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PLANNING COMMISSION  
ADVISORY BOARD  
May 12, 2026 – 5:30 p.m.  
City Center

**AGENDA**

- A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL
  
- B. APPROVAL OF THE SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA
  
- C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
  - 1. May 5, 2026
  
- D. NEW BUSINESS
  
- E. PUBLIC HEARINGS
  - 1. Conditional Use Permit for Bridge #R1144 Replacement
  
- F. COMMISSIONER COMMUNICATIONS
  
- G. STAFF COMMUNICATIONS
  
- H. ADJOURNMENT

*Disclaimer: This agenda has been prepared to provide information regarding an upcoming meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Albert Lea. This document does not claim to be complete and is subject to change.*

# **MINUTES OF THE ALBERT LEA PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Regular Meeting**  
**May 5, 2026**  
**5:30 pm – City Center**

Chairman Schuster called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

## **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Matt Dorman  
Rachel Christensen, Ex-Officio  
Josh Enriquez  
Matt Maras  
Allen Hendriks  
Lucas Schuster, Chairman

## **MEMBERS ABSENT**

Leon Axtman  
Steve Thompson

## **STAFF PRESENT**

Megan Boeck, City Planner and Cierra Maras, Community Development Administrative Assistant.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion by Dorman and second by Hendriks to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Motion by Dorman and second by Maras to approve the March 3, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried.

**Staff report prepared by Megan Boeck, City Planner, is to become part of these minutes by reference.**

## **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### **1. Preliminary and Final Plat of Dress Second Addition**

Boeck reviewed the staff report and explained that the plat being reviewed is a 66-acre parcel along Westwood Drive and the purpose is to subdivide a smaller 16-acre parcel to meet the needs of a potential developer. She noted that this plat is contingent upon evidence of title status that includes encumbrances and easements in form of Opinion of Title addressed to the City of Albert Lea provided

by a licensed attorney or commitment to insure title naming City of Albert Lea as insured as recommend by the City Attorney.

**Schuster opened the hearing to the public at 5:40 p.m.**

Steve Tubbs questioned if the parcel is to be subdivided into 16 lots. Boeck stated it is for 16 acres, not individual lots.

Tubbs questioned if the utility lines are still within the abandoned railroad. Boeck confirmed they are.

Tubbs asked if the City would extend Westwood Drive. Boeck explained that if the 16-acre parcel were to develop, Westwood Drive would be extended as part of a development agreement at the cost of the developer.

Tubbs asked if the City were to approve subdividing the 16-acre parcel into individual lots, would the current zoning require one-acres lots.

Boeck stated that the current zoning suggests single-family lots on medium sized lots and that there is not a maximum size, rather a minimum lot sized required.

Tubbs questioned the plat not showing individual lots or blocks.

Boeck stated that if the developer was proposing separate individual lots, the City would require that to be shown that on the proposed plat and subdivide accordingly but the current application is to subdivide into one large 16-acre parcel.

Tubbs asked if the developer has stated it will remain as just one 16-acre lot. Boeck stated that is what has been applied for.

**Schuster closed the hearing to the public at 5:49 p.m.**

Motion by Maras and second by Enriquez to recommend to City Council the approval the preliminary and final plat of Dress Second Addition as contingently presented.

Motion passed on a 5-0 voiced vote.

**COMMISSIONER COMMUNICATION**

None.

**STAFF COMMUNICATION**

Boeck reminded the commission of the special meeting next week on May 12, 2026 to review a conditional use permit request for a bridge replacement along the Songbird Trail. She noted that the bridge will be replaced as is with no changes.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Dorman and second by Maras to adjourn the meeting at 5:55 p.m. Motion carried.

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Cierra Maras, Planning Commission Secretary

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Lucas Schuster, Chairman

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Applicant: City of Albert Lea  
 Property Owner: Freeborn County  
 Purpose: Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for bridge replacement in the F-1 Floodway District  
 Address: N/A. Bridge #R1144  
 Parcel Number(s): N/A  
 File Date/Publication Date: April 28, 2026 / May 2, 2026

Subject Site:

Existing Land Use	Zoning
Pedestrian Bridge	R-1

Adjacent Land Use and Zoning:

Existing Uses	Zoning
North   Single-Family Residential	R-1
South   Public Park/Open Space	R-1
East   Public Park/Open Space	R-1
West   Single-Family Residential	R-1



**BACKGROUND**

The City of Albert Lea and Freeborn County have been working to develop the Songbird Trail since 2013. In 2014, Freeborn County acquired 12 miles of former Union Pacific Railroad corridor from the southern portion of Albert Lea to Hartland. In 2018, Freeborn and Waseca counties initiated a master planning effort to connect the Blazing Star State Trail to the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail. Albert Lea partnered with Freeborn

and Waseca counties and submitted a plan to the Great MN Parks and Trails Commission for regional trail designation which opened several different grant opportunities. In 2022, the City of Albert Lea and Freeborn County formalized a joint powers agreement to maintain the corridor and advance trail development. Most recently, Freeborn County received nearly 2.6 million toward building a pedestrian bridge over MN Highway 13 and for paving a trail from Fountain Street to Shoff Park and from Sunset Street

to County 74. They also received nearly \$300,000 to replace the existing pedestrian bridge over Shoff Creek, which was evaluated and determined not safe for travel. The bridge does not have railings for pedestrians or bicyclists to safely cross and a replacement bridge is being designed to correct these



deficiencies.

## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Zoning 50.0698. – Conditional permitted uses. (F-1 – Floodway District)**

In the F-1 floodway district, the following uses shall be permitted only if specifically approved by the planning commission and authorized by the city council:

- (1) Uses requiring fill or storage of materials or equipment, structures accessory to open space uses, placement of fill, and extraction of sand, gravel and other materials.
- (2) Uses constructed on or over the water surface, such as marinas, docks, piers, wharfs and water control structures. A conditional use permit is not required for seasonal docks licensed by the city.
- (3) Public and semipublic service facilities such as railroads, streets, **bridges**, utility transmission lines, pipelines and other public utilities.
- (4) Structural works for flood control, such as levees, dikes and floodwalls, constructed to any height where the intent is to protect individual structures and levees or dikes where the intent is to protect agricultural crops for a frequency even equal to or less than the ten (1) year frequency flood event.

### **Zoning 50.0699. – Standards for review of conditional uses. (F-1 – Floodway District)**

In the F-1 floodway district, conditional uses shall be reviewed in accordance with section 50.0052 and in addition, the following shall apply:

- (1) Prior to granting a conditional use permit or processing an application for a conditional use permit, the applicant shall obtain all necessary state and federal permits and make certification to the zoning administrator that all necessary permits have been received.

**The following permits have been completed:**

Endangered Species  
Compliance with Water and Wetland Regulation  
Water in Waters Permit  
Compliance with Minnesota Environmental Review Rules  
Review of Project from the Minnesota State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO)  
Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS)

- (2) The applicant shall submit certification by a registered professional engineer, registered architect or registered land surveyor that the finished fill and the building elevations, if any, were accomplished in compliance with this division.

**Bridge replacement plans and specifications were prepared by Erickson Engineering and signed by a licensed engineer, the City Engineer, and the County Engineer.**

**The proposed bridge replacement is approximately 53 feet wide and was designed with a cross section similar to the existing in order to ensure a change in flow rate and/or volume does not occur.**

- (3) Fill, dredge, spoil and all other similar materials deposited or stored in the floodplain shall be protected from erosion by vegetative cover, mulching, riprap or other acceptable method.

**The plans and specifications for the project have a stormwater pollution and prevention plan (SWPPP) and erosion control measures to ensure protection of the waters.**

- (4) Dredge, spoil sites and sand and gravel operations shall not be allowed in the floodway unless a long-term site development plan is submitted which includes an erosion/sedimentation prevention element to the plan.

**All work performed is included within the SWPPP which is designed to prevent erosion.**

- (5) Structural works for flood control that will change the course, current or cross section of protected wetlands or public waters shall be subject to Minn. Stats. Ch. 105. Community-wide structural works for flood control intended to remove areas from the regulatory floodplain shall not be allowed in the floodway.

**The design of the replacement bridge is intended to maintain and have no change to the flow characteristics of the channel from the existing bridge.**

- (6) A levee, dike or floodwall constructed in the floodway shall not cause an increase in the one hundred (100) year or regional flood, and the technical analysis must assume equal conveyance or storage loss on both sides of a stream.

**The design of the replacement bridge is intended to maintain and have no change to the flow characteristics of the channel from the existing bridge.**

- (7) The storage or processing of materials that are, in time of flooding, flammable, explosive or potentially injurious to human, animal or plant life is prohibited.

**No flammable, explosive or potential injurious to human, animal or plant life will occur.**

- (8) Storage of other materials not listed in subsection (7) of this section or equipment may be allowed if readily removable from the area within the time available after a flood warning and in accordance with a plan approved by the city and made part of the conditional use permit.

**Construction equipment and materials will be stored in a manner not to be impacted by flooding. Most of the work will be completed on the trail bed which is out of the floodplain.**

- (9) Accessory structures not designed for human habitation may be constructed and placed on the building site if designed so as to offer the minimum obstruction to the flow of floodwaters. Accessory structures shall be constructed with the longitudinal access parallel to the direction of flood flow and placed approximately on the same flood flow as those of adjoining structures. Accessory structures must be elevated on fill to one (1) foot above the regulatory flood protection elevation.

N/A.

## ANALYSIS

### **Zoning 50.0052. – Conditional uses.**

#### *(c) Procedures.*

- (4) A public hearing shall be held on each application within thirty (30) days after submittal of the application to the planning commission. The planning commission shall make its findings based on the following points:

**a. Current and anticipated traffic congestion.**

A pedestrian bridge will not impact traffic. Because the bridge is within an abandoned railway and not within a public right of way, there will not be any short-term traffic concerns such as detours or delays.

**b. Population and density.**

A pedestrian bridge will not increase population or density.

**c. Noise.**

Apart from construction, a pedestrian bridge will not off put any noise.

**d. Effect on adjoining land values.**

Pedestrian bridges are known to improve connectivity to schools and amenities such as parks and improve neighborhood safety by being separated from vehicle traffic. All of which boost neighborhood walkability and aesthetic which has the potential to increase home values (Institute for Transportation and Development Policy).

**e. Public health, safety and welfare.**

Pedestrian bridges are known to increase safety by physically separating pedestrians and cyclists from high-speed or heavy vehicle traffic. (Institute for Transportation and Development Policy).

f. **Aesthetics.**

The proposed bridge will significantly improve aesthetics, especially for Songbird Trail users and those recreating at Shoff Park.

**FINDINGS OF FACT**

1. The proposed bridge is consistent with the 2030 Comprehensive Plan which designates Songbird Trail as a future trail network (page 89).
2. The proposed bridge meets the conditions of F-1 Floodway District by not impacting public waters or wetlands, having proper erosion and sediment prevention plans, and implementing a design that will not change current flow characteristics of the channel from what is existing.
3. The proposed bridge is compatible with the surrounding uses and will not negatively impact the public health, safety and welfare of the surrounding area.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Conditional Use Permit with the following conditions:

1. A Stormwater Pollution and Prevention Plan (SWPPP) be kept on file in part of the CUP approval.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Bridge Survey Plan & Profile

BENCHMARK EL. 1220.43  
 LOCATION: RAILROAD SPIKE IN POWER POLE,  
 APPROX. 151 FT. NORTHWEST OF  
 EXISTING BRIDGE 95

**DESIGN DATA**

2020 AASHTO LRFD BRIDGE DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS  
 2009 AASHTO LRFD GUIDE SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN  
 OF PEDESTRIAN BRIDGES & 2015 INTERIM REVISIONS  
 PEDESTRIAN LIVE LOAD = 0.090 KSF  
 H-10 TRUCK VEHICULAR LIVE LOAD

MATERIAL DESIGN PROPERTIES:  
 REINFORCED CONCRETE:  
 $f'_c = 4$  KSI CONCRETE  
 $f_y = 60$  KSI PLAIN AND EPOXY COATED BARS  
 $n = 7.3$  FOR REINFORCEMENT BARS

STRUCTURAL STEEL:  
 $F_y = 50$  KSI STRUCTURAL STEEL SPEC. 3309

DESIGN SPEED = 20 MPH  
 DECK AREA = 936 SQUARE FEET

**LIST OF SHEETS**

NO.	TITLE
D1	GENERAL PLAN & ELEVATION
D2	BRIDGE STATEMENT OF ESTIMATED QUANTITIES
D3	BRIDGE TYPICAL SECTION & CONSTRUCTION NOTES
D4-D6	ABUTMENT
D7	RIPRAP SLOPES WITH GEOTEXTILE FILTER
D8-D9	MISC. BRIDGE DETAILS
D10	TIMBER APPROACH RAIL
D11	BRIDGE SURVEY
D12	BRIDGE SURVEY ~ PLAN & PROFILE

APPROVED: *Steven Johnke*  
 CITY OF ALBERT LEA  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED: *Phil Walz*  
 FREEBORN COUNTY ENGINEER  
 DATE: 5/7/2026

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PLAN WAS PREPARED  
 BY ME OR UNDER MY DIRECT SUPERVISION AND THAT  
 I AM A DULY LICENSED PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER  
 UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA.

*Chad Darnell*  
 CHAD DARNELL  
 DATE: 05-07-2026 LIC. NO. 45944

**EE** ERICKSON ENGINEERING  
 9531 WEST 78TH STREET - SUITE 100  
 EDEN PRAIRIE, MN 55344

UNION PACIFIC RAIL TRAIL FREEBORN COUNTY  
 MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**BRIDGE NO. R1144**

LOCATED 0.2 MILES SOUTHEAST OF JCT. T.H. 13 ON  
 UNION PACIFIC RAIL TRAIL OVER PICKEREL LAKE CREEK

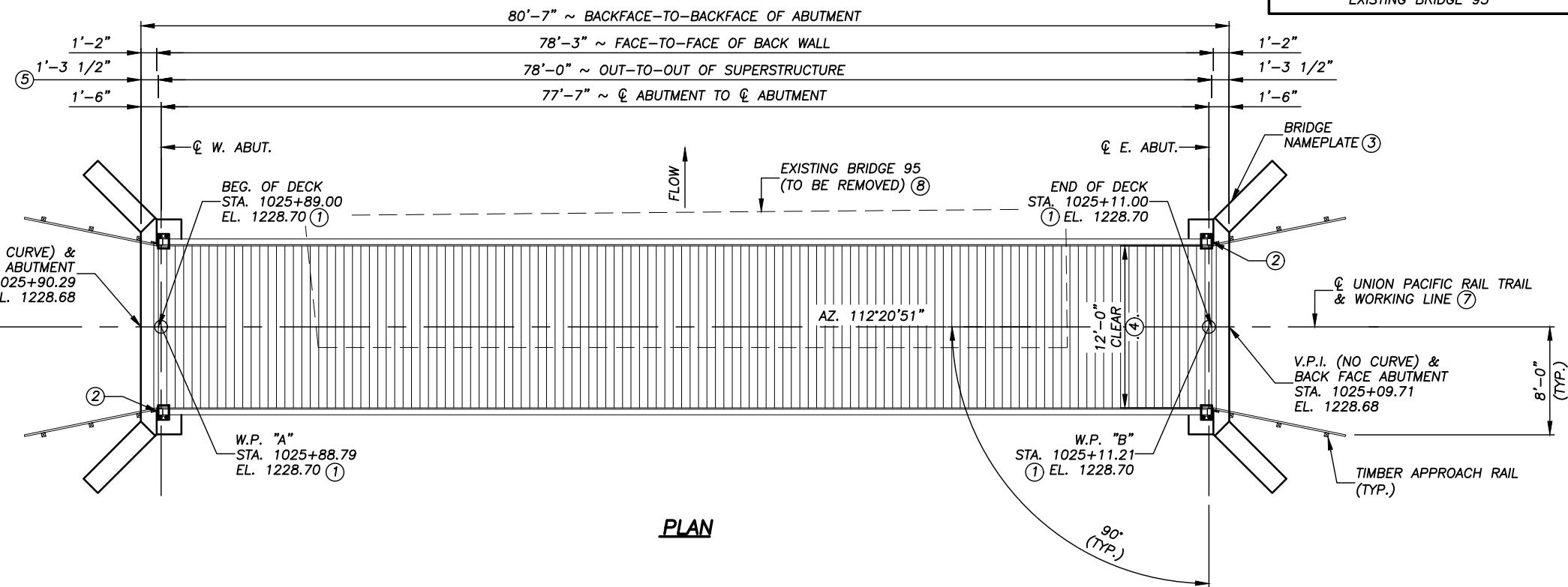
78'-0" STEEL TRUSS PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE SPAN  
 12'-0" CLEAR WALKWAY ~ 0° SKEW  
 SPAN IDENTIFICATION NO. 302

**GENERAL PLAN & ELEVATION**  
 SEC. 8 TWP. 102 N R 21 W

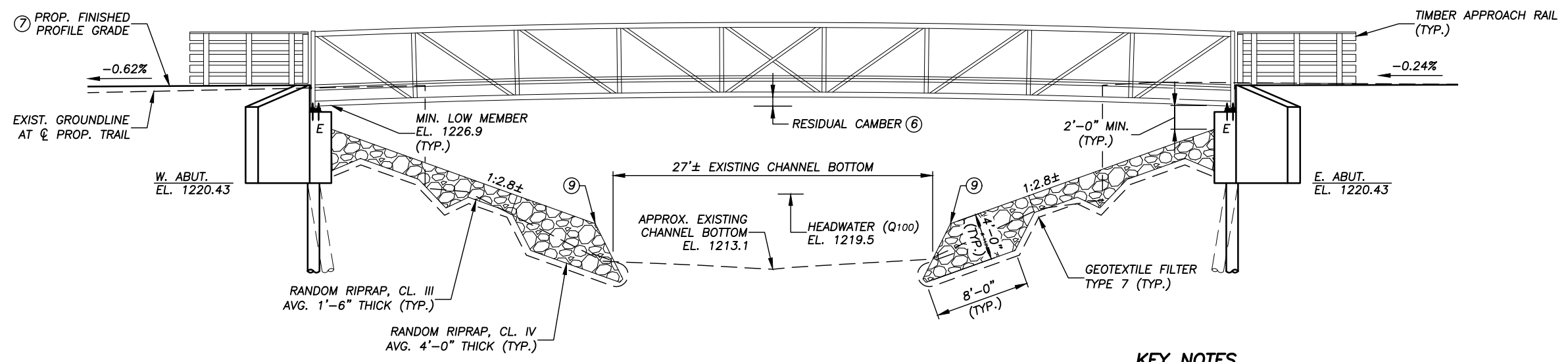
CITY: ALBERT LEA  
 COUNTY: FREEBORN

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_  
 STATE BRIDGE ENGINEER  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

DES.: DJL	DRN.: NBB	<b>BRIDGE NO.</b> <b>R1144</b>
CHK.: CGD	CHK.: DJL	
S.A.P. 024-590-002 & DNR C009-25-4D		
SHEET D1 OF D12 SHEETS		



**PLAN**



**ELEVATION**

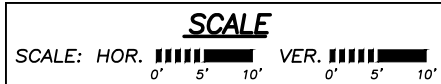
**KEY NOTES**

- PROFILE GRADE ELEVATION SHOWN. COVER ANGLE/PLATE, TOP OF ABUTMENT BACKWALL, AND/OR TOP OF DECK TO BE LEVEL ALONG BRIDGE PROFILE FOR THE MINIMUM DISTANCE NEEDED TO PERMIT MOVEMENT OF COVER ANGLE/PLATE WITHOUT BINDING ON DECK. ELEVATION MAY VARY SLIGHTLY DUE TO BRIDGE CAMBER AND COVER ANGLE/PLATE CONFIGURATION.
- PLACE "10 TON LOAD LIMIT" PLAQUE ON BRIDGE END POST.
- PLACE MnDOT BRIDGE NAMEPLATE ON ABUTMENT WINGWALL.
- CLEAR SHALL BE ACTUAL CLEAR OPENING MEASURED BETWEEN INSIDES OF THE RAILS, TOP CHORDS, OR END POSTS - WHICHEVER IS LESS.
- MEASURED AT 70°F
- TRUSS SHALL BE FABRICATED WITH 9 3/8" RESIDUAL CAMBER AFTER INSTALLATION OF TRUSS.
- SEE GRADING PLANS (BY OTHERS) FOR COMPLETE HORIZONTAL ALIGNMENT & VERTICAL PROFILE DETAILS.
- EXISTING UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD BRIDGE NO. 95  
 TIMBER SPAN TRESTLE BRIDGE  
 STRUCTURE LENGTH: 55'  
 YEAR BUILT: UNKNOWN
- OFFSET 15'  
 EL. 1217.0

**PILE NOTES**

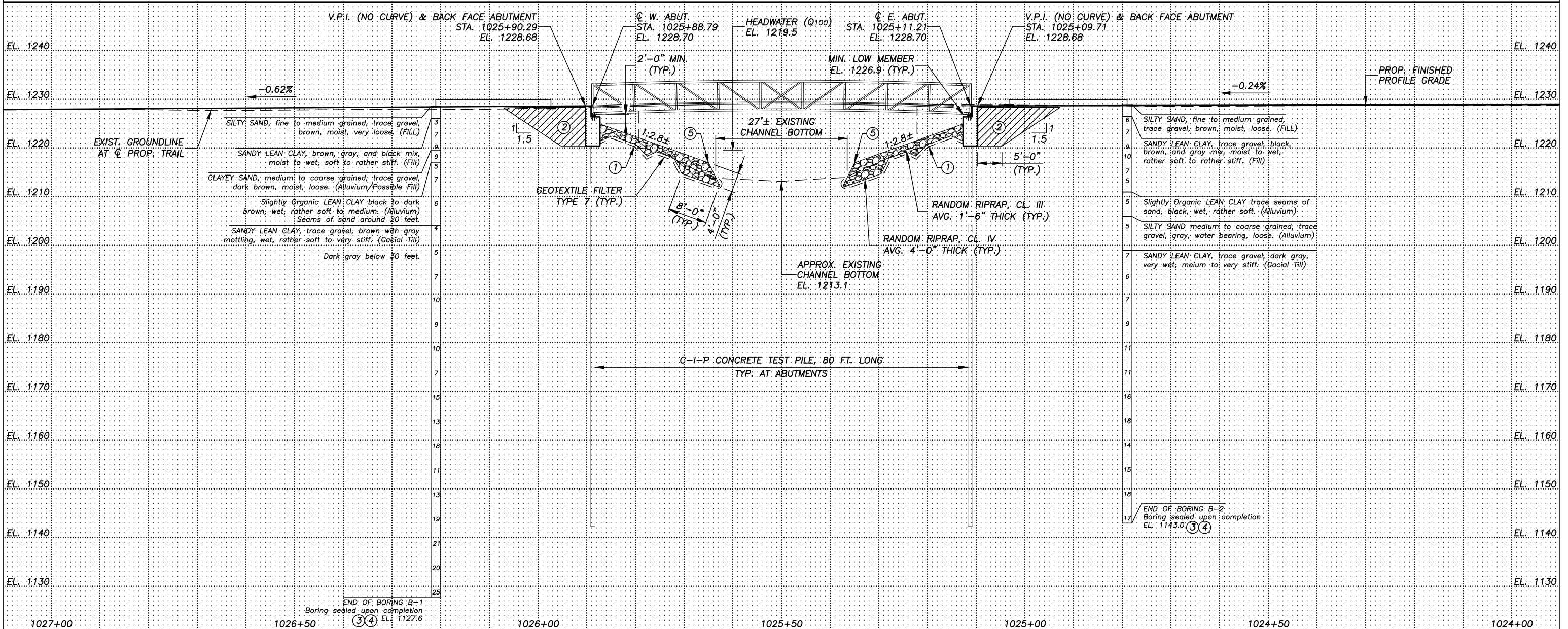
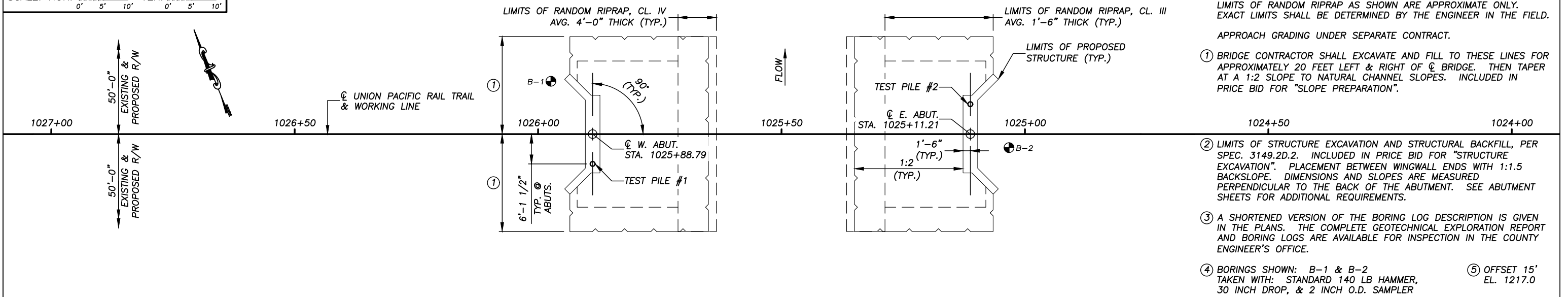
ABUTMENT PILES ARE TO BE 12" C-I-P  
 CONCRETE PILES WITH PILE POINTS.

REV.	DATE	DESCRIPTION	BY



**NOTES**

- LIMITS OF RANDOM RIPRAP AS SHOWN ARE APPROXIMATE ONLY. EXACT LIMITS SHALL BE DETERMINED BY THE ENGINEER IN THE FIELD.
- APPROACH GRADING UNDER SEPARATE CONTRACT.
- BRIDGE CONTRACTOR SHALL EXCAVATE AND FILL TO THESE LINES FOR APPROXIMATELY 20 FEET LEFT & RIGHT OF  $\phi$  BRIDGE. THEN TAPER AT A 1:2 SLOPE TO NATURAL CHANNEL SLOPES. INCLUDED IN PRICE BID FOR "SLOPE PREPARATION".
  - LIMITS OF STRUCTURE EXCAVATION AND STRUCTURAL BACKFILL, PER SPEC. 3149.2D.2. INCLUDED IN PRICE BID FOR "STRUCTURE EXCAVATION". PLACEMENT BETWEEN WINGWALL ENDS WITH 1:1.5 BACKSLOPE. DIMENSIONS AND SLOPES ARE MEASURED PERPENDICULAR TO THE BACK OF THE ABUTMENT. SEE ABUTMENT SHEETS FOR ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS.
  - A SHORTENED VERSION OF THE BORING LOG DESCRIPTION IS GIVEN IN THE PLANS. THE COMPLETE GEOTECHNICAL EXPLORATION REPORT AND BORING LOGS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION IN THE COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE.
  - BORINGS SHOWN: B-1 & B-2 TAKEN WITH: STANDARD 140 LB HAMMER, 30 INCH DROP, & 2 INCH O.D. SAMPLER
  - OFFSET 15' EL. 1217.0



		I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PLAN WAS PREPARED BY ME OR UNDER MY DIRECT SUPERVISION AND THAT I AM A DULY LICENSED PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA. <b>Chad Darnell</b> CERTIFIED BY: PROFESSIONAL ENGINEER/CHAD DARNELL LIC. NO. 45944 05-07-2026	DES.: DJL CHK.: CGD DRN.: NBB CHK.: DJL	 <b>ERICKSON ENGINEERING</b> WWW.ERICKSONENGINEERING.COM 952-929-6791	<b>BRIDGE SURVEY          PLAN &amp; PROFILE</b>	S.A.P. 024-590-002 DNR C009-25-4D SHEET NO. D12 OF D12 SHEETS	APPROVED:  BRIDGE NO. <b>R1144</b>
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