Vice Chair Ghorley read the rules of procedure and the time limitation policy.

Item 2: 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update (Informational purposes only)

Vice Chair Ghorley recognized the consultant team, Demetri Baches with Metrocology, Inc. and Glenn Walters with TownStudio for the presentation of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan update. Vice Chair Ghorley noted that the following presentation was for information purposes only and that no action was required from the Planning Commission at this meeting. A PowerPoint presentation was displayed. Mr. Baches discussed the purpose of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan update, the timeline for adoption, and the individuals involved in the process. He presented the final draft and explained the overall context, layout and format of the plan. Mr. Baches discussed the community outreach and public involvement process and the importance of the city's vision and principles.

He presented projections of population growth from year 2025 to year 2100, which reflected primary population growth in eastern and central Gastonia. Commissioner Harris asked Mr. Baches what the overall growth rate would be for the central city in 25 years. Mr. Baches replied that the population projection showed a 13% increase in the downtown area for 2050. The Commissioners and Mr. Baches discussed the growth of the City of Charlotte and its impact on adjoining municipalities. Commissioner Wilson asked Mr. Baches if the population projections he provided were conservative numbers. Mr. Baches replied "Yes" stating that the projections are based upon the average number of new residents in Gaston County, which is only 7,500 to 8,000 people per decade.

Mr. Baches stated that the 2050 Comprehensive Plan update would no longer use a traditional Future Land Use Map (FLUM) but instead will introduce Place Types and Place Based Future Planning. He discussed the concepts of corridors, wedges, districts and centers. Mr. Baches explained the Place Types that will be utilized in the Comprehensive Plan, which include three types of residential, three types of commercial centers, and four types of employment centers. He discussed how the place types would correspond with current zoning in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). To provide visual context, Mr. Baches shared a variety of maps of the study area showing main transportation networks, green area and open space, neighborhoods and the Future Place Based Map. Vice Chair Ghorley asked Mr. Baches if Union New Hope Road would be considered a secondary center in the future due to the mix of housing, commercial, retail and office uses. Mr. Baches replied "No" stating that secondary centers are larger, typically 250,000 to 600,000 square feet of commercial. He described Franklin Square as an example based upon the mix of uses and the large regional draw.

Lastly, Mr. Walters discussed the implementation and investment chapter and the action plan of the proposed 2050 Comprehensive Plan. He stated that the implementation plan provides the steps that need to be taken by staff, citizens, city boards and others, to be able to achieve the agreed upon community vision. Mr. Walters noted that the priorities for implementation are funding investments and actions to accommodate growth and the delivery of services. In regards to the action plan, Mr. Walters described that it is broken down amongst categories and topics, which include development and redevelopment, complete neighborhoods, transportation, parks and open space, and infrastructure

Gastonia Planning Commission

July 10th, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes

and community services. He noted that each action has a specific level of expected investment, timeline and key entities. Mr. Baches and Mr. Walters discussed the importance of the action plan component of the Comprehensive Plan and stated that it directly influences public policy, future investments, potential grants, the provision of city services and more.

Commissioner Harris asked the consultant team what the best first step would be to enhance and promote redevelopment in downtown Gastonia. Mr. Baches stated that residents, businesses and investors need to be motivated and interested in downtown. He noted that a visual task force would be beneficial to improve attention, outreach and accountability. Commissioner Harris stated that he believes a significant change in the economic development of downtown will promote the growth of Gastonia from the center. Mr. Baches confirmed and stated that downtown is typically a city's most valuable asset. Vice Chair Ghorley stated that future growth around the Caromont Health baseball park will further promote the city and bring new residents. Mr. Baches stated that the Comprehensive Plan update would prepare the city for that future investment.

Commissioner Silverman asked if a new task force or city board would have to be created by City Council. Assistant City Manager, Quentin McPhatter, approached to answer. Mr. McPhatter replied "Yes" and noted that a lot of downtown work and coordination is already being done with the Gaston Business Association (GBA) and Gaston County Economic Development. He discussed the importance of downtown businesses being engaged and working together to improve and promote downtown and other important areas of the city. Lastly, the Commissioners and the consultant team discussed the priority of having people live in the city center.

Item 3: Public Hearing – Unified Development Ordinance Amendment (File #202500281)

Subject hearing involves a request to amend *Section 2.7 Terms Defined in This Ordinance* and related sections of *Chapter 7 Use and Building Lot Standards*, *Chapter 8 Supplemental Regulations* and *Chapter 9 General Provisions* of the Unified Development Ordinance to allow some uses classified as "Manufactured Goods" by right or by right with supplemental regulations in the General Industrial Zoning Districts.

Vice Chair Ghorley opened the public hearing and recognized Joe Gates, Assistant Planning Director, and Donny Hicks, Gaston County Economic Development Commission (EDC) Executive Director, for the presentation. Mr. Gates stated that the City of Gastonia, in partnership with the Gaston County EDC, continuously works to recruit and attract new industry and support economic growth in the region. He discussed that the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) is periodically reviewed and updated as needed to reflect shifts in industrial development trends, emerging technologies, industry standards, and changing market conditions.

Mr. Gates noted that the proposed text amendment aims to address these industry needs, and will modify Chapter 2 and Chapter 7. Mr. Gates discussed how Manufactured Goods are defined and determined in the UDO. He stated that Manufactured Goods include any manufacturing, refining, processing, or assembly of goods and products categorized into three classes (Manufactured Goods Class 1, Manufactured Goods Class 2, and Manufactured Goods Class 3). Additionally, he noted that all specific uses within Manufactured Goods are defined by the North America Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Mr. Gates stated that the amendment to Chapter 2 would remove NAICS code #325199 "All Other Basic Organic Chemical Manufacturing" and NAICS code #311942 "Spice and Extract manufacturing" from Manufactured Goods Class 2, which would automatically classify those NAICS codes as Manufacture Goods Class 1 and permit them by-right in the I-1, I-2, I-3, and I-U zoning districts. In regards to Chapter 7, Mr. Gates stated that the only amendment would be a proposal to increase maximum height in the I-2 and I-3 zoning districts from 50-feet to 75-feet to accommodate modern building design practices.

Following Mr. Gates' presentation, Mr. Hicks, Executive Director of the Gaston County EDC, approached the podium. Mr. Hicks stated that the Gaston County EDC provides services to all municipalities in the county, including business recruitment, business retention, and infrastructure development. He stated that he has worked with the City of Gastonia to modernize the zoning ordinance so that it works in favor of business recruitment, not against it. Mr. Hicks discussed changes in the industrial market as it relates to building practices, design, layout and ceiling height. He displayed a PowerPoint presentation of recent industrial buildings that have been constructed in the Apple Creek Industrial Park in Gaston County. He stated that building height over 50-feet is typical for high-technology manufacturing due to the increase in ceiling height standards and an overall change in building design. He shared photos of several buildings with a wide range of ceiling heights. Mr. Hicks stated that his department has received 108 inquiries thus far in 2025 and that the ordinance changes

Gastonia Planning Commission

July 10th, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes

are necessary to keep Gastonia and Gaston County as a competitive region for new industrial and manufacturing growth and expansion.

Commissioner Wilson asked Mr. Hicks if any industrial companies have requested a building height or ceiling height greater than 75-feet. Mr. Hicks replied “No” stating that the tallest warehouse buildings were 48-feet and 58-feet.

Commissioner Silverman inquired about the general timeline for larger corporations to open in the County and whether there is sufficient capacity in priority industrial areas. Mr. Hicks stated that a previous study was done on industrial land and growth from 1960 to 2024 in Gaston County, which showed that more industrial growth has occurred in the past five years than any other period since 1960. He stated that there is immense pressure on the EDC to conserve industrial land because of the competition with residential development. He discussed the importance of preserving industrial land and noted that he was thankful to participate in the city of Gastonia’s 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Harris asked Mr. Hicks what the average height of the warehousing buildings along Interstate-85 was. Mr. Hicks responded that the top of the ceiling panel is approximately 52-feet to 54-feet tall. Commissioner Harris asked Mr. Gates what the zoning district and height was for the Gateway 85 properties. Mr. Gates stated that they are zoned I-2 and that the ordinance currently allows some exceptions to height, up to 75-feet, if the buildings are 200-feet from residential structures. Mr. Gates noted that some of the Gateway 85 properties were eligible to use this ordinance provision.

Commissioner Coffey asked Mr. Gates if the proposed ordinance amendment could be an incentive to redevelop other underutilized industrial areas. Mr. Gates replied “Yes” and referred to the zoning map; identifying all of the industrial zoning that currently exists within the city.

Commissioner Wilson asked Mr. Hicks how industrial properties compete in price or value with residential properties. Mr. Hicks stated that the cost of industrial property has grown substantially in the last couple of years. He noted that the cost would continue to rise as industrial spaces compete with other land uses. Lastly, Mr. Hicks discussed the rebirth of South Highway 321 for industrial development, stating that buildings are selling for unprecedented prices and leases are occurring within a matter of weeks.

Commissioner Coffey asked Mr. Hicks what percentage of tax revenue comes from the industrial and manufacturing sectors. Mr. Hicks stated that tax revenue at the county is estimated at 25 to 30 percent from industrial sectors.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Silverman made a motion to recommend approval of the text amendment request as presented. Commissioner Coffey seconded the motion. The motion to recommend approval of the text amendment request as presented was unanimously passed (5-0).

Following, Commissioner Silverman made a motion to adopt the statement of consistency and reasonableness. Commissioner Harris seconded the motion. The motion to adopt the statement of consistency and reasonableness was unanimously passed (5-0). Vice Chair Ghorley noted that a public hearing will be held for this item before the City Council on August 19th, 2025.

Item 4: OTHER BUSINESS

No other business.

Item 5: ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Ghorley entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Harris made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Coffey seconded the motion. The motion to adjourn was unanimously passed (5-0). The meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Rebeca Mintz, Secretary

Kristie Ferguson, Chair