THE OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY OF GERING PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING, OCTOBER 6, 2026

A regular meeting of the City of Gering Planning Commission was held in open session on October 6, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Gering City Hall Council Chambers at 1025 P Street, Gering, NE. Present were Commissioners Crews, Miles, Taylor, Hauck, C. Kaufman, T. Kaufman, Keener, Waterman. Absent: Commissioner Alvazar. Notice of the meeting was given in advance by publication in the Star-Herald on September 24, 2026 and the agenda was posted on the City's website on October 1, 2026, pursuant to the designated method of giving notice by the Planning Commission. All proceedings hereafter were taken while the meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

Call to Order and Roll Call:
Chair Keener called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and noted that a quorum of the Planning Commission was present and business could be conducted.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Open Meetings Act - Neb. Rev. Stat. Chapter 84, Article14

Chair Keener stated that as required by State Law, public bodies shall make available copies of the current Open Meetings Act in the meeting room. There are printed versions of the Open Meetings Act on the counter by the press corps. Agenda items may be moved up or down on the agenda at the discretion of the Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson. Additions may not be made to this agenda less than 24 hours before the beginning of the meeting unless they are considered under this section of the agenda and the Planning Commission determines that the matter requires emergency action.

3. Approval of Minutes of the September 15, 2026, regular Planning Commission meeting

Chair Keener noted one correction to the minutes of the September 15, 2026, Regular Planning Commission meeting. On page 2, in the third paragraph, Commissioner Miles was incorrectly listed among the "Nays" but had been absent from the meeting. The correction was made. Chair Keener then entertained a motion to approve the minutes as corrected.

A motion was made by Commissioner C. Kaufman to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2026 regular Planning Commission meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Miles. There was no discussion. The Secretary called the roll. "AYES": Keener, T. Kaufman, Miles, Taylor, Hauck, Waterman, C. Kaufman and Crews. "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Alvazar. Motion carried.

4. Current Business:

A. Public Hearing to consider a Conditional Use Permit for a Boutique Wedding and Events Venue to be located at Lot 12 & 13, Block 23, Gardners Addition Replat, City of Gering, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska.

i. Approve, deny or table Resolution PC 10-26-1 granting a Conditional Use Permit

Chair Keener opened the public hearing at 6:03 p.m. to consider a conditional use permit for a boutique wedding and events venue at Lots 12 and 13, Block 23, Gardners Addition Replat, City of Gering, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. City Engineer Annie Folck presented the staff recommendation and reviewed the applicable criteria for consideration of the request.

Ms. Folck explained that the applicant did not yet own the property but was in the process of purchasing it contingent upon approval of the conditional use permit. The property contains a former church building located near the edge of the RM residential zoning district, across Q Street from the middle school. Because the zoning code does not specifically define an event center as a land use, staff classified the proposed use as an indoor recreation and entertainment facility, which requires a conditional use permit in the RM district. This classification allows the City to establish conditions to address potential impacts and ensure compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood.

Ms. Folck reviewed the property's access, parking, refuse and service areas, utilities, screening, signage, required yards, and compatibility with the surrounding area.

Regarding access, Ms. Folck stated that the property has no off-street parking but provides adequate pedestrian access from the sidewalk, including ADA-accessible ramps and access to public rights-of-way. Parking was identified as the primary consideration for the proposed use, which could accommodate weddings and other events with approximately 150 or more attendees. Although parking is available across the street, those lots are privately owned, and the owners have indicated that they do not permit others to use them. Under the zoning code, an assembly use requires one parking space for every four seats. The code also allows one-third of the on-street parking spaces within 600 feet of the property to count toward the parking requirement. Ms. Folck reported that approximately 285 on-street parking spaces were available within that distance, including diagonal parking and parallel parking throughout the surrounding neighborhoods. Accordingly, approximately 95 spaces could be counted toward the parking requirement, providing sufficient capacity for an estimated 380 people under the code's calculation. Ms. Folck noted that parking could become a concern when events coincide with school activities, particularly football or basketball games, but otherwise believed adequate parking was available in the area.

Regarding refuse and service areas, Ms. Folck identified an existing alley behind the property where dumpsters are currently located. The applicant would be responsible for obtaining commercial trash service and paying for any additional dumpsters or pickups as needed. The application also indicated that refuse and service areas would be maintained in a clean and orderly condition.

Ms. Folck stated that the property was already served by water, gas, sewer, and electricity, and no new utility connections were anticipated. She did not recommend additional screening because the existing building, setbacks, and lawn were consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. Regarding signage, she recommended that the applicant reuse the existing monument sign or install a replacement of the same dimensions in the same location. She noted that the existing sign was appropriately positioned on the corner property without obstructing traffic visibility. A citizen attendee noted that the sign was illuminated, and Ms. Folck acknowledged the information. She further stated that the required yards and setbacks were satisfied and that the property was compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood. Ms. Folck added that an appropriate new use could help ensure the building remained well maintained.

Ms. Folck reviewed the Comprehensive Plan and explained that the area was identified primarily as a neighborhood district. Although the property was zoned residential, staff believed the proposed use could be compatible with the neighborhood if appropriate conditions were established to preserve its residential character.

Ms. Folck then presented staff's recommended conditions for the conditional use permit, noting that the Planning Commission could modify the proposed conditions or add others based on concerns raised during the public hearing.

The first recommended condition was to limit events to 200 people or fewer. Ms. Folck explained that, although discussions with the applicant suggested that events would generally be smaller, establishing a maximum occupancy would provide a clear limit for future events. In response to a question about the building's maximum capacity, Ms. Folck stated that she was unsure of the exact limit under fire code. The applicant indicated that the capacity was approximately 200 people. Commissioners discussed whether a larger gathering would require standing room. The applicant stated that the business was intended to focus on

smaller, boutique-style weddings, with a preferred maximum attendance of approximately 150 to 175 people rather than large events.

Ms. Folck reiterated the recommendation that any replacement sign maintain the existing sign's size, dimensions, and location, noting that a large billboard was not necessary for the proposed business.

The final recommended condition was that no events take place between 1:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m., with all events concluded and attendees departed by 1:00 a.m. Ms. Folck clarified that this time restriction was her recommendation rather than a requirement established in the Comprehensive Plan. She noted that 1:00 a.m. was a typical closing time for bars and other establishments, and suggested that an earlier cutoff could be considered because the property was located in a residential zone. She further explained that the restriction would apply to events and would not prohibit staff from being on-site before or after those hours for setup, cleaning, or other preparations.

Ms. Folck concluded by inviting the Planning Commission to consider additional conditions or modifications to the staff recommendations in response to concerns raised during the public hearing. She noted that the applicant was present and could provide further information about the intended use of the property. Chair Keener then invited Planning Commission members to ask Engineer Folck questions.

Commissioner Waterman asked whether noise restrictions would apply to events at the proposed venue. Engineer Folck stated that no specific noise condition had been proposed but that one could be added if the Planning Commission deemed it necessary. She explained that noise restrictions could be difficult to measure but suggested using a standard under which noise from the venue, measured at the property line, could not exceed the sound of passing traffic. This approach would allow staff to evaluate compliance using a noise meter. Chair Keener noted the proximity of the football stadium and questioned whether additional noise restrictions would be appropriate given the existing noise associated with stadium events. Ms. Folck acknowledged the concern but noted that the venue's proximity to neighboring residences could warrant consideration of noise impacts. Ms. Folck also noted that the City's existing nuisance ordinances would address excessive noise.

Commissioner Hauck asked whether alcohol would be served or permitted at events. Ms. Folck deferred the question to the applicant, who would be better able to describe the proposed operations.

With no further questions for Engineer Folck, Chair Keener invited the applicant to approach the podium. Applicant Hilary Strom introduced herself, her husband, Randy Strom, and their daughters, Ella and Emma. She requested approval of a conditional use permit for the property at 1650 9th Street in Gering, where the family planned to establish a business called The Little Chapel at 1650. Mrs. Strom explained that their vision was to preserve the character and history of the former church while giving the building a new purpose as a place for people to gather.

Mrs. Strom stated that the idea developed while her family was searching for a chapel-style wedding venue for their engaged daughter. Recognizing the limited availability of such venues, the family saw an opportunity to create a space where their daughter and other community members could hold weddings in the chapel and receptions in the fellowship hall. She emphasized that the business would focus on smaller, more intimate weddings, generally accommodating approximately 100 people in the chapel and no more than 175 people overall. The intent was not to establish a large entertainment facility or high-traffic commercial operation, but rather to host scheduled private events, primarily weddings on evenings and weekends, as well as birthday parties and other small gatherings.

Mrs. Strom acknowledged the property's location in a residential neighborhood and stated that the family understood the importance of being good neighbors. They would oversee parking, noise, guest arrivals and departures, lighting, and trash service, and would comply with conditions established by the City. As a Gering native with family in the community, she viewed the project as an investment in the area that would preserve the existing structure and provide a gathering place for residents. She thanked the Planning Commission for considering the application.

Randy Strom, 2920 Applewood Road, addressed the Commission. In response to the earlier question about alcohol, he noted they had not yet fully considered whether alcohol would be part of the business. Hilary Strom explained that she had contacted the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission for information but had not applied for any permits. Mr. Strom clarified that serving alcohol would not be a primary component of their business model but that they wanted to allow it as an option for customers.

Commissioner Waterman asked whether the City would have authority over alcohol use or whether the matter would be governed by the State. Ms. Folck explained that the applicants would need to comply with all applicable Nebraska Liquor Control Commission requirements, but the Planning Commission could establish additional or more restrictive conditions regarding alcohol if desired. Commissioner T. Kaufman observed that this would apply if the applicants intended to serve alcohol and questioned whether allowing customers to bring their own alcohol would fall under the Commission's authority.

Commissioner Hauck then asked about the building's seating arrangements. Mr. Strom stated that the purchase agreement requested that the existing pews, round tables, and chairs remain in the building. Hilary Strom confirmed that the existing seating was intact, including the seating in the fellowship hall. When asked about food preparation, the applicants explained that the property contained a large, well-maintained kitchen that could be made available for customers to use or for outside caterers. The applicants did not intend to prepare or serve food themselves but hoped to work with local caterers, florists, and other businesses to support the community. They indicated that customers could arrange their own food service or catering.

Parking was raised as a concern by Commissioner Miles, particularly when school activities or other community events like Oregon Trail Days coincided with weddings. Hilary Strom acknowledged the potential for conflicts and noted that parking near the junior high school might provide additional options, although she recognized that certain events could create congestion. She believed that significant parking conflicts would not occur frequently but had considered the issue.

Commissioner Crews asked whether the applicants might consider providing valet parking or having a staff member assist guests with parking farther from the venue during particularly busy periods. Hilary Strom stated that they had not previously considered that option but would be willing to explore it if needed.

Commissioner Taylor expressed additional concern about parking availability if plans for a new middle school were approved, noting that parking currently available along the existing school grounds could be affected. Ms. Folck responded that the school plans also included a substantial new parking lot. Commissioner Taylor reiterated concerns about the loss of parking previously used by the church and noted that the surrounding area was already experiencing parking difficulties following changes in property ownership.

Commissioner T. Kaufman asked how long the building had been used as a church. A response indicated that it had been a church for approximately 100 years, including its former use as St. Timothy's Episcopal Church.

Commissioner Hauck asked whether the applicants anticipated hosting potentially controversial events, such as political gatherings involving Republican or Democratic groups. Hilary Strom responded that the venue could be available for business events or conferences, depending on the nature of the event. Ms. Folck noted that the Planning Commission could not regulate the use of the venue based on the political nature of an event.

Chair Keener then asked whether anyone else in the Council Chambers wished to speak regarding the application and invited those wishing to comment to approach the podium and state their name and address.

Linda Landrigan, 190497 Highway 92, Scottsbluff, addressed the Commission in support of the application. Ms. Landrigan stated that her husband had started the church more than 20 years earlier and that the building had hosted numerous showers, parties, funerals, weddings, and graduation parties. She noted that she had never received complaints about parking difficulties at those events and questioned whether parking would be as significant a concern as anticipated. Ms. Landrigan described the building as quaint and appropriately sized for smaller weddings, noting that a family from another large church had chosen the venue for their daughter's wedding because of its intimate character. She also highlighted the rooms available for wedding parties to

prepare and change clothes and the large kitchen capable of accommodating events. She stated that the proposed use would be a unique addition to Gering and the surrounding area, benefiting both local residents and visitors from outside the community.

Mary Jane Dishman, 1315 O Street, Gering, also spoke in support of the application. She agreed with the previous speaker and stated that the proposed venue would offer a smaller, quieter alternative to other event facilities in the area. Ms. Dishman expressed support for preserving the building's longstanding wholesome, family-oriented atmosphere and emphasized the importance of finding an operator who would continue to care for the property responsibly. She stated that the building had been owned by the church since 2007 and had served the community through weddings, funerals, and other gatherings. She noted that funerals had accommodated more than 200 people, with meals served on-site, demonstrating the building's capacity to host larger gatherings when needed. She further commented that weddings bring visitors from other communities and out of state, benefiting the local economy. Ms. Dishman concluded that the proposed venue would provide a valuable place for families and community members to gather and would be a positive addition to Gering.

With no further public comments, Chair Keener closed the public hearing at 6:33 p.m. and entertained a motion to approve, deny, or table Resolution PC10-26-1, granting a conditional use permit for a boutique wedding and events venue at Lots 12 and 13, Block 23, Gardner's Addition Replat, City of Gering, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska.

Commissioner T. Kaufman made a motion to approve granting a Conditional Use Permit including staff recommended conditions for a Boutique Wedding and Events Venue to be located at Lots 12 & 13, Block 23, Gardners Addition Replat, City of Gering, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. The motion was seconded by Commissioner C. Kaufman. There was no further discussion. The Secretary called the roll. "AYES": Crews, Taylor, Waterman, Miles, Keener, C. Kaufman, T. Kaufman and Hauck. "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Alvazar. Motion carried.

5. City Engineer Report

City Engineer Folck provided the engineer's report and apologized for previously indicating that the Commission would not need to meet again for several weeks. She explained that a new item had been submitted, requiring another meeting in two weeks to consider a blight study for the property at the corner of Five Rocks Road and Country Club Road, where a physical therapy facility was being proposed. Ms. Folck stated that the blight study would be the first step toward making the property eligible for tax increment financing (TIF), with a TIF application expected to follow. She encouraged commissioners to mark their calendars and noted that the blight study would be the only item on the next meeting's agenda. She added that the City continued to accept applications for future meetings.

6. OPEN COMMENT: Discussion or action by the Planning Commission regarding unscheduled business will not take place. This section is for citizen comment only.

Chair Keener opened the public comment period, noting that no discussion or action on unscheduled business would take place and that the period was for citizen comments only.

Mary Jane Dishman, 1350 O Street, Gering, addressed the Commission regarding the middle school. Ms. Dishman stated that she had worked at the school approximately eight or nine years earlier and believed the building had been in poor condition at that time and may have deteriorated further since. She expressed concern about potential safety hazards, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient parking, noting that she had experienced the parking difficulties while working with special education students. Ms. Dishman encouraged community members to support the proposed school improvements, emphasizing the importance of investing in children and providing them with adequate and safe facilities. She acknowledged concerns about public

spending, particularly among senior citizens, but stressed that investing in schools was necessary because future generations would continue to need them. She concluded by encouraging the community to support the school proposal.

7. Adjourn

A motion was made by Commissioner C. Kaufman to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Miles. There was no discussion. The Secretary called the roll. "AYES": Crews, Miles, Taylor, C. Kaufman, Keener, T. Kaufman, Hauck, Waterman. "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Alvazar. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

Levi Keener, Chairman

ATTEST:

Karen Heins, Administrative Secretary