

**CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS  
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING  
31555 W ELEVEN MILE ROAD  
FARMINGTON HILLS, MICHIGAN  
MAY 21, 2026 7:30 P.M.**

**CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

The Planning Commission Regular Meeting was called to order by Chair Lindquist at 7:30 p.m.

**ROLL CALL**

Commissioners present: Brickner, Countegan, Grant, Lindquist, Mantey, Stimson, Trafelet, Ware

Commissioners Absent: None

Others Present: City Planner Mulville-Friel, Staff Engineer Dawkins, City Attorney Schultz, Planning Consultant Auerbach (Carlisle Wortman)

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**MOTION by Stimson, supported by Trafelet, to approve the agenda as published.**

**Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**A. SITE PLAN APPROVAL 69-11-2025**

**LOCATION: 35080 Grand River Avenue**  
**PARCEL I.D.: 22-23-21-351-031**  
**PROPOSAL: Redevelop a 6.8-acre site to establish a “Customer Experience Center” for used vehicle sales and purchases within the B-3, General Business District**  
**ACTION REQUESTED: Site Plan Approval**  
**APPLICANT: Carvana, LLC (Brendan Weak, Authorized Representative)**  
**OWNER: R S Grand River LLC**

**Planner review**

Referencing the May 12, 2026 Carlisle Wortman Site Plan Review, Planning Consultant Auerbach gave the background and review for this request for site plan approval to redevelop a 6.8-acre site located north of Grand River Avenue and East of Drake Road, to establish a Carvana “Customer Experience Center”. The site was previously used as an auto dealership that had two principal buildings with interior sales space, service bays, and storage areas.

Carvana primarily sells vehicles online, and the center would be used to deliver vehicles that were sold online to customers. There would also be minor vehicle detailing and receiving of trade-ins and returns on-site.

Planning Consultant Auerbach made the following points:

- 80-100 vehicles will be stored on site at a time.
- Facility hours of operation will be 7:00 am-9:00 pm.
- Public hours of operation will vary.
- There will be 30-40 staff and three managers on site.

- On-site detailing will consist of cleaning, rinsing, inspections, and minor equipment adjustments.
- The western building is approximately 28,600 square feet, and previously contained a showroom, service bays, and a washing area.
- The eastern building is approximately 7,500 square feet, and previously was used as office storage and additional service space.
- The northern portion of the site contains a gravel section with a small telecommunications building that is in use and will remain.
- The site is zoned B-3 General Business. The property to the north of the site is zoned B-3 General Business, but the northernmost portion of the site abuts property that is zoned L-1 Light Industrial. The property to the east of the site is zoned L-1 Light Industrial; the property to the west is zoned B-3 General Business.
- The uses to the east of the site include an indoor recreation facility, a dance school, and smaller commercial establishments. North of the site is a stormwater retention pond that serves the site and adjacent properties. The property to the west contains a McDonald's. South of the site is Grand River Avenue and the City of Farmington.
- The site configuration will remain largely unchanged. Parking lot islands will be added around the perimeter of the building that will define parking bays and drive aisles within the site. Parking bays along the western lot line will add separation between the parking lot and the lot line and will accommodate additional landscaping.
- The site is accessible by one divided driveway from Grand River Avenue and an existing cross-access drive from the McDonald's on the southern property line.
- There is a cross-access easement along the western lot line that does not appear to be traveled.
- There is an access easement from the driveway on Grand River Avenue to the telecommunications building.

Planning Consultant Auerbach explained that the primary consideration for the Commission was to determine whether the proposed use was permitted in the B-3 General Business district. Some automotive sales related use categories are permitted in the District including a new or used car sales room, show room, or office when the main use is carried on within a building with an open air display of vehicles as an accessory; and outdoor space for the sale or rental of new or used motor vehicles, trailers, mobile homes, boats, recreation vehicles, and similar products.

The proposed use differs from traditional auto sales establishments because, at traditional auto sales establishments, customers browse and purchase cars on site, and Carvana customers browse and purchase cars online.

An additional use category permitted in the B-3 General Business district allows other commercial uses that are similar to and no more objectionable character than other uses permitted in the district. The Commission should determine whether the proposed use of land impact would be comparable to permitted uses, particularly auto sales-related uses, including whether the typical number of vehicles stored on site and the on-site operations are comparable to permitted uses.

The primary difference between the proposed use and traditional auto sales establishments is the online sales activity, but the functionality of the site is similar to that of traditional auto sales establishments.

The Commission could consider characteristics used to evaluate traditional auto sales establishments, including traffic, trip generation, noise, and lighting. The Commission could impose conditions as part of approval to ensure that the use remains consistent with their findings, including a condition to prevent the site from being used for intensive auto repairs.

The previous auto dealership had auto repair stalls and registered underground tanks associated with auto repair on-site. The applicant has indicated that the intensive auto repair facilities will be closed and removed in accordance with State requirements.

A condition as part of approval would ensure that future intensive auto repair facilities would require a special land use review.

Planning Consultant Auerbach recommended making a condition as part of approval that limited the number of vehicles on site to the amount proposed by the applicant, and specified that no outdoor storage is allowed in the required setbacks or off-site, to ensure compliance with ordinance requirements.

Planning Consultant Auerbach explained that the site plan designates how different parking spaces will be used. Parking areas will be dedicated to customer parking adjacent to the western building, employee parking areas, and inventory. Inventory cannot be displayed within a required setback.

Existing onsite parking spaces encroach into a side yard setback. Additional landscape islands along the western lot line will add the required separation.

Because the number of required parking spaces for an auto dealership is based on the usable sales room floor area and the number of auto service stalls, which are not detailed in the site plan, the number of required parking spaces cannot be determined. There will be roughly 302 parking spaces on site, which are anticipated to meet ordinance requirements.

Fifteen parking spaces in the northeast corner of the site will be extended and dedicated for single-car haulers. The applicant should more fully describe what this entails.

The ordinance requires loading spaces to be provided in the rear yard, but the Commission has the discretion to allow loading spaces in a side yard if there are practical limitations that prevent loading spaces from being located in a rear yard, as long as the loading spaces are adequately screened. The proposed loading spaces location is between the two existing buildings and is set back significantly from the Grand River Avenue right-of-way, and appears to be sufficiently screened and set back.

Planning Consultant Auerbach noted that the Commission might want to consider whether the proposed tractor-trailer turning area is adequate.

A required pedestrian connection to the right-of-way was not shown on the plan. The ordinance allows the Commission to waive the connection requirement if there are practicality issues with providing the connection or if the Commission determines that the connection would not be utilized.

The proposed plan generally meets ordinance landscaping requirements. Parking lot islands with canopy trees will be added around the building perimeters. 57 trees are required, and 58 are provided, including 8 existing trees. The applicant has provided smaller shrub vegetation along the Grand River Avenue right-of-way, and the proposed varieties meet the ordinance's height and spacing requirements.

The applicant provided an inventory of the existing trees. Seven existing trees will be removed, including some invasive species. No landmark trees will be removed.

Lighting will include 10 building-mounted fixtures between 10'-20' in height. The applicant will utilize 22 existing light poles, and fixtures will be mounted between 22'-26' in height. The proposed fixtures meet the ordinance's maximum height requirements, but there are some deviations relative to the lighting plan, and additional lighting plan updates need to be submitted.

Deviations include illumination levels that exceed the maximum level permitted along the lot line in several locations. The maximum illumination level on the western lot line is approximately 4.8 foot candles. The maximum illumination level on the southern lot line is approximately 1.8 foot candles. The maximum illumination level on the eastern lot line is approximately 3.2 foot candles. The maximum illumination level permitted by the ordinance is 0.3 foot candles, but the Commission can allow greater illumination if it provides a public safety benefit.

Planning Consultant Auerbach explained that the ordinance requires any existing building to be brought into compliance with design requirements if there are exterior facade modifications beyond a one-for-one replacement of windows and doors. The applicant's narrative states that they will perform a facelift, but does not clarify the extent of exterior modifications. If the modifications require that the buildings be brought into compliance, some waivers would be required, including for exterior material requirements for facades facing a public right-of-way, and requirements for fenestration visible from the right-of-way. There are insufficient elevation details to evaluate necessary waivers at this time.

The site is located in a special planning area where public art is required for projects with a cost of \$2 million or greater. The estimate for the proposed site plan is approximately \$400,000, and public art will not be required.

### **Commissioner questions**

Commissioner Mantey raised concerns that lighting from the site previously illuminated the apartments across the street.

In response to questions from Commissioner Mantey, Planning Consultant Auerbach acknowledged that illumination levels had been calculated and not measured. If a waiver was not granted, staff could perform a zoning compliance inspection and measure illumination levels. Additionally, if a waiver was not granted, the applicant would need to submit an updated lighting plan that demonstrates compliance with the ordinance. Planning Consultant Auerbach added that the lighting plan did not include shielding specifications.

In response to a question from Commissioner Ware, Planning Consultant Auerbach explained that the proposed use was different enough from a traditional dealership to require a site plan review, and the

Commission could determine whether the proposed use should be permitted as a car sales use or as a similar use.

Commissioner Ware noted that many car sales begin online, and traditional dealerships were operating similar to the Carvana sales model.

City Attorney Schultz explained that if the Commission determined that the proposed use met the definition of an auto dealership, or was similar enough to a traditional dealership to meet the similar use requirement, then the proposed use would be regulated the same as a traditional dealership.

Chair Lindquist asked why lighting would be required after business hours if there are no on-site sales.

Commissioner Stimson agreed that online car sales were the norm, and that Carvana was similar to other auto dealerships. A kiosk could be used for onsite browsing, but a kiosk would still be an online process.

City Attorney Schultz clarified that the Commission had to determine whether the proposed use was permitted by the zoning ordinance before considering the details of the site plan.

Commissioner Countegan suggested that the existing ordinance language might need to be updated to reflect current market conditions.

Commissioner Brickner noted that the existing buildings were built prior to current ordinance requirements, and the Commission should consider whether current ordinance requirements were met, including lighting, dumpster enclosures, ADA parking, and rooftop screening requirements.

Planning Consultant Auerbach pointed out that the intent of the ordinance was to allow legal existing nonconformities to continue but to encourage the gradual elimination of nonconformities over time, whenever a site plan review is required.

In response to a question from Commissioner Mantey, City Attorney Schultz clarified that approval conditions would ensure the approved use would not change or expand in the future.

### **Applicant presentation**

Attorney Dennis Cowan PC, 2716 Trafford, Royal Oak, was present on behalf of this application for site plan review. Project Manager Emily Garcia, Carvana, and Project Engineer Jamie Antoniewicz, Atwell, were also present.

Mr. Cowan made the following points:

- Carvana chose the site because of its size, former use as a car dealership, accessibility, ample parking, and a large existing building that will be used to prep vehicles before pick-up or delivery.
- The site would not have a Carvana tower.
- The applicant believed the use met the definition of the ordinance as a used car operation with an office, with a main use carried on within the building consisting of vehicle preparation and

transaction completion, and with the open-air display of vehicles consisting of vehicles stored on a temporary basis.

- The proposed use was a similar commercial use to uses permitted in the district and was not of a more objectionable nature, with no body repair, spray painting, car sales, mechanics, diagnostic testing, muffler repair, or oil changes on site. The proposed use would produce less noise and traffic, less odor, and be more environmentally safe than a traditional dealership. Cars that were received as a trade-in would be removed from the site and taken to a reconditioning and repair hub in Flint.
- Carvana would look like a car dealership, and most people would call Carvana a car dealership.
- Carvana did not have any issues with the proposed conditions, except that they asked that there would not be a restriction on the number of vehicles on the site. The 80-100 vehicle estimate in the submittal documents was informational and an average amount. The maximum amount could spike. Analysis showed that about 200 spaces would be available for cars, and the applicant would like to be able to utilize all of the available spaces when necessary. The number of available spaces was one reason that the site was chosen.
- There would not be a change to the footprint of the two existing buildings. Carvana would only use the main building at this time. Carvana is aware that any future use of the smaller building would require Planning Commission review.
- The cost of site improvements was about \$400,000 and was not within the public art requirement.
- There were no underground tanks on the site, and the above-ground storage tanks had been removed. The existing hoists were above-ground only and were also going to be removed. There is no existing car wash equipment.

Mr. Antoniewicz, Atwell, made the following points:

- Few changes were required to make the site operational, and additional parking lot islands and landscaping would bring the site more into compliance. There are mature trees on the southwest corner of the entrance. The applicant will plant trees in the southeast portion of the site.
- The applicant was requesting operational lighting. The site was surrounded by commercial property, and the existing light pole locations made meeting light level requirements at the property line difficult. Carvana requested consideration for light levels that exceeded the requirements. There would not be spotlights on the apartments. Existing pole-mounted floodlights would be removed from the site.
- Lighting will be reduced to 70% during non-operational hours, and facade lighting will be turned off. Some lighting will remain on for safety and security.
- The existing rooftop mechanical units were not observable from Grand River Avenue, and the applicant requested consideration for the screening requirement.
- A facelift of the building would include painting and repairs as needed, including the possibility of replacing some stairs, but the building configuration would remain unchanged.

In response to a question from Chair Lindquist, Ms. Garcia said the cost of the facelift was not yet known. Chair Lindquist pointed out that the cost of the facelift and the cost of exterior work on the second building should be added to the cost of the project for consideration of the public art requirement.

### **Commissioner questions**

In response to questions from the Commission, the applicant team gave the following further information:

- Operational hours in the documentation would be the maximum number of hours, but there might be flexibility in hours of operation throughout the year. Site lighting was needed for employees managing inventory. Reduced lighting during non-operational hours was needed for security purposes.
- Inventory would typically range from 100 to 200 vehicles.
- Operational hours were 7:00 am-9:00 pm, and public hours were 8:00 am-9:00 pm.
- The increased inventory estimate of 100-200 vehicles allowed for an increase in business and matched potential storage.
- The proposed location of the turning area for multi-vehicle delivery vehicles was based on limitations of the site, including the turning radius around the building.
- The average of 80-100 vehicles would be moved within 24 to 72 hours, requiring 4-6 multi-vehicle delivery vehicle trips on site per day. This estimate was similar to multi-vehicle delivery trips at traditional dealerships.
- New signage was proposed but not shown on the elevations. The applicant would apply for a sign permit separately.
- Carvana was requesting that a loading area be allowed in a side yard and was also requesting that the proposed illumination levels be approved.
- The site plan did not include a pedestrian connection because they felt a pedestrian connection was not needed, but they were open to input about including a pedestrian connection.
- Carvana was asking for consideration of the existing building materials and asking for relief from adding additional rooftop screening.
- As stated, the project cost was below the public art requirement.
- The dumpster would be screened.
- In response to a question from Commissioner Mantey, Mr. Antoniewicz said the applicant was requesting that ADA parking would not be required at the unused building.
- There were 300 parking spaces on site. The applicant estimated that 100 parking spaces would be used by customers, employees, and vendors, and proposed using the remaining 200 parking spaces for inventory.

Planning Consultant Auerbach said the Commission could determine that there are not sufficient changes to warrant additional rooftop screening, and that no additional screening is required.

A condition limiting vehicle storage was proposed for the Commission's deliberation. However, the site plan itself could be considered as an adequate record of the number of parking spaces. The applicant would be limited to the approved number of parking spaces by default and could not store inventory in the setback.

Commissioner Countegan noted that a decision to consider the proposed use as a dealership could lead to updating the ordinance to reflect the current market and was simpler than a decision to consider the proposed use as a similar use, which required justification. Commissioner Mantey agreed that other car dealerships operated similarly to Carvana.

Chair Lindquist noted that a traditional dealership would not have a limit on inventory, but would be limited by the number of parking spaces they were required to have.

Planning Consultant Auerbach said the site plan designated 50 parking spaces for employees and 15 parking spaces for customers, which met the ordinance requirement. The site plan allowed up to 235 parking spaces for inventory.

In response to a question from Commissioner Ware, Planning Consultant Auerbach said that a parking space use condition was proposed for consideration if the Commission determined that the proposed use was not a traditional dealership. A parking space use analysis was important if the use was considered similar to an auto dealership, in order to answer questions such regarding where customers and employees would park.

In response to a question from Chair Lindquist, Ms. Garcia said that auto sales sold through the site would be Farmington Hills revenue-generating sales.

In response to a question from Commissioner Brickner, City Attorney Schultz said the Commission reviews the plan to determine whether there is sufficient parking and whether the plan meets ordinance requirements, including customer and employee parking.

Planning Consultant Auerbach suggested adding a determination to the motion that handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the east building are not required until a use is permitted for that building.

**Motion by Stimson, support by Countegan to grant preliminary site plan approval for the Carvana SP 69-11-2025 proposal based on the information provided by the applicants, the May 12, 2026 Carlisle/Wortman review letter, the May 8, 2026 City Engineer review letter, the May 1, 2026 Fire Marshal review letter, and the findings that the proposal meets the requirements of Section 34-6.1 of the City of Farmington Hills Zoning Ordinance and applicable Zoning Ordinance requirements subject to the following:**

- *Use Determination*  
The proposed use qualifies as an outdoor display for sale or rental of new or used motor vehicles, trailers, mobile homes, boats, recreation vehicles, or other similar products.
- *Loading Space*  
The loading space may be permitted in the side yard as proposed. Site conditions limit the space available in the rear yard, and the side yard location is adequately set back and screened from the street.
- *Illumination Levels*  
The applicant must submit a revised lighting plan that demonstrates compliance with the 0.3 footcandle property line illumination limit. Additional illumination does not provide public safety benefits and may be a nuisance to drivers and adjacent properties.
- *Pedestrian Connection*  
The required pedestrian connection must be provided. The applicant has not demonstrated that it is impractical to provide the connection.
- *Design Requirements*

Provided that no significant façade modifications beyond one-for-one window replacements are proposed, the buildings do not need to be brought into compliance with Section 34-5.20 design requirements.

**This approval is subject to the following conditions and determinations, based upon the Commission's finding that the proposed use is a new or used car dealership:**

- No inoperable, damaged, wrecked, or visibly derelict vehicles will be stored on site.
- Vehicle carrier unloading will only take place in the approved side loading area; no unloading/staging in Grand River, drive aisles, or required setbacks is permitted.
- No outdoor display/storage of inventory is permitted in required setbacks.
- All items identified in the May 12, 2026 Carlisle/Wortman review letter shall be addressed to the reasonable satisfaction of the City Planner.
- All items identified in the May 8, 2026 City Engineer review letter shall be addressed to the reasonable satisfaction of the City Engineer.
- All items identified in the May 1, 2026 Fire Marshal review letter shall be addressed to the reasonable satisfaction of the Fire Marshal.
- Additional rooftop screening is not required.
- Handicapped parking spaces adjacent to the east building are not required until a use is permitted for that building.

**Commissioner discussion**

Commissioner Grant noted concerns about the accuracy of the applicant's estimated costs. Commissioner Mantey agreed with those concerns, noting that the public art requirement should be enforced if the City was able to identify an increased value of \$2 million.

Chair Lindquist felt strongly that a condition that "no body work, painting, collision repair, engine rebuilding, mechanical repair, or major reconditioning will be conducted" should be included in the motion. Commissioner Countegan observed that the condition was not relevant to the determined use. Commissioner Ware said that a business should not be prevented from doing what's normal for their type of business.

Chair Lindquist argued that the applicant does not call the site a dealership, and that the applicant has stated that they would not be doing the activities listed in the condition. The condition was important to establish the new model type of dealership described by the applicants as a sales center only, and not a repair center.

Commissioner Countegan noted that the Commission was making a use determination that the use was a car dealership, with knowledge of the applicant's site plan, and determining that the requirements of a car dealership applied. Commissioner Brickner said that if there was a distinction between the applicant's and a traditional dealership under the ordinance, then the condition would be necessary. However, the Commission determined that the use was a car dealership.

City Planner Mulville-Friel explained that auto repair is considered an incidental accessory use for a traditional car dealership. However, a use such as a spray booth would require special approval because of the potential nuisance hazard, according to the ordinance.

City Attorney Schultz said that under the motion as stated, conditions were not necessary to make a distinction between the applicant and a traditional dealership under the ordinance. He did not have concerns about the motion as stated.

Commissioner Bricker raised the possibility of preventing the applicant from doing engine repairs and mechanical repairs in the future. Commissioner Stimson said that the applicant should be treated like an auto dealership. City Planner Mulville-Friel added that a site plan change would require City approval.

Commissioner Ware was concerned that the Commission would restrict the applicant's ability to manage their own business.

Chair Lindquist noted the difference between the Carvana proposal and traditional dealerships and observed that conditioning the motion and limiting future environmentally unfriendly practices would be more desirable than the motion on the table.

Commissioner Countegan noted that the Commission had been asked to determine whether the applicant was a car dealership. He felt the project was a dealership and that dealerships were a good investment in the community; the property was a dealership in the past and probably would be again in the future; and that the property should have more flexibility going forward to adapt to refinements and improvements.

Chair Lindquist said he was supportive of the applicant's business model, and that the Commission should use the opportunity to establish a new type of model by including the condition that "no body work, painting, collision repair, engine rebuilding, mechanical repair, or major reconditioning will be conducted."

Commissioner Grant said she would not support the motion without the condition referenced by Chair Lindquist.

**Roll call vote:**

<b>Brickner</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Countegan</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Grant</b>	<b>no</b>
<b>Lindquist</b>	<b>no</b>
<b>Mantey</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Stimson</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Trafelet</b>	<b>yes</b>
<b>Ware</b>	<b>yes</b>

**Motion passed 6-2.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES                      April 16, 2026**

**MOTION by Grant, supported by Ware, to approve the April 16, 2026 meeting minutes as submitted.  
Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**COMMISSIONER/STAFF COMMENTS**

City Planner Mulville-Friel said there would be a special study meeting to discuss site plan review, text amendments, and the zoning ordinance audit at 6 pm on June 20.

Planning Consultant Auerbach noted that a Washington Township ordinance addressing High Energy Intensive Development (HEID) that was included in the meeting packet was being shared with multiple communities as an example.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION by Brickner, supported by Mantey, to adjourn the meeting.**

**Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.**

The meeting ended at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tanji Grant  
Planning Commission Secretary

/cem