

**KENT PLANNING COMMISSION
BUSINESS MEETING
AUGUST 19, 2025**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Amanda Edwards
Derek Salustro
Ken Crookston
Earl Clausson
Naser Matar

STAFF PRESENT:

Bridget Susel, Community Development Director
Eric Fink, Assistant Law Director
Tim Sahr, Development Engineer

I. Call to Order

Ms. Edwards called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Roll Call:

Amanda Edwards, Derek Salustro, Earl Clausson, Naser Matar, and Ken Crookston were present.

III. Reading of Preamble

Ms. Edwards read the Preamble, which describes the purpose and procedures of the Planning Commission as well as the applicant's right to an appeal.

IV. Administration of Oath

Mr. Fink instructed those members of the audience wishing to be heard on the case to be presented at this meeting to raise their right hand. Mr. Fink administered the Oath, "Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, if yes, please say "I do." The participants responded, "I do."

V. Correspondence

Email from Jeff St. Clair and Marta Weist to the Planning Commission regarding their opposition to the rezoning request. Another email from Doria Daniels was sent to the Planning Commission in favor of the rezoning request. Ms. Edwards asked if all the Commissioners had the opportunity to review the written correspondence. All members affirmed they had.

VI. New Business

**A. PC25-011 GrayFoxRE LLC
600 FRANKLIN AVE (PARCEL NO. 17-012-10-00-081-022) AND
PARCEL NO. 17-012-10-00-072-002 (NOT YET NUMBERED)**

The applicant is requesting a map amendment to change parcel No. 17-012-10-00-081-022 (600 Franklin Avenue) and Parcel No. 17-012-10-00-072-002 (Not yet numbered Franklin Avenue) From I: Industrial Zoning District to R-3: High Density Residential Zoning District.

Mr. Sahr presented the project as submitted and presented the staff report to the Commission. He stated that the applicant has written authorization from the owner of the property, Hometown Bank, to pursue the map amendment request. He stated that the site is accessed from W. Williams St. and Franklin Ave. and is surrounded by an industrial use to the southwest, residential uses to the southeast and the east, WLE Railroad to the west, and commercial uses to the north. He stated that the applicant is requesting an amendment to the City of Kent Zoning Districts Map to rezone an 11.61 acre and a 0.22 acre parcel from their current I: Industrial classification to the R-3: High Density Residential classification. He stated that the applicable code sections for this case are Sections 1103.11, 1103.22, and 1112 of the Kent Codified Ordinances. Mr. Sahr stated Chapter 1112.01(C)(1) and (2) of the Kent Zoning Code specifies the process for requesting a zoning map amendment. He stated that the City of Kent Law Department has reviewed the application and found that all the requirements have been met for the case to be heard. He also stated that Section 1103.22 I: Industrial District, which is the current zoning district and Section 1103.11 R-3: High Density Residential District, which is the proposed zoning district are included in the staff report for reference. He stated that according to Section 1112.01(D)(2), the Planning Commission shall consider the proposed amendment along with any and all supporting documentation and testimony provided by the applicant and during the public hearing, which are related to the proposed amendment. He stated that the Planning Commission must forward a recommendation for approval or disapproval of the Zoning Map amendment request to City Council.

Ms. Susel reminded the members that a map amendment is not specific to any project and all permitted and conditionally permitted uses for the proposed zoning district must be considered.

Jake Shields, GrayFox Capital / GrayFoxRE LLC, 2929 Saybrock Blvd, Stow, OH, is the applicant. He stated that they are a company that focuses on a mix of residential and commercial uses. He stated that during a neighborhood community meeting, he learned that the property was owned by John Brown, who was planning for a residential neighborhood before it became a train car factory. He stated the property is currently mostly vacant. He stated that the site contains environmentally hazardous waste materials from all of the industrial uses. He stated that a Brownfield Grant was approved to clean the site up to industrial standards and it is their plan to let that go forward. He stated that the site is unique in that it is close to downtown, parks, and amenities that Kent has to offer and provides an opportunity for neighborhood connectivity. He stated that they would like to rezone the property from industrial to residential. He stated that he doesn't feel that it is a good industrial site due to its proximity to downtown, not great highway access, and is close to existing residential areas. He stated that there has been a lot of opportunities for reuse of the existing buildings and site, but nothing has occurred so far and he speculated that the existing buildings will likely need to be demolished for any new industrial use. He stated that rezoning the property to residential allows for the opportunity to upgrade the cleanup of the site to residential standards. He stated that they feel that this would be a great opportunity for a neighborhood that hasn't seen any development in

the last 100 years. He stated rezoning to residential will increase community connectivity to the downtown and park system as it is a very walkable site. He stated that the change in zoning could provide 100-200 new residents, which will help the City with tax and business revenues. He stated that with residential use, the site is more flexible and the existing structures could be preserved.

Public Comment

Ms. Edwards stated that public comment will be limited to two minutes and reminded the audience that the case is not about a specific project but rather a recommendation to City Council regarding the question of changing of the zoning district from Industrial to R:3: High Density Residential. She stated that City Council will be the deciding vote regardless of the Planning Commission's recommendation either for or against the proposal. She stated that there won't be any discussion on a specific project at this meeting.

Doria Daniels, 1200 Cedar St., stated that she is present on behalf of the Historic South End. She stated that she shared a letter to the Community Development Department on August 11, 2025. She stated that she is in favor of the map amendment as it could provide the possibility for future economic development in a neglected historic community. She stated that there is concern about some homes that were listed on the National Historic Register via the Kent Historical Society and the Regional Planning Board, but she has found no documented evidence that the City of Kent ever codified a historic district.

Greg Lowdermilk, 704 Franklin, stated that his concern is the traffic and noise that would be increased on an already busy street where the houses are close together. He stated that the ingress/egress is on a very small piece of property.

Kevin Gray, 631 S. Depeyster, Curator of the Portage County Historical Society, stated that his concern is the historical nature of the existing building and the steps that will be taken to preserve it. He stated that the property was established as a historic structure in 1991 by the Kent Historical Society and questioned if the Certificate of Appropriateness was obtained through the Design and Preservation Board as per KCO Chapter 1393.

Ms. Susel stated that it has not been done for this specific property. She added that it could have gone through a historic designation at a state or federal level. She stated that the designation through Chapter 1393 is initiated through the Community Development Department and can be done at any point the owner of the property or agency that has support of the property owner applies. She stated that it would then be heard by the Committee on Design and Preservation, who will make a recommendation to City Council to vote on and then send it to the State of Ohio.

Mr. Gray stated that Chapter 1393 also states that a person who demolishes or alters in violation of that shall be required to restore the building to its appearance prior to the violation.

Ms. Susel stated that it is dependent on the scope and scale of the demolition. She stated that this statement is also in conflict with the demolition ordinance. She stated that currently the concern of demolition or alterations is presumptive as they are not discussing a specific project. She stated that if the property is designated, at that point, the conflict question can be raised and taken to the Law Department.

Ann Courtney Davis, 555 Franklin Ave. stated that she will be directly impacted by anything that happens because her property is right next store to the parcel that connects to Franklin Ave. She questioned how the change could impact her property values.

Mary Culton, 216 W. Oak St., stated that she is concerned about which roads will be used during the clean-up of the property and the potential increased traffic that is not familiar with the area specifically the traffic light at School St. and Franklin Ave.

Carol Tharp, 646 Franklin, stated that the residents are present tonight because they are concerned about the project that has been shown even though that is not the case being heard.

Ms. Susel stated that the City did not share information about the proposed future project. She stated that the developer and media have presented the information.

Charles Hotaling, 219 W. Oak St., stated that he doesn't feel that it should be rezoned as he is concerned about traffic, noise, police patrols, road conditions, and drainage. He stated that he doesn't see this improving the neighborhood in a way that he would appreciate or want. He stated that he would rather see it left alone than become a big apartment complex because there are many single family homes in the area.

Bill Garmier, 341 W. Oak, stated he purchased his industrial property, which is the location for Renewable Lubricants, a large manufacturer of bio-based lubricants in North America, and they are going to need the railroad for the tankers that are coming in. He stated that according to the information provided, the proposed site contains arsenic, mercury, EDCs, and lead that shows that the property has been an industrial site for a long time. He stated that he and the neighboring company purchased industrial properties that they have invested a lot of money into and if this isn't an industrial site, someone should have told them that years ago. He questioned if they will be able to continue their industrial use if the zoning is changed.

Todd Packer 543 Rockwell St. stated that he would like to pause the process until all options are available to review and remediation is assured. He stated that he feels that the zoning should be maintained. He stated that he feels that there are other safer and more convenient areas in the City that are already designated or not sitting in a highly active industrial area. He stated that he welcomes the opportunity to enhance the housing stock in the Historic South End of the City but there are other current residential designated zones in other areas of need. He stated that Kent State University has slated to demolish buildings on campus, which would open up opportunities for safe, needed, and likely lucrative residential housing. He stated that he feels that the Planning Commission should support economic development by job creation in this industrial area and feels that high density residential would disrupt the City's capability to maintain and grow local viable and important manufacturing companies. He stated that he is not in favor of the creation of residential units in an area that is contaminated.

John Thomas, 1621 Chadwick Rd., suggested that the Commissioners walk the site because whatever they decide is good for the Southend is good for Kent.

Travis Copen, 7001 Red Brush Rd., stated that he has been a taxpayer, property owner, and employer in the Historic South End for 27 years. He stated that he is opposed to changing the zoning as he feels that it is a bad idea for the City as well as the businesses here that rely on the industrial corridor for places to expand and operate. He stated that he does support the current plans to remediate the property to allowable commercial/industrial standards and feels that industrial is a good long-term planned use for the property. He stated that he feels that the high density residential zoning will clash dramatically with the abutting existing industrial zone properties. He stated that the local industrial owners know their properties and know what is in the ground and do their best to ensure it remains safe and that they don't add to the problems.

He invited the Commissioners to come to his business to see what modern manufacturing is and the future it can bring to the town.

Marta Weist, 130 W. Williams St., stated that she feels that it would be too much traffic for the neighborhoods if the zoning was changed to high density residential. She stated that the City didn't want the entrance to the previously proposed hotel on Summit St. and the railroad doesn't want to allow another crossing, so why should they be the ones to let them come down their streets.

John Spindler, 501 Franklin Ave., stated that he feels that they are not at a point where they should be considering a high density residential zoning district if the property isn't even usable for commercial use. He stated that he is also concerned about urban sprawl and feels that the businesses will be squeezed out. He stated that space is needed between uses. He stated that he would like to see the property remain industrial. He stated that he would also be weary about living there even after remediation.

Lanika Mulsach, 1004 Franklin Ave., stated that she works in public health and questioned Mr. Shields statement regarding demolition.

Ms. Susel stated that the demolition status is speculative at this point as this case is only concerning the rezoning and not a project.

Ms. Mulsach stated that affordable housing is important and needed in the City of Kent.

Jackie Garmier, 341 W. Oak St., stated their industrial site has two rail spurs through a grant from the Ohio Rail Commission. She stated that they intend to use their site with trains coming in and off-loading, etc. She stated that currently they have room to store approximately 20 rail cars for off-loading. She stated that there may be an opportunity in the future to offload products for Land O Lakes. She stated that the Wheeling Lake Erie Rail was just sold to a New York company and noted that the rail was being upgraded from Hartville to Cleveland to accommodate heavier loads, which will increase rail use. She stated that she feels that the rail is too close to have residential uses and expressed her concern for the safety of the children in such a situation. She feels that it should stay industrial.

Jason Sheller, 247 Maple St., stated that they are long-time residents in that area and expressed his concern about the potential increased traffic.

Karen Unkefer, 247 W. Oak St., stated that she doesn't want the extra traffic from high density residential and feels that the property should stay industrial.

Planning Commission Discussion

Ms. Edwards invited the applicant to the microphone to speak after public comment was closed. Mr. Shields stated that he understands the traffic concerns with every development whether it's residential or industrial/commercial as there is always a concern. He stated that if the site stays industrial, there would be quite a bit of traffic as it is a large site. He stated that if the site is developed, traffic will increase but there are ways to mitigate that and they would go through the process if the site were rezoned as would any other user. He stated that the site has been listed for sale for a long time and has been industrial with no offers to his knowledge. He stated that they seek to develop the site if given the opportunity. He stated that the site made sense as to why it has been industrial for a long time, but the City has grown significantly. He stated that if the site were residential, it would help the downtown businesses. He stated that the site will be cleaned up to industrial standards regardless of the zoning. He stated that they are

proposing an opportunity to clean it up further based on the strict EPA standards. He stated that a nearby residential community could help shorten the work commute for some as well.

Mr. Salustro questioned why the parcels were not combined prior to the rezoning request and why the northern CD: Commercial Downtown is being kept separate.

Mr. Susel stated that consolidation is not required for a zoning map amendment request and that the consolidation is up to the current property owner not to a prospective buyer. She explained that if it were to be rezoned and projects were to come before Planning Commission, then the issue of consolidating parcels would be discussed.

Mr. Clausson questioned if GrayFox had done any studies to quantify the costs in increasing the cleanup from industrial to residential.

Mr. Shields stated that from their standpoint, it is roughly \$500,000, however, they have not been given authority from the Land Bank for their team to do official testing and this is just based off the reports that have been provided. He stated that an official test would allow them to identify further details on the cost. He stated that regardless of the cost, they believe that this is a successful opportunity to develop.

Mr. Crookston stated that the SME document provided by GrayFox states that the Ohio EPA Voluntary Action Plan allows for a modified and restricted residential usage or plan if other types of controls are put into place and his concern is that right out of the gate, they are already talking about making it easier as opposed to going all the way in making sure the site is safe.

Mr. Shields stated that SME is just stating what can happen but it doesn't mean that that is what will be done. He stated that they plan to clean to a standard that they feel that they can market to. He stated that they will do everything they can to make it successful and be clean for the community.

Mr. Crookston stated he is assuming based on a map that was in an email that was provided as part of the public written correspondence sent to the Commission, that the two egress points are located off Franklin Ave., which only provides access to the residential area through isolated industrial zoned spaces.

Mr. Shields stated that the map in the email was only a concept plan and if the site was rezoned, the resident comments would be taken into consideration during the planning process.

Ms. Susel stated that Brownfield Restoration Group is the certified professional that performed the assessment of the site on behalf of the Land Bank and secured a \$1.7 million brownfield grant. She explained that the grant has been executed, but remediation activity has not occurred as the Escrow Agreement for the 25% match has not been executed. She stated that she asked BRG for an estimated cost to bring the property to residential standards and the answer is that conservatively it would be double what it is for the industrial/commercial work; an additional \$1.7 million. She explained that the Figure 10 shows the industrial/commercial standard areas and Figure 11 shows the areas that would need to be brought to the residential standards. Ms. Susel explained that remediation for the industrial/commercial standards must be completed and accepted by the Ohio EPA before another assessment could be done for the residential standards; the grant cannot be changed to allow for the residential standards.

Mr. Salustro stated that he feels that the rezoning request is premature with regards to the cleanup.

Ms. Edwards read the allowed uses for the R-3 district, which include single family dwelling, two-family dwellings, home businesses and accessory buildings. She stated that if it is a permitted use, the Planning Commission doesn't have a say about the project. She stated that the Housing Study shows that one of the biggest issues is that owner occupied housing is only at 40%. She stated that in her opinion, any residential development in this area would not be owner occupied given the cost to construct a new home and the location of the property. She added that these would likely not be high end rentals. She stated that she feels that traffic is also a concern. She stated that she does not support the rezoning.

Mr. Crookston stated that the property currently doesn't meet industrial standards and the process to remediate it has not yet been executed. He added that at this point no developer is obligated to do anything. He remarked that if there is a piece of property that isn't suited for residential, why would the City rezone it that way.

Ms. Edwards stated that she is questioning if R-3 is the best use of that parcel. She stated that she would lean more to extending the C-D district south or leaving it industrial before changing it to R-3.

Mr. Salustro agreed and added that it is especially true since they haven't even provided the required grant match funds yet. He questioned why they are even discussing it at this point. He stated that he would be more inclined to vote for it if the remediation process was underway. He stated that traffic studies are done whenever there is a new build so he isn't too concerned about that.

Mr. Matar questioned if they would be required to inform any residents that may build on the proposed parcels that the land was contaminated and remediated.

Ms. Susel stated that title companies typically research this issue during a sale.

Ms. Edwards stated that anyone renting the property would not have that information from a title company and she feels that this would not be owner occupied.

Mr. Crookston questioned if the rezoning would affect the grant that has already been given.

Ms. Susel stated that she cannot speak for the Ohio Department of Development or the Ohio EPA. She stated that the information that was gathered for the Phase I Assessment that BRG completed was based on the current zoning of industrial only.

MOTION: *In the case of PC25-011, GrayFoxRE LLC, 600 Franklin Ave., Mr. Matar moved that the Planning Commission recommend to the Kent City Council to NOT APPROVE the amendment to the City of Kent Zoning Districts Map to amend the 11.61 acre parcel, Parcel Number 17-012-10-00-081-022 (600 Franklin Avenue), and the 0.22 acre, Parcel Number 17-012-10-00-072-002 (unnumbered parcel), from I: Industrial to R-3: High Density Residential.*

Mr. Crookston seconded the motion. The motion carried 5-0.

VII. Meeting Minutes

None

VIII. Other Business

None

IX. Adjournment

MOTION: *Mr. Clausson moved to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Matar.
The motion carried 5-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.*