

The City of Lake Forest
Zoning Board of Appeals
Proceedings of the March 30, 2026 Meeting

A regular meeting of the Lake Forest Zoning Board of Appeals was held on Monday, March 30, 2026, at 6:30 p.m., in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Zoning Board of Appeals members present: Chairman Ari Bass and Board members Jan Gibson, Fred Brewer, Patrick Marshall, Jay Soave, Jeffrey Giannelli, and Mike Adams.

Zoning Board of Appeals members absent: None

Staff present: Susan Thomas, Assistant Director of Community Development, and Catherine Czerniak, Director of Community Development

1. Introduction of Board members and staff, overview of meeting procedures - Chairman Bass

Chairman Bass reviewed the meeting procedures and asked the members of the Board to introduce themselves.

2. Consideration of the minutes of the February 23, 2026 meeting.

The minutes of the February 23, 2026 meeting were approved as presented.

3. Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of variances from front and corner side yard setbacks for a replacement open front porch at 437 N. Green Bay Road.

Property Owners: Nancy and Jim Powers

Representative: Healy M. Rice, architect

Chairman Bass asked the Board to declare any Ex Parte contacts or conflicts of interest. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner and swore in all those intending to speak.

Ms. Rice stated that the homeowners are not in attendance. She stated that variances are requested to allow reconstruction of the open front porch in a slightly different configuration. She stated that the existing front porch is not original to the structure, adding that both the existing front porch and the screen porch on the north side of the residence are nonconforming to the zoning setbacks. She stated that the replacement front porch as proposed will be centered on the house unlike the existing porch and will be expanded to a width of seven and a half feet to make it usable.

She stated that the replacement screen porch will be setback from the front of the house and will conform to the zoning setbacks. She stated that the hardship in conforming to the zoning setbacks is the fact that the structure was moved to the site long before the current setback requirements were adopted by the City. She stated that the overall square footage of the house will be reduced with the proposed changes. She noted that the Historic Preservation Commission recently approved the project.

Ms. Thomas confirmed that the structure was moved to the site and was originally a mercantile establishment located on Western Avenue. She stated that the lot was created prior to current zoning regulations and is nonconforming to the minimum lot size and width. She stated that based on the current zoning setbacks, a majority of the home encroaches into the corner side yard setback along Vine Avenue and into the front yard setback along Green Bay Road. She stated that as proposed, the replacement porch will encroach 15 feet into the front yard setback, further than the existing front porch. She stated that the proposed front porch will encroach an additional seven feet into the corner side yard setback. She noted that the front porch will not encroach into the corner side yard setback further than the main residence. She confirmed that the replacement screen porch conforms to the zoning setbacks. She stated that findings are detailed in the staff report in support of the variances for the replacement front porch.

Chairman Bass invited questions from the Board.

In response to questions from Board member Gibson, Ms. Thomas stated that one letter of support was received from the property owner to the north.

In response to questions from Board member Gibson, Ms. Rice stated that there are no plans at this time for the screen porch to be enclosed with solid walls or glass.

In response to questions from Board member Adams, Ms. Rice confirmed that the replacement screen porch will be shifted back, away from the front wall of the house to allow the house to stand proud of the porch.

In response to a question from Board member Marshall, Ms. Rice stated that overall, with the replacement porches, the house will be 13 square feet smaller than it is today.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, Chairman Bass invited public comment. Hearing none, he invited final comments from the Board.

Board member Gibson complimented the decision to set the replacement screen porch back from the front of the house. She stated that the additional width of the front porch will make it more functional.

Board member Adams stated support for the variances noting that in his opinion, the proposed changes will improve the curb appeal.

Board members Soave and Giannelli stated support for the variances.

Chairman Bass stated that in his opinion, the proposed changes will enhance the property and noted the prominence of the property from Green Bay Road. He stated support for the variances.

Hearing no further comments from the Board, Chairman Bass invited a motion.

Board member Adams made a motion to recommend approval of front and corner side yard variances to allow construction of a replacement and enlarged open front porch at 437 N. Green Bay Road. He stated that the recommendation supports an encroachment into the front yard setback of no more than 14 feet at the point of the furthest encroachment and into the corner side yard setback no more than 15 feet at the point of furthest encroachment generally in conformance with the plans presented to the Board. He stated that the motion includes a condition requiring that the front porch remain open to minimize the mass at the front of the residence. He stated that the motion is based on the findings detailed in the staff report which are adopted as part of the motion and stated that the Board's comments are incorporated as additional findings.

The motion was seconded by Board member Gibson and was approved by a vote of 7 to 0.

4. Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of variances from front and interior side yard setbacks and lot coverage regulations for an open front porch, a detached garage, and a rear addition at 916 Oakwood Avenue.

Property Owners: Hawkins and Madeline Gay

Representative: Scott A. Streightiff, Architect

Chairman Bass asked the Board to declare any Ex Parte contacts or conflicts of interest. Hearing none, he invited a presentation from the petitioner and swore in everyone intending to speak.

Mr. Streightiff stated that variances are requested to allow 850 square feet of additions to the residence. He stated that a 576 square foot detached garage and interior alterations are also planned. He stated that the property is 6,900 square feet. He stated variances are requested from the required front and north side yard setbacks and from the lot coverage and building square footage limitations. He commented that there is a mix of eclectic homes on small lots along Oakwood Avenue. He stated that open front porches and detached garages are common elements in the neighborhood. He presented photos of nearby homes. He stated that the subject

property is located on the west side of Oakwood Avenue. He stated that the residence was constructed in 1910 in the Queen Anne and European Vernacular architectural styles. He stated that the structure and mechanical systems are sound making the home a good candidate for renovation, rather than demolition. He stated that his clients recently purchased the home and wish to make changes to meet their family's needs. He stated that the petitioners plan to be long term stewards of the home. He reviewed the deficiencies of the home that are intended to be addressed by the planned renovations including the small kitchen which lacks natural light, the lack of a family room near the kitchen, the stairs which are not in compliance with current Code requirements, the lack of a functional laundry room, and the lack of a garage. He stated that overall, the home suffers from deferred maintenance. He stated that the proposed additions are intended to maintain and enhance the original architecture of the home. He reviewed the front elevation and described the proposed open porch as similar in scale to other porches in the neighborhood. He presented the south elevation pointing out the single story addition proposed at the rear of the home. He reviewed the west elevation noting the two one story additions proposed at the rear of the home. He presented elevations of the detached garage. He stated that natural materials will be used throughout matching the exterior materials on the existing home. He presented a conceptual streetscape illustration reflecting the home in relation to the neighboring homes. He stated that in response to a request from staff, an alternate plan was prepared for the rear single story addition proposed at the northwest corner of the home. He stated that the alternate plan locates the proposed addition the same distance from the north property line as the existing one story element that is proposed for demolition while maintaining the proposed square footage of the addition. He stated that by shifting the proposed addition in two feet further from the north property line, the functionality of the interior floor plan is compromised, the symmetry of the north elevation is disrupted, and the rear addition at the southwest corner of the house is pushed further to the south, making the driveway tighter. He stated that the alternate plan achieves only a very minor additional setback from the north property line but in his opinion, compromises the project. He stated that his clients have met with the owner of the property to the north and agreed that the landscaping on the neighboring property could be enhanced to provide screening for both properties. He reviewed a conceptual landscape plan noting the trees and vegetation on the property that are intended to remain and noted limited additional plantings planned around the front porch and along the west property line. He stated that the owners are committed to working with an engineer to develop a plan for addressing stormwater given the increased impervious surface proposed on the site. He stated that the variances are appropriate because the proposed additions to the home are consistent in scale to other homes in the neighborhood, due to the current non-conforming condition of the house, and the fact that the petitioners propose to invest in the existing structure rather than demolish it. He stated that the variances will not offer special privilege to the petitioners, will not impact the character of the property and will enhance the property value. He stated that the proposed plan is the best solution for meeting the desires of the homeowners.

Ms. Thomas reviewed that the project as proposed requires several variances. She stated that variances are requested to allow encroachment into the front and north side yard setbacks, and lot coverage and square footage over and above the maximums allowed by the Code. She reviewed the location of the property, on the west side of Oakwood Avenue, one lot south of Woodland Road. She stated that the house was built in 1910 prior to the City's adoption of a Zoning Code. She stated that the existing house encroaches into the front and side yard setbacks. She stated that the proposed open front porch will encroach into the front yard setback an additional seven and a half feet beyond the encroachment of the existing house for a total encroachment of 18 feet into the 40 foot front yard setback. She stated that the front porch as proposed also encroaches into the north side yard setback and aligns with the north wall of the residence. She stated that the siting of the front porch is dictated in large part by the location of the front door close to the north wall of the house which is not intended to change. She stated that findings are included in the staff report in support of front and side yard variances for the front porch, adding that the open nature of the porch and the minimal excavation needed to construct the porch are the basis for the findings. She stated that two single story additions are proposed on the rear of the house noting that only the proposed addition at the northwest corner of the house requires a variance. She noted that the addition will replace an existing single story element in generally the same location except that the existing element is located about three and a half feet away from the north property line, instead of one and a half feet as proposed. She stated that there is no clear hardship to support the further encroachment into the side yard setback adding that construction and maintenance of the addition will likely require access on to the neighboring property to the north and that there will be no space on the subject property for landscaping or stormwater. She stated that the proposed further encroachment will extend a solid wall very close to the property line increasing the impact of natural light to the property to the north beyond what currently exists. She stated that the alternate design prepared by the petitioner's architect retains the same square footage while shifting the addition slightly further from the north property line. She noted that currently, the air conditioning unit for the subject property is located on the neighboring property to the north. She stated that the unit will be relocated to the south side of the house to address that issue. She stated that a large second floor addition is proposed on the south side of the house expanding the roof mass but not changing the footprint of the house. She stated that no setback variances are required for the second story addition, however, the additional square footage in combination with the rear additions requires a variance from the allowable building square footage. She stated that the Building Review Board will consider that request. She stated that currently, the structures on the property cover 19 percent of the property, less than the permitted maximum coverage of 30 percent. She stated that with the proposed additions and the detached garage, the lot coverage totals 37 percent. She added that a variance is requested from the lot coverage limitation to accommodate the expanded footprint of structures on the property. She stated

that findings in support of front and side yard variances for the front porch, a side yard variance for the alternate design of the rear addition at the northwest corner of the house, and a lot coverage variance are detailed in the staff report.

Chairman Bass invited questions from the Board.

In response to questions from Chairman Bass, Ms. Thomas confirmed that both the preferred and alternate plans are presented to the Board for consideration. She clarified that the driveway is not included in the lot coverage calculation.

In response to questions from Board member Marshall, Ms. Thomas explained that the request for a variance from the allowable building square footage proposed on the property will be considered by the Building Review Board.

In response to questions from Board member Marshall, Mr. Streightiff reviewed the alternate plan for the rear addition noting the offset from the north wall of the house. He stated that no objections to the plan were raised by neighboring property owners.

In response to Board member Gianelli, Mr. Streightiff acknowledged that careful consideration needs to be given to managing stormwater to avoid impacting the petitioner's home, lot, and neighboring properties. He acknowledged that the front porch extends further toward the street than most of the other porches but noted that there are a few porches that are sited similarly.

In response to Board member Gibson, Ms. Thomas clarified that the square footage of the addition remains the same in both the preferred and alternate plans.

In response to questions from Chairman Bass, Mr. Gay stated that he talked with neighbors across the street and shared the plans with the neighbors to the north and south. He stated that no questions were raised about the front porch. He stated that the adjacent neighbors expressed some concern about the impact of the windows on the proposed second addition. He stated that no concerns were raised about the siting of the rear addition.

Board member Marshall observed that several houses in the neighborhood have larger garages and more driveway surface than proposed in this petition. He agreed that stormwater runoff needs to be addressed but stated that should be done by others, outside of the Board's review. He noted other porches on nearby homes that encroach into the front yard setback. He stated that the porch as proposed appears consistent with other homes on the street. He questioned whether shaving off a piece of the addition that is not visible from the street is worthwhile given that the petitioners believe it will create an awkward room size.

In response to questions from Board member Gibson, Mr. Streightiff stated that the garage could be slightly narrower but noted that both of the owners drive large cars.

In response to questions from Board member Soave, Ms. Thomas stated that the existing rear addition is nonconforming and has existed for decades. She stated that there is no apparent hardship that supports further encroachment into the setback.

In response to questions from Board member Soave, Ms. Czerniak explained that a hardship results from some action the City has taken. She stated that the Code specifically states that a hardship cannot be created by something a past or current property owner has done or be the result of something that is desired by a property owner. She stated that aligning the replacement addition with the existing one story element that will be removed is reasonable and has been proven to be workable. She noted that further encroachment to within a foot and a half of the property line will result in additional impacts to the neighboring property.

Board member Adams clarified that the alternate plan does not reduce the livable square feet, only shifts the building footprint away from the property line.

Board member Marshall noted that the petitioner stated that the shift of the proposed addition away from the property line impacts the functionality of the proposed driveway.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Ms. Thomas stated that the impact on the driveway is not a hardship because the owners desire two rear additions of a certain size. She noted that the width of the addition could be reduced rather than retaining the same square footage as the preferred plan.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Mr. Streightiff stated that with the alternate plan, the driveway is 1.8 feet tighter.

In response to a question from Board member Gibson, Mr. Streightiff pointed out the proposed location of the air conditioner on the south side of the house.

Ms. Gay stated that they are excited to be in Lake Forest adding that her and her husband are both physicians. She stated that they have been renting a home and are looking forward to moving to the Oakwood Avenue neighborhood with their two little girls. She stated that they have designed a home for the rest of their lives.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, Chairman Bass invited public comment. Hearing none, he invited final comments from the Board.

Board member Adams stated support for the overall project acknowledging that the house needs work. He stated that there are a variety of front porches in the

neighborhood and stated that he is comfortable with the porch as proposed and the required variances.

Chairman Bass acknowledged that the porch extends further into the front yard setback than other porches along the street but stated support for the porch as proposed and the required variances.

In response to a question from Board member Gianelli, Mr. Streightiff stated that the front stairs will extend approximately an addition three feet in front of the porch.

Board member Marshall stated support for the variances required for the porch noting that as presented, the porch is functional and aesthetically pleasing.

Board member Gibson also stated support for the variances for the porch. She thanked the petitioner for staking the property to reflect the footprints of the additions and for the conceptual streetscape image.

Chairman Bass invited comments on the proposed rear addition. He referred the Board members to the criteria for variances which the Board is required to consider.

Board member Gibson stated support for the alternate design for the rear addition which steps back further from the property line, in alignment with the existing one story structure. She stated that from an aesthetic perspective, the step back of the addition will not have a negative impact but will provide some relief to accommodate construction and future maintenance. She pointed out that the livable square footage is not reduced with the alternate plan.

Board member Giannelli agreed with Board member Gibson and stated that his inclination is to defer to the staff recommendation and the findings presented in the staff report. He commented that ultimately, he could go either way.

Board member Brewer stated support for the preferred plan noting that no neighbors expressed concerns. He stated that the addition will not impact the house to the north given its location away from the property line. He stated that the addition will not be visible from the street. He stated that although there may not be a hardship as defined by the Code, with the addition shifted away from the property line, the functionality of the driveway could be affected making it difficult to turn around an SUV.

Board member Marshall agreed with Board member Brewer's comments noting that the shift is minor and will impact the functionality of interior space and the driveway.

Chairman Bass agreed pointing out that due to the location of the existing fence, the neighbor to the north already does not have access to that part of their property. He

stated that maneuvering into and out of the driveway could be more difficult with the alternate design.

Board member Soave noted that if the totality of the nonconforming house is considered that it could be considered a hardship. He stated that the existing house already creates an infringement on the zoning requirements and noted that differentiating between a smaller house and a larger house when there is already noncompliance with the Code is difficult.

In response to a question from Board member Adams, Ms. Czerniak stated that the Board's recommendation, assuming approval by the City Council, will establish the furthest extend of the permitted encroachment into the setbacks. She acknowledged that the Building Review Board could recommend approval of a design with a lesser encroachment and explained if that occurred, no further Zoning Board of Appeals action would be necessary.

Board member Gibson pointed out that construction of the addition and future maintenance could require crossing over on to the neighboring property.

Board member Marshall commented that there appears to be another house in the neighborhood that has a similar length of mass along a property line.

Board member Brewer stated that the rear addition will not be a glaring distraction. He stated that given the stepped back location of the fence on the neighboring property, the proximity of the addition will not be as noticeable as it otherwise could be. He stated that different in siting being discussed is minimal. He stated that the preferred option will add value to the subject property.

Chairman Bass acknowledged that the number of variances request is unusual but stated that it is the result of the existing conditions on the site.

Board member Brewer stated support for the garage as proposed noting that it is no larger than some of the other garages in the neighborhood. He stated that in his opinion, the garage is not excessive.

Board member Giannelli expressed continued concern about stormwater and suggested consideration of permeable pavement for the driveway. He stated that with the driveway as proposed, the coverage on the lot is probably 70 to 80 percent. He noted that the petitioners will need to live with any situation that is created by the amount of impermeable surface.

Board member Adams noted another house to the south which has excessive impervious surface. He stated that he is not concerned about a precedent.

Board member Gibson asked whether the garage could be reduced in size. She expressed concern about stormwater due to limitations on the City's old stormsewer pipes. She encouraged consideration of a pervious surface for the driveway. Mr. Streightiff stated a willingness to consider reducing the size of the garage.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the size of the garage relates to lot coverage adding that the Board could condition a recommendation on reducing the size of the garage. She noted that the Building Review Board may have an issue with the square footage variance requested.

Hearing no further comments from the Board, Chairman Bass invited motions.

Board member Adams made a motion on the first of three variances for property at 917 Oakwood Avenue. He made a motion to recommend approval of front and side yard variances to allow construction of an open front porch encroaching into the 40' front yard setback no further than 18'3" at the point of furthest encroachment and encroaching into the interior side yard (north) no further than 8'3" at the point of furthest encroachment. He stated that the motion is based on the findings detailed in the staff report and noted that the Board's deliberations are incorporated as additional findings. He stated that the motion includes a condition that the front porch remain open.

The motion was seconded by Board member Soave and was approved by a vote of 7 to 0.

Board member Marshall made a motion to recommend approval of a side yard variance to allow construction of a single story rear addition encroaching into the 10' side yard setback no further than 8'3" at the point of furthest encroachment. He stated that the motion is based on the findings as articulated by the Board during its deliberations.

The motion was seconded by Board member Brewer and was approved by a vote of 7 to 0.

Board member Adams made a motion to recommend approval of a lot coverage variance to allow structures to cover up to 37% of the lot area. He stated that the motion is based on the findings detailed in the staff report and noted that the deliberations of the Board are incorporated as additional findings. He stated that the motion includes a recommendation to the Building Review Board to consider reducing the footprint of the garage.

The motion was seconded by Board member Gibson and was approved by the Board by a 7 to 0 vote.

4. Public testimony on non-agenda items.

No public testimony was presented to the Board on non-agenda items.

5. Additional information from staff.

There was no additional information presented by staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Czerniak
Director of Community Development