

The City of Lake Forest
Zoning Board of Appeals
Proceedings of the April 27, 2026 Meeting

A regular meeting of the Lake Forest Zoning Board of Appeals was held on Monday, April 27, 2026, at 6:30 p.m., in Lake Forest, Illinois.

Zoning Board of Appeals members present: Chairman Ari Bass and Board members Patrick Marshall, Jeffrey Giannelli, and Mike Adams.

Zoning Board of Appeals members absent: Board members Jan Gibson, Jay Soave and Fred Brewer

Staff present: Luis Prado, Assistant Planner, Michelle Friedrich, Planning Technician, 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 March 30, 2026 meeting.

The minutes of the March 30, 2026 meeting were approved with corrections to pages 9 and 10 relating to the motions as requested by Board member Adams.

3. Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of a variance from the corner side yard setback for a replacement single family residence at 870 Woodbine Lane.

Property Owner: Chicago Title Land Trust #8002349280 (Bianca Timbota Balia)
Representative: John Timbota

Chairman Bass asked the Board to declare any Ex Parte contacts or conflicts of interest. He stated that he knows the neighbor across the street from the subject property but noted that will be able to consider the petition objectively. Hearing no further declarations from the Board, he invited a presentation from the petitioner and swore in all those who intended to speak.

Mr. Timbota reviewed the property noting that it is 30,887 square feet in total with 1,801 square feet of the property located within the ravine. He stated that the property is developed with two small structures, a one story garage at the southwest corner of the property which was constructed in the 1940's and a two story cottage near the southeast corner of the property which was constructed in 1910. He noted that both

structures were constructed as utilitarian buildings to serve the nearby estates. He stated that both buildings encroach not only into the required zoning setbacks, but also into the City right of way. He stated that the property is zoned R-4, adding that due to the size and configuration of the property, any redevelopment of the property will likely require variances from one or more of the setbacks. He stated that both existing structures are deteriorated and adaptive reuse is not practical to meet today's families' needs or financially justifiable. He stated that like any development project, a licensed engineer will develop a plan to address stormwater on the site. He presented photos of the existing structures and neighboring homes. He reviewed the comments offered by the Historic Preservation Commission noting support for demolition of the two structures, an interest in seeing the replacement residence sited generally in the location of the cottage, and continued simplification of the design of the replacement residence to reflect the modest character of other homes in the neighborhood and the cottage. He stated that an engineer was engaged and is developing a plan to address drainage on and across the property. He presented elevations of the proposed home.

Mr. Prado stated that a variance from the corner side yard setback along Woodbine Lane is requested. He stated that the property is a remnant parcel that decades earlier was carved off of a larger estate property. He stated that the property is unusual in shape with an appendage that extends to the north and a very limited buildable area. He stated that as a corner property, 50 foot setbacks apply to the east, west, and south sides of the property, and a 20 foot setback applies along the north property line. He stated that to redevelop the property, it is likely that at least one variance would be required. He noted that the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed the petition at several meetings. He stated that during those discussions, the size of the proposed replacement house was scaled down. He noted that the house as now proposed encroaches into only the corner side yard setback along Woodbine Lane to a lesser extent than the existing cottage which encroaches into and beyond the setback, on to the City right-of-way. He stated that both existing structures are nonconforming with respect to the setbacks along both Woodbine Lane and Woodbine Place. He stated that the neighborhood is unique with several of the homes adapted from outbuildings from the earlier estates, many of which encroach into the front yard setbacks along the street. He stated that the Historic Preservation Commission approved demolition of the two structures and the design aspects of the replacement residence subject to a variance from the corner side yard setback being granted and subject to a limited number of design refinements on the house. He stated that as part of the permitting process, the City Engineer will review proposed drainage improvements adding that no permits will be issued until the City Engineer is satisfied with the grading and drainage plans. He stated that findings in support of the requested corner side yard variance are detailed in the staff report.

In response to a question Chairman Bass, Mr. Prado confirmed that a drainage and grading plan prepared by a licensed engineer, will be required at the time of submittal for permit and will be subject to review and approval by the City Engineer.

Chairman Bass invited questions from the Board.

In response to a question from Board member Marshall, Mr. Prado stated that to date, the petition has only been before the Historic Preservation Commission and was modified during that process from the plans originally presented. He stated that this is the first time the plans are being presented to the Board.

In response to questions from Board member Adams, Mr. Prado clarified the siting of the house and confirmed that the existing cottage encroaches beyond the setback, into the City right-of-way. He acknowledged that the site was not staked.

In response to questions from Board member Marshall, Mr. Prado confirmed that the house only encroaches into the setback along the south property line, along Woodbine Lane. He stated that the house does not encroach into the setback on the north side. He pointed out the limited buildable area on the property.

Board member Marshall commented that the house appears to be generally centered on the lot. He commended the petitioner for adhering to the setbacks on three sides of the property.

In response to questions from Board member Adams, Mr. Prado confirmed that the drainage and grading plan will be required as part of the application for permit.

In response to questions from Board member Marshall, Mr. Prado confirmed that the two existing structures are both within the zoning setbacks. He stated that the proposed residence is larger than the existing structures but is less nonconforming than the existing structures.

In response to a question from Board member Adams, Mr. Prado stated that options for siting the house could be further explored. He noted that shifting the house may impact more trees on the site.

In response to questions from Chairman Bass, Mr. Prado confirmed that an arborist's report was submitted to the Historic Preservation Commission. He stated that any trees intended for preservation will need to be protected during construction.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, Chairman Bass invited public comment.

Sheila Herietta, 885 Woodbine Lane, stated that she and her husband, David, are not opposed to replacing the existing structures with a new home. She acknowledged

that unfortunately, the structures have deteriorated due to lack of care by the previous property owner. She stated appreciation for the changes made to date to the plans for the replacement residence and the commitment voiced by the property owners to preserve mature trees on the site. She stated that the mature trees contribute significantly to the character of Woodbine Lane. She stated that as the homeowners directly across the street, their concerns focus on the combination of the size of the replacement home and the proposal to have the setback along Woodbine Lane bear the full brunt of the encroachment. She stated that the large residence will be imposing on the Woodbine Lane streetscape and will alter the essential character of the street. She stated that she is not persuaded by arguments that the encroachment as proposed is less than the encroachment of the cottage noting that the cottage is much smaller than the proposed residence. She acknowledged that based on the square footage of the lot, a larger home can be supported but stated that because the lot is irregularly shaped, consideration should be given to whether the lot can support a house of the permitted square footage. She stated that the original section of her home was built in 1908. She acknowledged that the original portion of her home encroaches into the setback along Woodbine Lane but noted that when the previous owners added on to the home, the additions were located in back of the structure, away from the street, avoiding any change to the streetscape. She questioned whether the plans as now presented to the Board are consistent with the plans reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission with respect to the proposed setback along Woodbine Lane. She stated that as proposed, the residence encroaches 43 feet into the 50 foot setback. She stated that in her opinion, an 86% reduction in the setback is not reasonable. She asked that if a variance is granted, the encroachment into the setbacks be balanced around the lot to the west and north sides as well as the south. She stated that if the house is shifted to the west, it will be further from the ravine, more centrally located on the property, and less imposing on the Woodbine Lane streetscape. She stated that there is also the option of making the house smaller to minimize the impact overall, potentially preserving more trees on the site. She stated that as proposed, almost the entire house is nonconforming. She recognized the complexity of the property but questioned whether the owners considered the limitations of the property before purchasing it. She stated that there are many small lots in Lake Forest and the rules are not compromised to allow larger homes than can be accommodated while complying with the rules. She stated that construction on the site should not proceed until work on the Woodbine Bridge is completed. She stated that they oppose the variance as currently proposed.

John Roberts spoke on behalf of his father, Theodore Roberts, who has lived at 1020 Lake Road for over 40 years. He stated concern about the impact of the proposed development on how stormwater moves through the property to the ravine. He stated that it is his understanding that the approval of the demolition has not yet been finalized pending resolution of outstanding design issues by a subcommittee of the Historic Preservation Commission. He questioned how the Board can be asked to approve a variance for the development before the questions about drainage are

answered. He stated that prior to any approvals, a significant amount of vegetation was removed from the property destabilizing the soil and the ability of the property to absorb water. He stated that an encroachment of 43 feet into a 50 foot setback is significant. He stated that the deterioration of the structures is the direct result of deferred maintenance. He stated that any consideration of redevelopment of the property should include replanting.

Hearing no further requests to speak from the public, Chairman Bass invited final questions from the Commission.

In response to a question from Board member Adams, Mr. Prado confirmed that permits for work on the site will not be issued until drainage and grading plans are reviewed and approved by the City Engineer.

In response to questions from Board member Giannelli, Mr. Timbota explained that they were attracted to the land and the location, but not to the structures. He stated that some removal of vegetation was done with the intent of cleaning up the property and taking measurements. He stated that the vegetation was too thick on parts of the property to allow access.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, Chairman Bass invited the petitioner to respond to the comments offered by members of the public.

Mr. Timbota stated the intention to build a home that his family and future owners can enjoy for the next 100 years. He stated that through the public process, in response to the comments to date, the footprint of the house was reduced drastically from the plan they originally developed with their architect. He stated that the drainage and landscaping will be addressed as part of the permitting and development processes. He stated that more trees will be planted noting that he and his family want privacy from the neighbors too. He stated an interest in investing time and money into the property to bring it to its full potential.

In response to a question from Board member Adams, Mr. Timbota stated that the size of the house has already been reduced in size during the process.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Ms. Czerniak said that the Woodbine Bridge replacement project is expected to be completed in the fall. She acknowledged that additional construction activity in the immediate area will be problematic while the bridge is still under construction.

Hearing no further questions, Chairman Bass invited Board discussion.

Board member Marshall acknowledged the challenges of the property and the petition. He stated appreciation that the Historic Preservation Commission had the

opportunity to review the petition in advance of the Board noting that the Commission concluded that salvaging and reusing the existing structures is not feasible. He acknowledged the unusual shape of the property and noted that a residence of approximately 3,000 square feet is fairly modest for the neighborhood. He stated that given the circumstances, removing the two structures which are currently eyesores is reasonable as is the proposed site plan. He noted that for the most part, the proposed residence complies with the setbacks except along the south side of the property. He noted that other residences in the immediate area encroach into the front yard setback. He stated that drainage issues will need to be addressed to the satisfaction of the City prior to the issuance of permits.

Chairman Bass suggested consideration of shifting the residence slightly north and west. He stated that if the drainage issue is not addressed to the satisfaction of the City Engineer, permits to allow construction of a new house will not be issued.

Board member Giannelli agreed that addressing the drainage issues is important given the path of stormwater across this property as it travels to the ravine. He stated support for considering whether the house could be shifted to the north or west with consideration of how drainage would be impacted. He stated his understanding that if the variance is approved and the house is not built, the variance is not transferable to a future buyer without further review by the City.

In response to a question from Board member Adams, Mr. Prado stated that the proposed residence as presented is sited slightly further from the ravine than the existing cottage.

In response to questions from the Board, Chairman Bass, Mr. Prado reviewed the square footage of the house and confirmed that the house is below the allowable square footage based on the land area with the square footage of the north appendage removed from the calculation.

The Board discussed options for shifting the siting of the house.

Chairman Bass stated general comfort with the size of the proposed residence but asked that further consideration be given to the siting and whether the residence could be shifted somewhat to the north and west or rotated. He expressed concern about recommendation approval with numerous conditions which could be unclear.

Board member Adams commented that the City processes, although they take time and patience, result in making the City so desirable. He stated appreciation for the petitioner's patience. He stated that a little more study could uncover opportunities that could result in improvements that will make a difference overall.

Board member Marshall commented that having the architect at the meeting would be helpful to understand the design options and challenges that were considered. Hearing no further comments from the Board, Chairman Bass invited a motion.

Board member Giannelli made a motion to continue consideration of the petition for 870 Woodbine Lane with direction to the petitioner to explore the feasibility of shifting the footprint of the house to the north and west or rotating it with consideration given to preserving trees and allowing sufficient area to properly address stormwater flows across the property to the ravine.

The motion was seconded by Board member Adams and approved by a vote of 3 to 1 with Board member Marshall voting nay based on his interest in moving the petition forward with conditions rather than continuing the petition.

4. Consideration of a request for a recommendation in support of a variance from the driveway regulations to allow two new driveway curb cuts on Ridge Road at **200 N. Ridge Road**
Property Owner and Representative: Ahmed Azhari

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.

Mr. Azhari asked the Board to approve a third curb cut for his property. He explained that his house faces Ridge Road with driveway access from Mellody Road to the rear of the home. He stated that the access is not ideal because to reach the front door, guests and delivery drivers park on Ridge Road, in front of the house. He stated that Ridge Road is frequently used as a cut through from Route 60 to Deerpath so there is a substantial amount of traffic. He stated that the existing driveway width is limited because of a tree on either side of the driveway and because of its location partially within the setback. He noted the intersection of Ridge and Mellody Roads which further impacts street parking adjacent to his home. He presented a site plan with a U-shaped driveway with two new curbs on to Ridge Road to provide access to the front door of the home. He acknowledged that the front of the house is currently barren and stated his intention to add plantings to enhance the curb appeal of the home.

Ms. Friedrich stated that a variance is requested to allow a third curb cut on to the property. She stated that the Code permits two curb cuts for residential properties. She confirmed that the property is located on the corner of Ridge and Mellody Roads and that the existing driveway is on Mellody Road, at the northwest corner of the property. She stated that the existing driveway will remain, noting that it provides access to the garage. She pointed out that the nearby intersection is irregular, not a 90 degree intersection, making on street parking adjacent to the home awkward. She stated that the petitioner presented various options early in the process including an

option for a single curb cut on Ridge Road with a motor court. She stated that the motor court would need to be large to accommodate turning movements and as a result, would also require a variance. She stated that the proposed driveway is modest at 13 feet in width. She stated that additional landscaping should be provided in the front yard to soften the new driveway and the streetscape. She stated that a fully dimensioned plan based on a legal survey of the property will be required at the time of submittal for permit.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, material for the driveway Mr. Azhari stated that the driveway will be asphalt.

Chairman Bass invited questions from the other Board members.

Board member Adams stated that there is a home at 111 Ridge Road which has two curb cuts on Ridge Road, on the east side of the street, south of this property.

In response to a question from Board member Marshall, Mr. Azhari confirmed that there were trees in the front yard, but they were diseased and removed. He acknowledged a slight grade change in the front yard but stated that his contractor said that it will not be problematic for the driveway.

In response to questions from Board member Gianlelli, Mr. Azhari confirmed that the landscaping in the front yard can be enhanced from what is shown on the current plan. He stated that year round screening can be added.

Hearing no further questions from the Board, Chairman Bass invited public comment.

Ms. Engle, Ridge Road resident, questioned why a driveway would be added on Ridge Road when there is a driveway on Melody Road. She stated that drainage is a problem on Ridge Road because of the old pipes. She stated that there are no sidewalks on the Ridge Road. She stated that the image presented is not accurate.

Chairman Bass invited the petitioner to respond to the public comments.

Mr. Azhari stated that he is not aware of a drainage issue on the street. He stated that drainage will be considered in designing the driveway.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Mr. Azhari stated that pavers could be considered but he noted that would be an additional cost. He stated that other driveways in the neighborhood are asphalt.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Ms. Czerniak stated that she is not aware of drainage issues on Ridge Road. She said that she will alert engineering staff

to the concern. She added that drainage will be considered in reviewing plans for the driveway prior to the issuance of permits.

In response to questions from Board member Marshall, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the only variance requested is to allow a third curb cut. She stated that the lot coverage and driveway width are all in compliance with the Code. She stated that she is not aware of any parking limitations on Ridge Road.

In response to a question from Board member Marshall, Ms. Friedrich stated that requests for third curb cuts are infrequent.

In response to a question from Chairman Bass, Ms. Friedrich reviewed the other driveway options that were considered by the petitioner.

Chairman Bass invited final comments from the Board.

Board member Adams agreed that more year round vegetation should be required. He acknowledged that Ridge Road is a high traffic area.

Chairman Bass acknowledged that the proposed plan will be more convenient but questioned whether a clear hardship exists. He agreed that Ridge Road is used as a short cut by drivers.

Board member Marshall stated that safety is a reasonable concern given the volume of traffic above and above that found on other residential streets. He stated that drop offs and pickups could be safer with cars off of the street. He stated that the house is very exposed and stated support for additional landscaping.

Board member Gianelli stated that the driveway could put more traffic on Ridge Road since the current driveway is on Melody Road.

Board member Marshall commented that without the driveway, vehicles may park on Ridge Road to access the front door. He noted that the mailbox is on Melody Road, but the property is addressed as Ridge Road. He stated that care will need to be taken to properly address the grade change and drainage from the driveway.

Chairman Bass agreed that the lack of trees in front of the house makes it more prominent than it might otherwise be.

In response to questions from Chairman Bass and Board member Adams, Mr. Azhari, stated that a circular configuration with a single curb cut on Ridge Road was considered but presented challenges for maneuvering cars to avoid backing out on to Ridge Road. He commented on the limited functionality of the existing driveway.

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

Board member Marshall made a motion to recommend approval of a variance for property at 200 N. Ridge Road to allow a third curb cut subject to the following conditions.

1. Provide a fully dimensioned plan on a legal plat of survey at the time of submission for permit.
2. Provide a detailed landscape plan reflecting enhanced year round plantings in front of the house and along Ridge Road at the time of submission for permit.

The motion was seconded by Board member Adams and approved by a 4 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 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Czerniak
Director of Community Development