



**UPDATED AUGUST 25, 2025**  
**DES PLAINES PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD MEETING**  
**August 12, 2025**  
**MINUTES**

The Des Plaines Planning and Zoning Board held its regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, August 12, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 102 of the Des Plaines Civic Center.

Chairman Szabo called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and a roll call was established.

PRESENT: Catalano, Weaver, Fowler, Zadrozny, Veremis & Szabo  
ABSENT: None  
ALSO PRESENT: Jonathan Stytz, Senior Planner  
Samantha Redman, Senior Planner  
Jonathan Mendel, Assistant Director of CED

A quorum was present.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The draft July 22, 2025 PZB minutes were reviewed by the PZB.

Member Catalano moved and Member Fowler seconded a motion to approve the July 22, 2025 PZB meeting minutes

AYES: Catalano, Fowler, Zadrozny, Weaver, Veremis, Fallico & Szabo  
NAYS: None  
ABSTAIN: None

\*\*\*MOTION CARRIED\*\*\*

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEM**

There was no public comment.

**GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Assistant Director Mendel detailed the City Council's approval of the 581 E. Golf Road day care Conditional Use Ordinance Second Reading. This was on the Consent Agenda and approval without further discussion.

**ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS**

25-043-V – 554 Arlington Ave – Minor Variation to replace an existing detached garage located 0 feet from the rear property line with a new detached garage in the same location, where a minimum 5-foot-setback is required – Approved

Case No. 25-038-V  
Case No. 25-040-CU  
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**PENDING APPLICATIONS**

Chairman Szabo introduced the cases on the agenda.

**Addresses:** 1173 Elmhurst Road **Case Number:** 25-040-CU

The petitioner requests a conditional use to allow a commercially zoned assembly use in the C-3 General Commercial district, and any other variations, waivers, and zoning relief as may be necessary. Petitioner requested continuance to the August 26, 2025 PZB meeting.

**PIN:** 08-24-102-013-0000

**Petitioner/Owner:** 1173 S. Elmhurst Rd LLC (Representative: Hukam Rawat, 1173 Elmhurst Road, Des Plaines, IL 60016)

Petitioner requests a continuance to the August 26, 2025 PZB meeting

Chairman Szabo asked if there was any discussion and there was none.

Member Catalano moved and Member Veremis seconded a motion to approve the continuance request to the August 26, 2025 meeting.

**AYES:** Catalano, Fowler, Zadrozny, Weaver, Fallico, Veremis & Szabo

**NAYS:** None

**ABSTAIN:** None

**\*\*\*MOTION CARRIED\*\*\***

**Address:** 555 Howard Avenue **Case Number:** 25-038-V

The petitioner requests major variations to reduce the minimum parking lot and parkway landscaping requirements for a future industrial warehouse use in the M-2 General Manufacturing district, and any other variations, waivers, and zoning relief as may be necessary.

**PINs:** 09-30-400-032-0000 and 09-30-400-002-0000

**Petitioner/Owner:** Bridge Point Des Plaines LLC (Representative: Jonathan Pozerycki, 9525 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue, Suite 700, Rosemont, IL 60018)

Chairman Szabo swore-in the petitioner team members that may give testimony.

Curt Pascoe, Bridge Construction, (representing the petitioner) outlined his company's history and the details of the nature of their request for various site and parking lot landscaping major variations as outlined in their request submittal as outlined in the meeting agenda packet.

Member Fowler asked how reducing the size of would be considered a hardship.

Curt Pascoe stated that reducing the building because of the easement would cause a hardship not of their making.

Member Weaver asked if the building is designed for general manufacturing as well as logistics and warehousing.

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Curt Pascoe stated this building is designed to accommodate a wide range of industrial/manufacturing and logistics uses.

Senior Planner Jonathan Stytz presented the staff analysis.

**Issue:** The petitioner requests major variations to reduce the required parkway and parking lot landscaping requirements on the subject property in the M-2 General Manufacturing district at 555 Howard Avenue.

- Ward Number:** #5, Alderman Thomas Merlin
- Existing Zoning:** M-2, General Manufacturing District
- Existing Land Uses:** Vacant Lot (former industrial building)
- Surrounding Zoning:** North: M-2, General Manufacturing District  
South: M-2, General Manufacturing District  
East: R-1, Single Family Residential District  
West: M-2, General Manufacturing District
- Surrounding Land Uses:** North: Industrial buildings (Manufacturing)  
South: Industrial buildings (Manufacturing)  
East: Single Family Residences (Residential)  
West: Industrial building (Manufacturing)
- Street Classification:** Wolf Road is a minor arterial street under Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) jurisdiction and Howard Avenue is a local street under City of Des Plaines jurisdiction.
- Comprehensive Plan:** The Future Land Use map designates this property as industrial.
- Property/Zoning History:** The subject property was annexed into the City in 1958 as vacant land. It was developed around 1961 with an industrial building and off-street parking areas off Wolf Road<sup>1</sup>. The original building was expanded around 1981 and later a second building was added. There is an existing 82.5-foot public utility easement established in 1960 that runs along the entire north property line as illustrated on the attached ALTA/NSPS Land Title Survey, which does not permit the installation of trees or shrubs within the easement boundaries. The subject property has since been purchased by the petitioner and has been razed to make room for a new industrial building. A recent subdivision process was completed to consolidate the two existing lots into one lot of record, which was approved by City Council on July 7, 2025 through Resolution R-138-25.

### **Major Variations**

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<sup>1</sup> Historic Aerials. <https://www.historicaerials.com/location/41.625/-87.875/T1890/16>. Retrieved August 5, 2025.

**Request Summary:**

*Overview*

The proposed development on the subject property will be comprised of a 225,604-square-foot industrial building with 64 exterior truck docks, 18 trailer parking spaces, and 199 car parking stalls as described in the attached Project Narrative and illustrated in the attached Geometric Plan. The Geometric Plan illustrates that all of the Howard Avenue southern right-of-way and a majority of the proposed north passenger vehicle parking area is located within the 82.5-foot public utility easement limiting the landscape improvements in these areas.

Due to the northern public utility easement and the space constraints created by the proposed development, the petitioner requests multiple variations to reduce the amount of parkway and parking lot landscaping required as noted in the attached Petitioner's Responses to Standards and listed below.

*Requested Variations*

Below is a summary of the requirements for each section and denotes where variations are requested for the proposed industrial development:

- A major variation from Section 12-10-7 of the Zoning Ordinance to reduce the required number of parkway trees from 40 to 9;
- A major variation from Section 12-10-8.A.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to reduce the required number of trees in the interior parking lot landscape areas from 33 to 31; and
- Major variations from Section 12-10-8.B of the Zoning Ordinance to:
  - Reduce the required number of shade trees in the perimeter parking lot landscape areas from 72 to 8; and
  - Reduce the required number of shrubs in the perimeter parking lot landscape areas from 412 to 81.

*Parkway Landscaping Requirements*

Required landscaping improvements in the parkway include the installation of shade and ornamental trees—which shall be placed 40 feet apart for 100 percent of the yard length abutting a street—and turf for all non-paved areas. Groundcover materials and shrub plantings are not required but if they are proposed they must comply with specific height standards and cannot obstruct or interfere with the use of sidewalks or on-street parking areas. The proposal includes the installation of grasses in the north parkway along

Howard Avenue, natural turf throughout both parkways, and some shade trees in the east parkway along Wolf Road, as noted in the table below.

Parkway Landscaping (Section 12-10-7)		
Regulation	Required	Proposed
Shade and Ornamental trees shall be placed 40 FT apart for the entire yard length abutting a street	40	9*

***\*A major variation is required for the number of parkway trees proposed.***

*Parking Lot Landscaping Requirements*

Parking lot landscaping regulations consist of interior and perimeter parking lot improvements. The table below identifies the required improvements for these landscape areas and how the proposal complies with these standards:

- Perimeter Parking Lot Landscaping: Pursuant to Section 12-10-8.B, a minimum five-foot-wide landscape area shall be installed in the space between the parking spaces and property lines for all parking lots located within a required yard and/or within 20 feet of a lot line.
- Interior Parking Lot Landscaping: Pursuant to Section 12-10-8.A.1, not less than five percent of the interior of a parking lot shall be devoted to landscaping, excluding landscaped areas located along the perimeter of a parking lot beyond the curb or edge of pavement of the lot. These landscape areas must be: (i) located at the end of every parking row and after every 30 parking spaces; (ii) no less than eight feet in width; and (iii) no less than 100 square feet in area.

Perimeter Parking Lot Landscaping (Section 12-10-8.B)		
Regulation	Required	Proposed
One shade tree shall be placed 40 FT apart for the entire perimeter landscape area	72	8*
One shrub shall be placed three feet apart for a minimum of 75% of the yard length	412	81*
Interior Parking Lot Landscaping (Section 12-10-8.A)		
Regulation	Required	Proposed
No less than 5% of the interior parking lot shall be improved with landscaping	3,403 SF	3,403 SF
One shade tree is required for every 100 SF of interior parking lot landscape area	33	31*

***\*Major Variations are required the number of shade trees and shrubs.***

As illustrated in the attached Landscape Plan, the perimeter landscape areas contain a variety of shade, evergreen, and ornamental trees, with the minority consisting of required shade trees. Additional evergreen and ornamental trees have been proposed in the perimeter parking lot areas in lieu of more shade trees and shrubs. The proposal includes a variety of shrubs along the north, west, and east building elevations with some shade, evergreen, and ornamental trees near the loading dock area. Areas not improved with plantings, surfaces, and buildings, are identified to be improved with natural turf groundcover.

*Consideration of Alternatives*

Given that the subject property is being redeveloped, there are some alternatives to consider:

- *Reduction in the amount of off-street parking spaces:* No specific user has been identified at this time. However, the building is designed for use by common industrial and manufacturing uses such as distribution centers, warehousing, and wholesaling. Pursuant to Section 12-9-7 of the Zoning Ordinance, these types of uses require one off-street parking space for every 1,500 square feet of gross floor area. Given the proposed building size, a total of 151 off-street parking spaces are required. There are 199 car spaces proposed, allowing for a reduction of these spaces and more space for required shade trees and shrubs.
- *Reduction in the amount of semitruck parking spaces:* There are currently 18 semitruck off-street parking spaces in addition to the 68 loading dock spaces proposed with the building. Similar to car off-street parking spaces, a reduction in the existing semitruck parking spaces would provide additional room for more shade tree and shrub plantings with less cost to the developer/petitioner.
- *Reduction in the size of the proposed building:* This option would allow for a reconfiguration of the site and/or provide much needed space for additional landscaping, specifically required shade trees and shrubs. While smaller, the building itself could still be utilized for a variety of industrial or manufacturing uses permitting a reasonable use of the lot.

**Standards for Variation:** The following is a discussion of standards for variations from Section 12-3-6(H) of the Zoning Ordinance. Rationale for how the proposed use would satisfy the

standards as provided below and in the petitioner's response to standards. The PZB may use this rationale toward its recommendation, amend it, or may make up its own.

**1. Hardship: No variation shall be granted pursuant to this subsection H unless the applicant shall establish that carrying out the strict letter of the provisions of this title would create a particular hardship or a practical difficulty.**

*Comment:* It is acknowledged that the existing 82.5-foot public utility easement at the north of the subject property with its planting restrictions does limit improvements for a portion of the subject property, which could be construed as a hardship or practical difficulty for the property owner. However, the proposed building on the subject property is expansive—covering almost half of the total property area—which, in addition to required pavement areas, greatly limits the amount of space available to install landscape improvements, arguably more so than the utility easement. The size and positioning of the proposed building could be reduced and/or reconfigured to provide additional space for the necessary landscaping improvements and adequate screening from neighboring uses. Nonetheless, the PZB shall decide.

**2. Unique Physical Condition: The subject lot is exceptional as compared to other lots subject to the same provision by reason of a unique physical condition, including presence of an existing use, structure, or sign, whether conforming or nonconforming; irregular or substandard shape or size; exceptional topographical features; or other extraordinary physical conditions peculiar to and inherent in the subject lot that amount to more than a mere inconvenience to the owner and that relate to or arise out of the lot rather than the personal situation of the current owner of the lot.**

*Comment:* The subject property is neither irregular nor substandard in shape and size and does not contain exceptional topographical features. However, the large public utility easement at the north and its specific planting restrictions is a unique physical feature for this site and the neighboring properties located south of Howard Avenue. That said, it should be noted that neighboring properties along the south side of Howard Avenue do contain trees and shrubs in the parkway and perimeter parking lot areas. In addition, the subject property, prior to demolition and grading of the site, contained various trees and larger foliage at its northwest corner. As such, the PZB may ask for additional information regarding the restrictions of the public utility easement and why trees and shrubs were permitted on site and on the neighboring properties.

**3. Not Self-Created: The aforesaid unique physical condition is not the result of any action or inaction of the owner or its predecessors in title and existed at the time of the enactment of the provisions from which a variance is sought or was created by natural forces or was the result of governmental action, other than the adoption of this title.**

*Comment:* While the location, dimensions, and size of the aforementioned northern public utility easement of the subject property are not the result of a known action by the current owner or previous owners, the property was purchased with these attributes. In addition, the proposed development can and should be designed so as to consider all applicable code requirements, including landscaping, to meet the intent of the Zoning Ordinance. Since the subject property is near single family residences and industrial uses are known for more intense

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and disturbing operations, additional considerations for the development of the site should be taken into account. Nonetheless, see the attached Petitioner's Responses to Standards.

**4. Denied Substantial Rights: The carrying out of the strict letter of the provision from which a variance is sought would deprive the owner of the subject lot of substantial rights commonly enjoyed by owners of other lots subject to the same provision.**

*Comment:* Carrying out the strict letter of this code for parkway and parking lot landscaping does not necessarily deprive the property owner of substantial rights but rather requires the proposed development on the subject property to be scaled appropriately to comply with all zoning regulations and minimize adverse effects on surrounding properties.

While properties in the M-2 General Manufacturing district are zoned for a variety of different industrial/manufacturing uses, the Zoning Ordinance prescribes a greater abundance of landscaping improvements on these sites so that the more intense operations conducted on site are better screened and adverse effects are reduced. Requiring a new development to be designed to meet the landscape requirements does not, in and of itself, infringe on the property owner's rights or prevent the owner from reasonably utilizing the subject property. While some relief may be warranted given the planting restrictions along the north of the property, the PZB shall consider the extent to which relief of the aforementioned landscape requirements should be granted.

**5. Not Merely Special Privilege: The alleged hardship or difficulty is neither merely the inability of the owner or occupant to enjoy some special privilege or additional right not available to owners or occupants of other lots subject to the same provision, nor merely the inability of the owner to make more money from the use of the subject lot.**

*Comment:* Granting all variations to the extent requested may be construed as a special privilege given that the new development can be designed to better comply with the landscaping regulations even with the existing northern easement restrictions. The petitioner has amended the landscape plan to place some additional required trees in the parking lot interior and perimeter along the north building elevation and sporadically throughout the remainder of the site, which has lessened the degree of a portion of the variation requests. In addition, efforts have been made to intensify the landscape improvements along the east parking area to better screen the proposed development from the residences across Wolf Road. However, these efforts are greatly limited by the existing site design and building size and does not create ample room for the number of shrubs and large shade trees to be installed. The PZB should consider whether the extent of the requested variations are warranted or if adjustments should be made by the developer to lessen the relief needed.

**6. Title And Plan Purposes: The variation would not result in a use or development of the subject lot that would be not in harmony with the general and specific purposes for which this title and the provision from which a variation is sought were enacted or the general purpose and intent of the comprehensive plan.**

*Comment:* The 2019 Comprehensive Plan discusses the pursuit of promoting the redevelopment of industrial areas and new manufacturing-related businesses. While no specific tenant has been identified at this time, the proposed development is designed for a variety of

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different types of industrial uses, which aligns with the Comprehensive Plan. While the Comprehensive Plan discusses landscaping wholistically in comparison to the specific intent of the Zoning Ordinance, it does focus on utilizing landscaping and screening installations in a way to beautify and enhance properties throughout the city, especially along major corridors. Nonetheless, the PZB shall decide.

**7. No Other Remedy: There is no means other than the requested variation by which the alleged hardship or difficulty can be avoided or remedied to a degree sufficient to permit a reasonable use of the subject lot.**

*Comment:* The *Consideration of Alternatives* section above identifies viable alternatives to the extent of the variations being requested by the petitioner. While staff have discussed options with the petitioner, the petitioner has requested approval of the landscape variations with the current site layout. Given the multiple alternatives available to the petitioner, the PZB may wish to ask why certain alternative designs are not feasible.

**8. Minimum Required: The requested variation is the minimum measure of relief necessary to alleviate the alleged hardship or difficulty presented by the strict application of this title.**

*Comment:* The variation requests may not, in staff's opinion, be the minimum measure of relief to address the petitioner's concerns given the development design options available to the developer. Instead, the reconfiguration or size reduction of proposed building on the subject property would better utilize the available lot area for landscaping and meet the applicable city ordinances all while minimizing adverse effects on surrounding properties.

**PZB Procedure and Recommended Conditions:** Under Section 12-3-6.G.2.b (Procedure for Review and Decision of Major Variations) of the Zoning Ordinance, the PZB has the authority to *recommend* that the City Council approve or deny the requests for major variations. Consideration of the requests should be based on a review of the information presented by the petitioner and the findings made above, as specified in Section 12-3-6.H (Standards for Variation) of the Zoning Ordinance.

If the PZB recommends and City Council ultimately approves the requests, staff recommends the following conditions.

**Conditions of Approval:**

1. The Landscape Plan shall be revised to add a continuous wood mulch landscape bed along the entire perimeter of the north parking area and drive aisle with a variety of grass and perennial plantings not less than 36 inches in height at maturity.
2. The Landscape Plan shall be revised to add a dense and continuous evergreen hedge along the east side of the loading dock area in conformance with Section 12-10-11 of the Zoning Ordinance to ensure the loading dock area is completely screened from view of the street and residences.
3. Prior to the issuance of a business registration for any uses, all landscaping improvements must be installed in compliance with Chapter 10 Landscaping and Screening of the Zoning

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Chairman Szabo asked for comments from the PZB members.

Member Weaver asked when the petitioner was made aware of easement and landscaping requirements.

Senior Planner Stytz stated that the easement and landscaping requirements were explained in early 2024 during the tentative plat of subdivision process.

Member Weaver stated, based on staff's statement, that a petitioner would have the easement and landscaping requirements very early in the process.

Member Weaver asked the staff if the north façade of the proposed building was moved further south, then how much would the building's area be reduced?

Senior Planner Stytz stated staff did not perform this analysis and that the petitioner could address this question.

Member Weaver stated the intent with their question is to address staff's suggested alternative methods for compliance. He also stated he wishes to know how that affects the size of the proposed building.

Curt Pascoe stated that his firm was aware of the easement early in the process. He also stated that reducing the area of the proposed building to provide the site area to provide compliant landscaping would result in the significant and uneconomic reduction in the proposed building's size.

Member Weaver asked the Petitioner about their justification for 199 vehicle parking when that is much more than required.

Curt Pascoe stated that the number is intended to accommodate tenants with a higher employee count in order to provide more future use and occupancy flexibility.

Member Fallico stated that there are about 49 extra vehicle parking spaces and whether reducing the number of parking spaces would provide more area for site and parking landscaping.

Curt Pascoe stated that removing parking along the Howard Street frontage is possible in the easement, but no additional trees or shrubs could be installed within the easement.

Member Fallico asked staff if more landscaping such as alternative landscaping could be planted within the easement instead of trees.

Senior Planner Stytz stated grasses and perennials could be planted in this easement and the Petitioner proposes doing this.

Curt Pascoe stated they are proposing extensive landscaping along Howard Ave.

Member Veremis asked where the evergreen trees are proposed.

Curt Pascoe stated that the evergreen trees are adjacent to Wolf Rd and in the NW and SW corners of the site.

Member Fowler stated it would be more understandable to focus landscaping onto the Wolf Rd side of the property which faces the residential on the east side of Wolf Rd.

Curt Pascoe stated they are planning to move as much landscaping to the Wolf Rd frontage as possible.

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Senior Planner Stytz stated the minimum landscaping buffer requirements.

Chairman Szabo if there is a landscaping expert attending tonight.

Kathryn Talty (Petitioner's landscape architect) was present and sworn in.

Chairman Szabo asked if the tree restrictions within the easement may be due to root invasion.

Kathryn Talty stated that the easement restriction is universal. To comply with the easement and the zoning code requirements, they are proposing to plant tall grasses in the easement and relocating as many evergreen trees along the Wolf Rd frontage.

Member Veremis asked if there has been any communication from residents to the City or the Petitioner.

Senior Planner stated there have been no comments directed to staff.

Member Weaver asked if existing trees in the easement are nonconforming throughout the other portions of the easement's ROW east and west of the subject property.

Senior Planner Stytz stated he is unaware of whether landscaping in the easement outside of this subject property were formally permitted or not.

Andrew Scott (Attorney for the Petitioner) asked that the PZB consider the third recommended condition be reconsidered to permit more time for business registration, in the event additional time is needed outside of the planting season. For instance, allowing a tenant to occupy the building in winter before the site landscaping is completed and approved.

Curt Pascoe stated there doesn't appear to be parkway trees within the parkway on the east side of the Wolf Rd ROW. He stated they could plant trees within the east side of the Wolf Rd ROW.

Asst. Dir Jonathan Mendel stated that PZB should be cautious regarding this suggestion from the Petitioner as this idea has not been reviewed by the City's PWE Dept and/or IDOT.

Curt Pascoe agreed that such a planting scheme would need to be guided by surveying for underground utilities and review/approval by applicable government agencies. Alternatively, they could plant more foundation landscaping within the east side of the subject site plan.

Member Fallico asked the Petitioner about the evergreen trees throughout the site, and if there is an intent to create an evergreen screening hedge.

Senior Planner Stytz stated the intent is to plant an evergreen opaque screen in that area of the site and the PZB could require more is so desired through a condition of approval.

There were no additional comments or questions from the PZB or comments from the public.

Member Weaver made a motion to recommend City Council approval of the major variations for site landscaping and staff generated conditions of approval with an amended sentence to the proposed third recommended condition of approval stating, "unless applicable winter weather conditions would necessitate a delay in plantings".

Member Fowler asked to place an additional timeframe limitation on the amended third condition of approval. There was discussion among the Petitioner, PZB and Asst Dir Mendel also provided discussion.

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The PZB decided that “late Spring time” would be satisfactory and further amended the third condition of approval “unless applicable winter weather conditions would necessitate a delay in plantings but no later than June 21”.

Member Weaver moved and Member Catalano seconded a motion to recommend City Council approval of the major variations, with the two staff generated conditions of approval and the amended language for the third condition of approval to state, “unless applicable winter weather conditions would necessitate a delay in plantings no later than June 21<sup>st</sup>.”

AYES: Catalano, Fowler, Zadrozny, Weaver, Veremis & Szabo  
NAYS: None  
ABSTAIN: None

\*\*\*MOTION CARRIED\*\*\*

Chairman Szabo introduced the next case on the agenda. Senior Planner Redman provided the staff report for this item.

**Address:** Citywide **Case Number:** 25-042-TA

The petitioner requests text amendments to the Zoning Ordinance related to applicability of Section 12-3-11 Building Design Standards and permitted materials for single-family and two-family residential.

**Petitioner:** City of Des Plaines

Chairman Szabo directed meeting to Senior Planner Sam Redman and she presented the staff analysis.

**Issue:** Consider Zoning Ordinance amendments to amend Section 12-3-11 to modify the applicability requirements for single-family and two-family residences, and other minor clean-up of text in this section.

### **Background**

At its April 22, 2025 meeting, the Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) discussed Section 12-3-11, Building Design Review Standards, which regulates the appearance of buildings within the City. Based on this discussion, the Board directed staff to prepare amendments to improve requirements. The following proposed amendments are devoted to single-family and two-family residential buildings.

As discussed at the meeting, under the current code, additions exceeding 15 percent of the existing floor area or changes to any street-facing elevation require the entire building to comply with these standards. For example, a home clad with siding with a larger than 15% addition would be required to add a masonry material on all elevations. For older homes, particularly those built before the standards were adopted, meeting the masonry requirement can create significant structural and financial challenges. Many homeowners recently have preferred to expand and improve their homes rather than move to larger, newer houses in other communities. For the City of Des Plaines, this creates a positive feedback loop that fosters community cohesion, neighborhood stability, and ongoing reinvestment

Minor variations have provided a path to allow these projects to proceed, but creates an additional process and do not have a guarantee of approval. Between 2023 and 2025, twenty-three minor variations related to these requirements were reviewed, primarily involving additions or renovations to single-family detached homes. Most were approved, often with conditions designed to promote harmonious integration with the existing structure and neighborhood. All requests must demonstrate hardship to the satisfaction of the Zoning Administrator. An additional benefit of the proposed amendments is a potential reduction in zoning caseload, allowing planning staff to devote more time and resources to other priorities.

### **Overview of Existing Building Design Review Standards for Single Family Residences**

The Building Design Review standards generally regulate four things on a building: entrances, windows/transparency, blank walls, and exterior building facade materials. Below summarizes the various components of the code related to single family residences, although the code more broadly applies to most building types.

#### *Applicability*

The Building Design Review Standards do not apply to every building permit or development review, but apply in the below circumstances:

1. New construction of a principal structure
2. Appearance altering renovations to the front or corner facades of a principal structure; and
3. Additions to principal structures resulting in greater than fifteen percent (15%) change of gross floor area.

#### *Materials*

An emphasis on encouraging masonry materials is prevalent in this section of the Zoning Ordinance. Single-family detached houses have the following requirements:

- Single Story: 100% face brick, natural stone, or anchored or adhered masonry veneer on all exterior elevations
- Multi Story:
  - Ground story and street facing elevations: 100% face brick on all ground floor and first floor street facing elevations.
  - Ground story and not street-facing elevation: Face brick a minimum of eight feet (8') from the top of foundation. Natural stone, face brick, and anchored or adhered masonry veneer permitted on the remaining portion of the not street-facing ground story elevations above eight feet (8') from top of foundation.
  - Upper story: Ground story materials, plus painted or stained wood, vinyl siding, or fiber cement board

#### *Transparency and Blank Wall Requirements*

A minimum amount of window or glass area—referred to as *transparency*—is required on street-facing façades. The intent of this code section is to prevent blank, monotonous walls facing streets. For single-family detached houses, 15% of the street-facing facades must include transparency. In addition, there are limits on the amount of blank walls (i.e. windowless areas) allowed.

### **Building Design Review Process**

Building design review standards are typically enforced during building permit reviews. Zoning Staff review permits for both new construction and additions that trigger the applicability requirements for the Building Design Review standards. The Staff Design Review Committee reviews any new permit submitted where these standards are applicable. The “Zoning Administrator” has historically been the Director of Community and Economic Development, although occasionally it has been designated to another staff member when this position is vacant.

Minor variations may be granted in two scenarios: (1) for single-family detached homes, the Zoning Administrator may approve the variation directly; and (2) for all other building types, the Zoning Administrator may grant the variation with a recommendation from the Staff Design Review Committee. When a variation is approved, conditions may be attached, such as requiring specific substitute materials or colors, or limiting the variation to certain portions of the building. The Zoning Administrator may also approve a reduced version of the requested relief. For example, if an applicant requests that an entire building addition be clad in vinyl siding, the variation may allow vinyl on non-street-facing elevations while requiring masonry on the front elevation.

### **Proposed Amendments**

Staff proposes amending the applicability provisions for single-family and two-family residential buildings to ensure that only significant alterations are required to meet the Building Design Standards. Currently standards apply to all building types; however, the amendments divide applicability into two separate categories, as a single-family or two-family residential dwelling is a different scale of project than other types of developments.

1. **Detached Single-Family Residential and Two-Family Residential Dwellings**
  - a. **Construction of a new principal structure; and**
  - b. Additions to principal structures resulting in greater than a ~~fifteen percent (15%)~~ **fifty percent 50%** change of ~~gross~~ **conditioned** floor area.
2. **All Others**
  - a. **Construction of a new principal structure;**
  - b. **Appearance altering renovations to the front or corner facades of a principal structure.**
  - c. **Additions to principal structures resulting in greater than a fifteen percent 15% change of ~~gross~~ conditioned floor area as defined by the City of Des Plaines building code.**

#### *Rationale for Amendments*

Under the proposed language, the Building Design Standards would apply to new houses or to projects that substantially increase building size, defined as more than 50 percent, with two-family dwellings (duplexes) explicitly added to ensure consistency with other sections of the Zoning Ordinance. The change from “gross” to “conditioned” floor area further refines applicability by

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focusing on enclosed, climate-controlled space. This adjustment prevents the standards from being triggered by improvements such as porches, decks, or small additions like sunrooms, which are not true living space and typically do not meaningfully alter a building's overall design.

Staff also recommends removing the requirement that any alteration to a front or corner façade must comply with the Building Design Standards. Common examples include the addition of a new open front porch to a house that previously lacked one, or the reconfiguration of window placements to align with interior floor plan renovations. Under current regulations, such changes trigger either full compliance or the need for a minor variation request.

This requirement is not reflective of the existing conditions of residential properties in the city. Cook County data shows that only 33.6 percent of residential buildings in Des Plaines are full masonry, while 40.7 percent are a mix of wood and masonry and 24.8 percent are entirely wood.<sup>2</sup> For many homeowners, meeting masonry requirements in these situations can be prohibitively expensive, discouraging reinvestment in the housing stock. In addition, these requirements can unintentionally compromise the integrity of historic architectural styles by encouraging alterations that could be incompatible with a building's original design or materials.

Together, these amendments are intended to focus design review on projects that truly reshape a building's scale or appearance, while removing regulatory barriers that can impose unnecessary costs. In the context of rising interest rates for new mortgages and ongoing housing affordability concerns, this approach supports home improvement and neighborhood reinvestment without compromising the City's design objectives.

Finally, staff suggest a few minor clean-up amendments. In particular, the below section of code appeared to unintentionally omit other permitted masonry types of multi-story/level single family houses. The amendment expands the allowable materials to include the other masonry types permitted on single-story houses.

#### **Standards for Text Amendments:**

The following is a discussion of standards for zoning amendments from Section 12-3-7.E. of the Zoning Ordinance. Rationale for how the proposed amendments would satisfy the standards is provided. The PZB may use the statements below as its rationale or adopt its own.

**1. Whether the proposed amendment is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the comprehensive plan, as adopted and amended from time to time by the city council;**

The 2019 Comprehensive Plan calls for modernizing development regulations to reflect the existing character of the community, promote a harmonious appearance, and remove unnecessary barriers to property reinvestment. The proposed amendments directly support these goals by refining the applicability of the Building Design Standards so they are triggered only by substantial changes to a building's size or form, rather than by minor improvements. This approach aligns with the Comprehensive Plan's emphasis on maintaining neighborhood

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<sup>2</sup> [Cook County Assessor's Office "Residential Property Characteristics" Data, Updated May 11, 2022,](https://datacatalog.cookcountyil.gov/stories/s/p2kt-hk36)  
<https://datacatalog.cookcountyil.gov/stories/s/p2kt-hk36>

character while encouraging property owners to invest in and improve their homes. The amendments advance the Plan's objective of fostering high-quality, context-sensitive development that is both feasible for property owners and beneficial to the broader community.

**2. Whether the proposed amendment is compatible with current conditions and the overall character of existing development;**

The proposed amendment is compatible with current conditions and aligns with the overall character of existing development within the City. The current housing stock is not uniformly constructed with the materials currently required, and these standards can create unnecessary cost barriers for homeowners seeking to repair, renovate, or expand their homes. By focusing applicability on projects that substantially change building size, the amendments preserve the City's overall character while removing barriers to common residential improvements and additions.

**3. Whether the proposed amendment is appropriate considering the adequacy of public facilities and services available to this subject property;**

All proposed amendments are not anticipated to negatively impact public facilities and available services.

**4. Whether the proposed amendment will have an adverse effect on the value of properties throughout the jurisdiction; and**

The amendments are intended to lessen regulatory restrictions and encourage reinvestment in residential properties, which can have a positive effect on property values over time. By removing unnecessary triggers for full compliance with the Building Design Standards, the amendments make it more feasible for property owners to undertake improvements that enhance the functionality, appearance, and marketability of their homes. The focus on substantial alterations, rather than minor projects such as porches, decks, or small additions, preserves the City's design objectives while reducing the risk of discouraging desirable investment in the housing stock.

**5. Whether the proposed amendment reflects responsible standards for development and growth.**

By refining applicability to substantial changes in building size, the amendments ensure that review resources are directed toward projects with the greatest potential to affect neighborhood character. At the same time, they remove regulatory barriers that can impose unnecessary costs, discourage reinvestment, or lead to alterations incompatible with historic architectural styles. This balanced approach supports orderly growth, maintains community character, and promotes long-term housing affordability.

**PZB Procedure and Recommended Conditions:** Under Section 12-3-7.C.3 of the Zoning Ordinance, the PZB has the authority to recommend that the City Council approve, approve with modifications, or deny the above-mentioned amendments. City Council has final authority on the proposal.

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Senior Planner Redman provided several examples of properties that have received minor variations related to the section being amended.

Chairman Szabo stated that he is receptive to the proposed text amendments, provided the existing material requirements still apply to new construction in order to maintain 'quality' exterior materials. He stated an example of another community that includes new housing with predominantly siding and communicated dislike of this material and style.

Chairman Szabo asked about one of the examples in the staff presentation and whether the owner could have been persuaded by staff to add brick on the building.

Senior Planner Redman clarified that with the minor variation process, staff reviews the neighborhood context when deciding a minor variation request. The front area comprised of a mixture of siding and masonry was pre-existing, the minor variation was granted for a rear addition.

Member Weaver asked with the current regulation if the addition must comply if it is over 15%.

Member Fowler asked for clarification if 15% triggers the requirement, but 50% does not.

Senior Planner Redman stated currently 15% is the threshold for requiring compliance with these standards, but the proposed change to this section of the ordinance would state that an addition of 50% or more would trigger these requirements.

Member Fallico asked if a fire sprinkler is required if it is an over 50% addition.

Senior Planner Redman stated the project would need to follow building regulations as that is a building code issue, not a zoning issue.

Senior Planner Redman believes the 50% threshold is similar to new construction, in the sense that it is a more substantial modification to the building than the current 15% requirement.

Asst. Dir. Mendel stated it is greater than 50% expansion of the entire floor area of the subject property.

Chairman Szabo asked how staff arrived at 50% as the new threshold.

Senior Planner Redman state it is a round number and most similar to new construction as a substantial alteration to a building.

Member Weaver states that that 50% is a common round number to use and a reasonable order of magnitude.

Member Fowler asked if a minor variation is still available and 50% seems reasonable and staff would review a minor variation in context with the adjacent neighborhood character.

Senior Planner Redman stated there is still the ability to request a minor variation which is reviewed administratively

Chairman Szabo stated he believes 50% is too high and allows for too much variability and potential for 'inappropriate' use of materials.

Member Veremis asked what other municipalities require and whether garages are included in these calculations.

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Senior Planner Redman stated staff did not research surrounding communities ordinances extensively, but staff does know that several comparable communities have an appointed design review entity that reviews proposals on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, attached garages are part of this applicability calculation.

Member Fowler asked if a house with a breezeway to an attached garage counts as part of the principal building.

Staff stated that this would count as an attached garage and would be subject to the existing standards.

Senior Planner Stytz reiterated that the lot coverage still applies and staff feels the proposed “greater than 50%” standard for building design review applicability is a reasonable threshold.

Chairman Szabo asked for any public comment and there was none.

Member Weaver moved and Member Fowler seconded a motion to recommend City Council approval of the requested text amendments as drafted by Staff.

AYES: Catalano, Fowler, Zadrozny, Weaver, Veremis & Szabo  
NAYS: None  
ABSTAIN: None

\*\*\*MOTION CARRIED\*\*\*

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Szabo adjourned the meeting by affirmative voice vote at 8:16 p.m.

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Mendel, CED Assistant Director/Recording Secretary  
cc: City Officials, Aldermen, Planning & Zoning Board, Petitioners