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**MEETING MINUTES**  
**Benton County Planning Commission**  
**March 17, 2026 Work Session**  
**6:00-8:00 P.M.**

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**I. CALL TO ORDER | ROLL CALL**

Benton County Planning Commission Chair Fowler called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M. The meeting was open to the public virtually via a published Zoom link. Chair Fowler confirmed a quorum of the Commission.

**Benton County Planning Commissioners**

Nick Fowler, Chair  
Greg Hamann, Vice Chair  
Ed Fulford  
Evelyn Lee  
Andrew Struthers  
John Wilson

**Benton County Staff**

Petra Schuetz, Planning Director  
James Wright, Associate Planner  
Gordon Kurtz, Public Works  
Meg Reehoorn, Recorder

**Absent**

Catherine Biscoe  
Sara Cash

**II. APPROVE MINUTES FROM January 20, 2026**

Commissioners reviewed the draft minutes from the January 20, 2026 meeting.

**MOTION:** Commissioner Struthers moved to approve the January 20, 2026 minutes

**SECOND:** Commissioner Wilson

**VOTE:** Motion passed unanimously

**ACTION:** Minutes approved without amendment

**III. LU-25-066 & LU-25-067-Conditional Use Permit and Variance: Northside Christian Church**

Chair Fowler opened the quasi-judicial public hearing and read the required procedures into the record, including testimony procedures, applicable criteria, ex parte inquiry, and appeal

Benton County will make reasonable accommodations for all alterable participants. Please give notification 72 hours before the meeting. All Planning Commission meetings are recorded and retained as required by ORS 166-200-0235.

rights. No commissioner declared an ex parte contact, conflict of interest, or bias, and no challenges to commissioner impartially were raised.

## **STAFF PRESENTATION**

James Wright, Associate Planner, presented the applications for property located at 4500 Powers Avenue NW, Albany:

- LU-25-067: Conditional Use Permit to establish a church
- LU-25-066: Variance request to reduce off-street parking requirements

Staff summarized the application history, noticing, applicable code sections, site conditions, and agency comments. Staff explained that the proposal is phased, with Phase 1 including a gymnasium initially serving as the main sanctuary, parking, and daycare use, and Phase 2 including a larger sanctuary and additional site improvements. Staff also summarized public comment themes received before the hearing, including traffic, rural character, environmental, and noise concerns.

Staff concluded that:

- The conditional use permit could be approved with phased conditions
- The parking variance should be denied

## **PUBLIC WORKS / ENGINEERING PRESENTATION**

Gordon Kurtz, Associate Engineer, presented transportation and public works comments. Public Works identified deficiencies in Powers Avenue relative to current standards and described a proposed hybrid road improvement concept intended to improve safety for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists. He also identified issues related to right-of-way dedication, stormwater, frontage improvements, driveway access, and the need to prevent overflow parking on adjacent roads.

## **PUBLIC TESTIMONY**

Public testimony was received both in support of and in opposition to the applications

Testimony in support emphasized:

- The church's history of community service and support for families
- Interest in expanded childcare and community-oriented programming
- The belief that the proposal would provide community benefit
- Support for roadway improvements on Powers Avenue
- The view that the church would be a positive addition to the area

Testimony in opposition emphasized:

- Traffic volume congestion, and pedestrian safety concerns on Powers Avenue, Scenic Drive, and Oak Grove
- Concern that the size and scale of the proposed church campus would not be compatible with the surrounding rural residential character

- Concerns regarding parking, hardscape, lighting, noise, construction impacts, and event intensity
- Concerns about drainage, wetlands, runoff, septic impacts, and wildlife movement
- Concern that the proposal would function as a large campus rather than a small rural church use

Several speakers stated that their opposition was directed to the size, intensity, and location of the proposal rather than to church use generally.

## COMMISSION QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Commissioners asked staff questions regarding:

- Phase structure and future compliance for Phase 2
- Parking calculations and shared parking standards
- Road widening feasibility and right-of-way acquisition
- Traffic impacts and traffic study assumptions
- Septic capacity and wastewater permitting
- Stormwater and wetland review
- Rural character impacts, including visual effects of hardscape and increased activity
- Applicable legal standards, including state law and religious land use protections

Commission discussion highlighted concern about:

- Whether the proposal would substantially alter the character of the surrounding rural residential area
- Whether required infrastructure improvements were feasible
- Whether the Phase 2 concept could comply with parking and site constraints as proposed

## APPLICANT REQUEST

Following testimony, Lara Roque, on behalf of Northside Christian Church, requested that the record remain open to allow additional time to review staff comments, transportation issues, and matters raised during testimony, and to continue working with County staff.

## ACTION

After discussion of procedural options, the Commission acted on the applicant's request.

- **Motion:** Commissioner Wilson moved to leave the written record open for 7 days, followed by 7 days for applicant response and 7 days for staff to finalize the report.
- **Second:** Second received
- **Discussion:** Commissioners clarified that this action would keep the written record open only and would not continue the oral public hearing. The matter would return at a future meeting for deliberations only
- **Vote:** Passed unanimously by voice vote
- **Action:** The Commission approved the 7-7-7 record process

## FOLLOW-UP / SCHEDULING

Commissioners discussed scheduling constraints, quorum availability, and the statutory decision timeline. The matter was scheduled to return at a future meeting for deliberations only after completion of the 7-7-7 process. During discussion, a request was also made for staff to include legal guidance regarding the applicable religious land use law in the follow-up materials.

**IV. PLANNING COMMISSIONER | STAFF UPDATES**

No formal updates were made.

**V. NEXT MEETING**

The next regular Planning Commission meeting is to May 5, 2026

**VI. ADJOURN**

Chair Fowler adjourned the meeting at 10:07 pm