

MINUTES OF THE KNOX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

October 14, 2025

Call to order: The October 14th 2025, meeting of the Knox County Planning Commission was called to order by Chairman Dean Wilken at 6:58 p.m. at the Knox County Courthouse Board of Supervisors meeting room.

Announcement of Open Meeting Act: Chairman Wilken announced where the Open Meetings Act is posted.

Roll Call: Members present: Jim Kotrous, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen, Robert Larsen. Absent: Doug DeShazer and Neil Clausen. Also present were Zoning Administrator Kelsy Jelinek, applicants Christian and Shelby Bird and members of the public.

Approve Agenda & Public Notice in the Knox County News and Verdigre Eagle

Jim Kotrous moved, Robert Larsen seconded to approve the agenda and public notice which was published in the Knox County News and Verdigre Eagle. Roll call vote showed all present in favor Ayes: Jim Kotrous, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen, Robert Larsen. Absent: Doug DeShazer and Neil Clausen.

Approve the Minutes from the August 12th, 2025 Meeting. Ganz moved, Kotrous seconded to approve the minutes from August 12th regular meeting. Roll call vote showed all present in favor Ayes: Jim Kotrous, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen, Robert Larsen. Absent: Doug DeShazer and Neil Clausen.

Ex Parte Communications: Jim Kotrous has had several that will be discussed during the public hearing.

Old Business: None

New Business:

- 1. Public hearing is to receive public comments regarding the application for a Conditional Use Permit #CU2502 For Belle's Sake, a 501c3 animal rescue and boarding facility offering long term low-rate boarding and welfare services to the Midwest in 11-30-7 in Jefferson Township.**

Chairman Wilken opened the public hearing at 7:01 p.m. Administrator Jelinek gave a brief explanation of the application, the correspondence received in favor of the application and call in opposition. Christian and Shelby Bird then spoke about their

history & plan. Vets in O'Neill, Creighton and Bloomfield have all stated that they could assist. They also described their plan to combine the buildings with a covered indoor area for inclement weather.

The planning commission asked questions about the previous setups, buildings, waste management, noise, staffing, etc. The buildings have insulated walls, which help with heat and as a noise barrier. Each kennel area has outdoor access. At least twice a day, it opens into an outdoor run. Fencing panels are 6 ft tall and 10 ft long and attach together. The maximum number of dogs would be approximately 24 at 1 time based on the size of the building and stall capacity, apart from a litter being born and the time it would take to adopt those puppies out. Washout requirements were questioned – none of the rooms have drainage, they are hand cleaned twice a day. Waste is cleaned and double bagged but never gets washed onto another's property. When the animals go outside, it's cleaned up right away, not left on the ground. Animals are not left there for the rest of their life – the next steps are based on the vet's recommendation. Historically, the applicants have only had to euthanize 2 animals for behavioral issues but prioritize foster home or in-home trainers then animals are adopted almost immediately after training. The facility has 1 indoor cat room, with a "catio" can house 10-15, but like to keep it to 10. When animals arrive, they go into an immediate 10-day quarantine. They've cared primarily for dogs and cats, but have had llama, donkey, iguana, parrots, etc. When the concern of noise level was brought up, Shelby stated that she had harvested a deer in the front yard of the facility last year. Christian and Shelby also mentioned that if they had a specific animal that was a noise nuisance it would be a top priority to relocate or find a foster facility for that animal. They don't want to be a nuisance to the area, but an asset. They encouraged any member of the public with concerns to visit the facility or consider being a member of their board to bring the concerns to them.

Members of the public were present for comments, and written testimony had been received prior to the meeting.

Dan Vakoc is an adjoining landowner and has a 500-acre gravel mine, recreational hunting, and cow/calf operation. Concerns include mine safety & health, dog escapes, odor and noise, etc. that will keep the wildlife away.

Bruce VanBuren – Concerned why the applicant doesn't put it on their home property. Also concern of waste management.

Larry Olsen – Property is recreational and hunting area. He has family camping on his ground and is concerned with an animal getting loose. Thinks the footprint has a negative impact.

The board asked Christian and Shelby to address the concerns of the public. Shelby responded with the concerns of the public. She said that animal escapes are virtually impossible. Waste is immediately picked up and put in closed containers. Water would be through a cistern from their private property. In 15 years, they have never had an animal escape.

Jim Kotrous made a motion to close the public hearing at 8:19 p.m. Keith Nielsen seconded the motion. Roll call vote showed all in favor. Ayes: Jim Kotrous, David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen, Robert Larsen. Absent: Doug DeShazer and Neil Clausen.

Jim Kotrous made a motion to refuse the conditional use permit CU2502. No second, motion fails for lack of second.

Robert Larsen made a motion to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors and Keith Nielsen would second the motion with addition of the condition of state approval licensing through Nebraska Department of Ag and the addition of doubled fencing. Roll call vote Ayes: David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen Nay: Jim Kotrous Absent: Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer

2. Discuss consider and take all necessary action on change of the November meeting date to November 12, 2025

Discussion was held among board members. Motion was made by Robert Larsen, seconded by David Arens to change the November meeting date from Tuesday, November 11th to Wednesday, November 12th to avoid conflict with Veteran's Day. Roll call vote Ayes: David Arens, Robert Ganz, Dean Wilken, Greg Kuhlman, Keith Nielsen, Jim Kotrous Absent: Neil Clausen, Doug DeShazer

Public comments: None

The August and September permit reports were reviewed.

Next Meeting: November 12, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m. by Chairman Wilken.

Kelsy Jelinek, Zoning Administrator

Approved by Planning Commission: 12/9/2025

Placed on File with Board of Supervisors: Will be placed on file 1/21/2026