

PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 18, 2026 - 4:00PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Hubbard, Chair
Grant Izzi, Member
Cindy Perry, Member

ABSENT: Sam Angelides, Jr., Vice Chair
Mark Kanak, Member

STAFF PRESENT: Kristin Coman, Planning Manager
Ralf Brookes, City Attorney
Ginny Bodkin, Deputy City Clerk
Laura Canary, Community Development Director
Brandon Berry, Senior Planner
Luke Curtis, Building Official

Chair Hubbard called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Approval of the Agenda –

Motion: Member Perry moved, and Member Izzi seconded, to approve the May 18, 2026 agenda as presented; the motion carried unanimously.

2. Audience Comments – No one came forward to comment.

3. Approval of Minutes – Minutes April 20, 2026

Motion: Member Perry moved and Member Izzi seconded, to approve the April 20, 2026 minutes as presented; the motion carried unanimously.

4. Action Items – None.

5. Discussion Items -

a. Division 26 - Sign Ordinance

Senior Planner Brandon Berry explained that this item was requested at the last meeting. His presentation clarified that the City's last major amendment to its sign ordinance was in summer 2025 to bring it into compliance with a variety of legal rulings on content neutrality and to consolidate what was previously over a dozen sign districts down to four. The new ordinance complies with Reed v. Town of Gilbert (2015) and other significant court cases. Content-based regulations (e.g. difference between real estate and construction signs) were removed. One of the intents in the ordinance is to preserve/strengthen "time, place, manner" regulations and provide uniformity between zoning districts along Gulf Blvd and Blind Pass Rd. Initially the intent was to pass stricter sign compliance requirements for nonconforming signs but that was disrupted by SB 180 and removed from scope but can be discussed after conclusion of SB 180 in October 2027. Staff presented a variety of examples of recent sign repairs and replacements to solicit Board feedback.

Discussion followed. Current regulations require signs to be brought into compliance when

substantial repair or restoration occurs. Triggers for compliance include significant maintenance or damage, property redevelopment or demolition or extended vacancy or abandonment. New pole signs are not permitted under current City code. Existing pole signs are considered legal nonconforming structures. Concerns were expressed regarding public safety, particularly during storm events, and aesthetic impacts along major corridors. The potential long-term removal or conversion to monument-style signage was discussed.

The Board discussed the absence of a universal compliance deadline for nonconforming signs (excluding electronic message board signs). The City Attorney and staff reviewed the concept of amortization periods which are commonly used to require compliance over time while allowing property owners to recover investment. Typical timeframes in other jurisdictions range between several years. Staff provided an overview of SB 180 and its impacts, which limits the City's ability to adopt or enforce certain land development regulations following declared emergencies. Provisions may be extended based on qualifying storm activity; these constraints have delayed implementation of certain sign code changes.

Board members discussed the need for a clearly defined vision for signage within the City. Questions were raised about the desired level of uniformity, preferred sign types and design standards, and the balance between aesthetics and business flexibility. It was noted that prior Commission direction emphasized limited uniformity but did not establish strict design standards. Staff added that there had been consultant review, community engagement, and Commission direction when the ordinance was last updated. A suggestion was made to utilize a stakeholder or volunteer-based working group to review best practices from other municipalities, assist in developing updated standards, and support community consensus building. The members agreed that the City should revisit the sign code when allowed under state law. Before taking further regulatory action, the City should establish a clearer vision for signage. Consideration should be given to amortization schedules for nonconforming signs, particularly pole signs. Staff should prepare to act when legal constraints are lifted. Staff will re-engage the Board on existing sign code provisions and prior amendments and have further discussion to define long-term signage goals and policies. Exploration of potential working group or stakeholder engagement process was noted.

b. Updates to seawall standards

Building Official Luke Curtis explained that staff had been tasked with developing changes to clarify and streamline the process for approving administrative variances for seawalls. He reviewed the five current administrative variance criteria - when the property or existing/planned buildings have unique conditions and applying the rule would create a hardship; the hardship is not mainly financial; applying the rule would create a safety risk to the property or nearby properties; the hardship is not caused by the owner refusing to modify the site for required stormwater management, unless such modification would itself create a hardship that prevents reasonable use of the property; and the requested variance is the smallest change needed to address the hardship or safety issue.

Mr. Curtis reviewed potential changes being considered including adding language to the code to require caps on seawalls to be designed for future upgrades to the required height; granting a hardship variance if the cost to accommodate storm water exceeds 20% of the value of the primary structure; revising the criteria for administrative relief; setting a minimum elevation at 4' NAVD; and requiring new construction to make the seawall conforming.

Member Perry emphasized that the City's seawall regulations are outdated and fragmented, dating back approximately 65 years, with only limited updates since 1997. Different sections of the City's code appear to conflict or lack clarity. She pointed to inconsistencies such as requirements to retain stormwater on-site (e.g., 25-year, 24-hour storm standard) and provisions allowing water to be directed off-site via swales. She described the overall framework as confusing, difficult to interpret, and not user-friendly. She argued that the City may be addressing the wrong issue by focusing on creating more variance criteria instead of modernizing the underlying regulations. She opined that the City should shift from a case-by-case variance approach to a comprehensive, forward-looking resiliency strategy grounded in clear goals and consistent standards. She asked what the City is trying to achieve and opined that the goal should be building a sustainable, resilient community and suggested policy decisions should align with that long-term vision. She questioned the focus on developing new variance criteria (e.g., 20% thresholds), stating that the basis for some thresholds is unclear and variances are being used to "work around" a flawed system. She stressed the need for data, analysis, and planning and the need for post-storm evaluations and data-driven decision-making. She raised concerns about uneven seawall elevations between neighboring properties redirecting water onto lower adjacent properties. She advocated for a full review and modernization of the seawall and stormwater code, the use of best practices and standardized models, and the development of a long-term resiliency plan, rather than piecemeal fixes. Interim variance processes may still be needed but should not replace broader reform.

Community Development Director Laura Canary clarified that this item was narrowly focused on the variance and appeal process, not on changing the 5-foot seawall standard. The intent was procedural to fix gaps in how variances are handled and appealed. Storms did not change the seawall standard, but they accelerated redevelopment timelines and increased the number of properties needing improvement sooner than expected which created more cases where seawall issues are surfacing now rather than gradually. There was not a widespread failure of seawalls, but storms have influenced public perception and there is growing interest in moving faster toward compliance. Some property owners want to improve their seawalls but cannot feasibly meet the 5-foot requirement due to site constraints which are situations that are driving requests for variances. The City did not have a clear process to appeal administrative variance decisions and that needs to be addressed.

The Board appreciated staff's work and efforts and felt that the best direction was to pursue a two-track approach by fixing procedural gaps (variance and appeals process) and long term to step back and rebuild the regulatory framework with a clear vision, consistent standards, and a strategic resiliency plan. The discussion made clear that process improvements alone are not enough, a broader policy and code overhaul is needed.

Member Izzi requested more information on the status of sidewalks and walkability and timelines either in the meeting or one on one with staff.

6. Adjournment - Next meeting June 22, 2026.

There being no further business, Chair Hubbard adjourned the meeting at 5:30 PM.

These minutes were approved at the June 22, 2026 meeting of the Planning Board.