



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

Minutes - Draft

Planning Commission

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

7:00 PM

Harrigan Centennial Hall

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Present: Robin Sherman (Acting Chair), Wendy Alderson, Jacquie Foss, Margaret Frank (via Zoom), Katie Riley (Assembly Liaison)

Excused: Darrell Windsor

Staff: Amy Ainslie, Kim Davis, Ariadne Will (via Zoom)

Public: Lauren Wild, Evan Love, Craig Shoemaker, Chris McGraw, Leah Mason, Gabby Kelly, Quinlyn Holder, Roy Anderson, Jerry Dzigan, Karen Lucas, Devon Calvin, Kristina Cranston, Auriella Hughes, Tory O'Connell Curran, John Murray, Jack Navitsky, Suzan Brawnlyn, Linda Waller, Tommy Joseph, Phil Burdick, Larry Edwards, Klaudia Leccese, Darryl Rehkopf, Connie Kreiss, Bernadette Rasmussen, Steve Fish, Phyllis Mulligan, Ann Walter, Larry Trani, Marg Parsons, Gail Johansen Peterson, Gerry Hope, Vicki D'Amico, Cynthia Gibson, Jere Christner, Karen Christner, Ronda Anderson, Mary Chambers, Floyd Tomkins, Paul Kortemeier, Jay Stelzenmuller, Hank Moore, Barb Bingham, Lenise Hendersen, Katherine Rose (KCAW), Anna Laffrey (Sitka Sentinel)

Acting Chair Sherman called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. CONSIDERATION OF THE AGENDA

III. CONSIDERATION OF THE MINUTES

A PM 25-20 Approve the December 3, 2025 meeting minutes.

**M/Alderson-S/Foss moved to approve the December 3, 2025 meeting minutes.
Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.**

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD

V. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ainslie said the next Planning Commission meeting was scheduled for January 21, 2026.

VI. REPORTS

VII. THE EVENING BUSINESS

B VAR 25-08 Public hearing and consideration of a request for a major variance to reduce the rear setback from eight feet to two feet at 104 Kuhnle Drive in the R-1 MH

single-family, duplex, and manufactured home district. The property is also known as Lot C-4A, Kuhnle Resubdivision. The request is filed by Lauren Wild and Evan Love. The owner of record is Evan Love.

Sherman said that she was an abutter but felt she could be unbiased. She did not recuse herself following input from the other commissioners.

Davis introduced a request to reduce the rear setback at 104 Kuhnle Drive from eight feet to two feet to accommodate an addition. The applicant was not planning to increase the building footprint, but staff had not found record of a building permit for an enclosed porch at the rear of the existing single-family house. The addition was to have a bathroom and a bedroom. The topography of the lot made building the addition elsewhere on the property difficult.

Applicants Lauren Wild and Evan Love had nothing to add. The commission did not have questions for the applicants. No public comment was received.

The commission asked how wide the eaves and gutter were to be. Davis said the eave was to be one foot and the gutter was to be six inches. The commission clarified that the variance was bringing the existing structure into compliance.

M/Foss-S/Alderson moved to approve the zoning variance for a reduction to the rear setback from eight feet to two feet at 104 Kuhnle Drive in the R-1 MH single-family, duplex, and manufactured home district subject to the attached conditions of approval. The property was also known as Lot C-Four A (C-4A), Kuhnle Re-Subdivision. The request was filed by Evan Love and Lauren Wild. The owner of record was Evan Love. Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

M/Foss-S/Alderson moved to adopt and approve the required findings for variances involving major structures or expansions as listed in the staff report. Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

C VAR 25-09

Public hearing and consideration of a request for a major variance to reduce the rear setback from eight feet to five feet and a front setback from fourteen feet to two feet at 211 Seward Street in the R-2 multifamily residential district. The property is also known as Lot One (1), Rigling Way Subdivision. The owner of record is the C&B Shoemaker Alaska Community Property Trust. The request is filed by Craig Shoemaker.

Davis introduced a request for a reduction in the rear setback from eight feet to five feet and a reduction in a front setback from 14 feet to two feet at 211 Seward Street to facilitate construction of a carport. A shed on the property was to be removed for the construction of the carport. The parcel in question had three fronts, which, along with the placement of the existing structure, made construction of a carport difficult.

Applicant Craig Shoemaker said that he wanted to receive the variance before contacting a contractor and that he hoped to build a structure that would fit two vehicles.

No public comment was received. During deliberation, the commission asked whether the proposal would exceed maximum lot coverage for the zone and if Rigling Way, the right-of-way adjacent to the front property line for which the setback was requested, was a public right-of-way. Davis said lot coverage was not to exceed the maximum for the zone and that Rigling Way was a public right-of-way.

M/Alderson-S/Foss moved to approve the zoning variance for a reduction to the rear setback from eight feet to five feet and the front setback from fourteen feet to two feet at 211 Seward Street in the R-2 multifamily residential district subject to the attached conditions of approval. The property was also known as Lot One (1), Rigling Way Subdivision. The request was filed by Craig Shoemaker. The owner of record was C&B Shoemaker Alaska Community Property Trust. Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

M/Alderson-S/Foss moved to adopt and approve the required findings for variances involving major structures or expansions as listed in the staff report. Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

D CUP 25-17

Public hearing and consideration of a request for a conditional use permit for a public transportation facility at 408 and 410 Oja Way in the CBD central business district. The properties are also known as Tract E, U.S. Survey 404 and the northern portion of Lot Four (4), Block Ten (10), U.S. Survey 1474. The owners of record are the Orthodox Church of America and Matt Lawrie. The request is filed by Chris McGraw (Sitka Dock Company).

Ainslie introduced a conditional use permit request for a public transportation facility at 408 and 410 Oja Way. The facility was to serve as a shuttle bus drop-off and pick-up location for cruise ship passengers from the Sitka Sound Cruise Terminal. The applicant was leasing both lots. 408 Oja Way had an office building on its premises that was to be demolished following the receipt of the conditional use permit; 410 Oja Way was a vacant lot. The applicant had also identified pedestrian use of 405 Etolin Way (not owned or leased by the applicant) and 402 Etolin Way (owned by the applicant) to route arriving passengers to the Lake and Lincoln Street intersection, as well as redevelopment plans for 402 Etolin Way, which included a three-story mixed use building (commercial and office space on the first floor, and twenty apartment units total on the second and third floors) and open space for tour vendors and/or food trucks.

Ainslie noted that the zone was a mixed use zone with some residential housing, schools, and police and fire departments nearby. Some residential uses in the vicinity were legal nonconforming uses. Ainslie provided an overview of the proposed traffic and pedestrian paths, which were included in the staff report and packet materials.

Ainslie provided staff's analysis regarding traffic, parking, noise and odor, impact to emergency services, location along major and collector streets, pedestrian and vehicular safety, emergency access, internal traffic layout, signage, and comprehensive plan guidance. She noted the complexity of the project, which would possibly have negative impacts to noise, odor, parking, and traffic in the area, but could also potentially positively impact some aspects of traffic safety and efficiency in the overall downtown area associated with current cruise passenger busing operations, namely pedestrian safety (jaywalking) and decreased bus traffic. Ainslie cited concerns raised by municipal public safety departments about air intake and noise impacts for the Police Department's building, and regarding right turning movements onto Lake Street from Oja Way given the blind corner at the intersection. Comprehensive plan guidance was provided and noted goals and objectives that both supported and opposed outcomes of the proposal. Ainslie also included guidance from the Sitka General Code regarding conditional uses in residential areas and weighing impacts to residential uses in mixed use zones, which had an effect similar to comprehensive plan guidance regarding its support and opposition to the proposal.

Ainslie also provided information to those who wished to give public comment. The information included criteria used by the commission to evaluate a conditional use permit request and the required findings that the commission had to make.

Following the staff report, applicant Chris McGraw said the proposal was meant to mitigate issues residents had been communicating for several years, including congestion near Harrigan Centennial Hall and jaywalking across Harbor Drive. He answered questions about a shuttle that would bring passengers from the proposed transportation facility to Centennial Hall and said he had met with Sitka School District personnel to discuss impacts to Xoots Elementary School. He provided information to the commission regarding a sound barrier, turning radii, and restroom facility plans.

22 members of the audience spoke under public comment. They were Leah Mason, Gabby Kelly, Quinlyn Holder, Roy Anderson, Jerry Dzigan, Karen Lucas, Devon Calvin, Kristina Cranston, Auriella Hughes, Tory O'Connell Curran, John Murray, Jack Navitsky, Suzan Brawnlyn, Linda Waller, Tommy Joseph, Phil Burdick, Larry Edwards, Klaudia Leccese, Darryl Rehkopf, Connie Kreiss, Bernadette Rasmussen, and Steve Fish. Ainslie read an additional five public comments into the record that had been received by the Planning Department after 5 p.m from Andrea Fraga, Linda Waller, Kaleb Aldred, Mel Beadle, and Nellie Lipscomb. 28 comments had been received and published in packet materials prior to the meeting's start. Those comments were submitted by Linda Behnken, Suzan Brawnlyn, Jeff Budd, Karen and Jere Christner, Kristina Cranston, Tory O'Connell Curran, Linda Danner, Jeff Farvour, Lexi Fish, Tess Heyburn, James Carter Hughes, Gabby Kelly, Nadalie Kennedy, Annemarie LaPalme, Laurinda Marcello, Leah Mason, Nancy Metashvili, Phyllis Mulligan, Jack Navitsky, Chandler O'Connell, Megan Pasternak, Robert Rose, Callie Simmons, Small Town SOUL, Jim Steffen, Carol Voisin, Bruce White, and Caitlin Woolsey.

All public comment heard at the meeting and received in writing was opposed to the request. Comments primarily cited increased air pollution and its impacts on the health of residents; private gardening and the horticulture program at Pacific High School; school uses in the surrounding area; noise disturbances from bus operations and the volume of passengers arriving the site; traffic issues, including increased traffic volumes in the area; safety of pedestrians and bike use on residential streets due to bus traffic and existing traffic pressures in the area related to school activities; increased jaywalking across Lake Street and client use of residential and/or narrow streets to leave and access the site; safety of bus turning movements at intersections; potential loss of on-street parking in the area; negative impacts to the existing character of the surrounding area, including impacts to uses and conditions such as residential uses, educational uses, vacation rentals, historical structures, and isolation from tourism-related impacts in the greater downtown area; impacts to public infrastructure (namely accelerated degradation of paving on Oja Way and increased maintenance needs); impacts to public safety facilities and operations in the surrounding area; and the loss of housing and an office building associated with the proposal. Public comments also noted other potential solutions to jaywalking and traffic issues in the downtown area during the visitor season, and a general sentiment regarding changes to the community that had resulted from recent growth of cruise tourism was expressed.

Immediately adjacent property owners/residents (Roy Anderson, 406 Oja Way; Christina Cranston and Tommy Joseph, 205 Monastery Street) testified that noise and privacy impacts would severely limit the enjoyment of their residences, and particularly outdoor areas. Cranston and Joseph noted that they would no longer be able to grow food for consumption on their property due to particulate pollution from bus operations. Joseph also noted that there was less than one foot between his home and the 410

Oja Way property line; the five windows on this side of his home would not be able to be opened, and the proposed fence would be two feet higher than his kitchen window. All property owners noted that they would no longer be able to live in or rent out their properties due to the impacts of the proposal. Written comment from another immediately adjacent property owner, Tess Heyburn of 207 Monastery Street, noted that there were four feet between the kitchen windows of the rental cottages on her property and the proposed fence on the shared property line with 410 Oja Way; she was concerned about the health effects from emissions on renters of the cottages, and stated that two of her repeat customers had already said they would not rent the cottages if the proposal went forward.

McGraw spoke again after public comment and said that the housing units at 402 Etolin Way were to be redeveloped regardless of the outcome of the conditional use permit due to the condition of the structures. He questioned the burden of proof to substantiate comments related to levels of harmful particulate pollution resulting from bus traffic.

During deliberation, commissioners said they did not believe the application met the requirements for the issuance of a conditional use permit due to noise, odor, pollution, and traffic safety and efficiency impacts that were either inadequately mitigated, could not be effectively mitigated, and/or lacked evidence by the applicant demonstrating they would not occur; negative impacts on the character of the surrounding area; and incompatibility with the comprehensive plan, particularly as it related to goals in the central business district for high density and infill development, as well as how downtown vibrancy would be negatively impacted in light of the seasonal, rather than year-round, use of the subject properties, as well as redevelopment that was likely to follow in the area. Draft findings were to be presented to the commission in January 2026 for consideration and approval.

The commission recessed at 10:12 p.m. and resumed its meeting at 10:18 p.m.

M/Alderson-S/Frank moved to deny the conditional use permit for a public transportation facility related to bus shuttling operations at 408 and 410 Oja Way in the central business district zone as the commission was not able to make the required findings for conditional use permits. The properties were also known as Tract E, and a northern portion of Block Four (4), Lot Ten (10), U.S. Survey 1474. The request was filed by Chris McGraw for Sitka Dock Company, LLC. The owners of record were Matt Lawrie and Orthodox Church of America, LLC, and further moved to postpone adoption of the findings for the decision to the January 21, 2026 Planning Commission meeting which was to constitute the date of final decision. Motion passed 4-0 by voice vote.

E MISC 25-19

Sitka Land Suitability and Feasibility Study Phase I Summary and Recommendations.

Acting Chair Sherman postponed the item for hearing at the January 21, 2026 Planning Commission meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Acting Chair Sherman adjourned the meeting at 10:36 p.m.