

JO DAVIESS COUNTY
PLANNING COMMISSION/ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 25, 2026

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Huschitt called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, March 25, 2026 in the Jo Daviess County Highway Department in Hanover, Illinois.

II. Roll Call

Roll Call was answered as follows: Present – Gary Diedrick, Don Hill, Steve McIntyre, Peter Huschitt. Present: 4. Present electronically – 0. Present electronically: 0. Absent – Ron Mapes. Absent: 1.

Staff Present: William Meeker, Planning & Development Administrator; Melissa Soppe, Planning & Development Office Manager.

III. Establishment of a Quorum

Chair Huschitt declared that a quorum of members was present.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. February 25, 2026 Planning Commission/Zoning Board of Appeals Minutes (DRAFT)

A motion to approve February 25, 2026 Planning Commission/Zoning Board of Appeals Minutes was made by Gary Diedrick and seconded by Don Hill.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes – Gary Diedrick, Don Hill, Steve McIntyre, Peter Huschitt. Ayes: 4. Nays – None. Nays: 0. Absent – Ron Mapes. Absent: 1.

Administration of Oath: Chair Huschitt administered the oath to those present (and via Zoom) who wish to testify as part of the proceedings.

V. Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

VI. New Business

- A. CASE NO 26-14: Petition of Scharpf Family Farm LLC/Donna Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036) & Debra Manders (1720 26th ST NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405), owners; and Andrew Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036), petitioner for:**

Preliminary/Final Plat of “Lot 1 of Andy Berlage’s Addition”;

Variance from the rear-yard setback to permit a setback of 20.32-feet where 40-feet is normally required; and

Variance from the side-yard setback to permit setback of 15.02-feet where 20-feet is normally required.

Property is zoned Agricultural (AG) District. Site Location: 578 Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036.

ZONING DISTRICT: AG (Agricultural)

ACRES: 75.12-Acre

PARCEL NO: 14-000-032-00

Wastewater Treatment: A soil investigation was conducted in January to identify a location for a new septic system to serve this home. An existing system which does not meet code is located outside of the new property line and will be properly abandoned. A shared well agreement is recommended. The variance requests should not affect the new septic system

Access Considerations: The County Highway Engineer has no concerns regarding access to the property.

Other Considerations: The petitioner's family owns a 75.52-acre property located at 578 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena. He wishes to divide off a 2.423-acre, single-lot subdivision ("Lot 1 of Andy Berlage's Addition") which will include the existing dwelling on the property as well as several outbuildings. The split of the home-site from the larger parcel could have qualified for a property split, however since the proposed lot does not meet the minimum 5-acres that would be required (the larger parcel is not a lot of record) and the proposed lot lines create nonconforming setbacks for two of the existing outbuildings, the petition for a single-lot subdivision and Variances for the two buildings that will have nonconforming setbacks has been submitted. The petitioner intends to continue farming the tillable portion of the newly created lot as he has been doing in the past, therefore, a LESA evaluation is not required in this instance.

Variances are requested for two outbuildings; one on the new lot, the other on the remaining portion of the larger property. On the 2.423-acre lot, the affected building will be situated 20.32-feet from the newly created rear property line for the property where a 40-foot setback would normally be required. A Variance to allow a 15.02-foot side-yard setback where a 20-foot setback would normally be required is sought from the newly created "side" property line on the remainder, larger property. In both instances, the deviations from the required setbacks are caused by the creation of the new property lines for the single-lot subdivision. It is staff's understanding that the petitioner wishes to remodel the existing home on the smaller lot and intends to use the building for which a rear-yard setback Variance is sought to store materials and equipment used in the home renovation; he may ultimately remove this building in the future. (See the diagram below; the red circle is the area where the Variances are sought.)

Staff requests that the PC/ZBA make separate motions for each item that is part of the requests, starting with the Variance requests. Final action regarding the Preliminary/Final Plat will be made by the Jo Daviess County Board at its first available meeting following the Commission's action; presumably Monday, April 13, 2026.

PROPOSED PARCEL & EASEMENT

RED DENOTES LOT LINES OF SUBDIVISION (APPROXIMATE)

YELLOW DENOTES ACCESS EASEMENT (APPROXIMATE)



PRELIMINARY/FINAL PLAT SHOWING AREAS OF VARIANCES IN RED



Standards for Variations: The Zoning Board of Appeals shall make findings of fact based upon the evidence presented to it specifying the reason for making such variation including findings with respect to the following standards:

1. The physical surroundings shape, or topographical conditions of the specific property will cause practical difficulties or a particular hardship to the owner, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, if the strict letter of the regulations were carried out.
2. The conditions upon which a petition for a variation is based are unique to the property for which the variation is sought and are not applicable generally to other property within the same zoning classification.
3. The purpose of the variation is not based exclusively upon a desire to make more money out of the property.
4. The alleged difficulty or hardship is caused by this ordinance and has not been created by persons presently having an interest in the property.
5. The granting of the variation will not alter the essential character of the locality, and will not be detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to other property or improvements in the neighborhood in which the property is located.
6. The proposed variation will not impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property, or substantially increase the congestion of the public street, or increase the danger of fire or flooding, or endanger the public safety, or substantially diminish or impair property

values within the neighborhood.

7. The variation requested is the minimum variation that will make possible the reasonable use of the land or structure.

Variance Findings of Fact/Explanation of Criteria:

1. What is there about the physical nature of this particular site that creates a necessity for a variance?
2. What is there about the request in general that distinguishes itself from other properties in this same zoning classification?
3. Is the purpose of this request to solve a problem for the property owner or strictly to increase the value of the property for purposes of selling it?
4. From the testimony, who was responsible for creating the situation which now requires that a variance be granted on this property?
5. Will this request be out of character with the neighborhood (such as allowing a forty-foot structure in a high-density residential area)? Will it be detrimental to the public, such as creating a blind spot at an intersection?
6. What affect will this variation have on the public's safety or on the value of other property or improvements to property in the area?
7. Can reasonable use be made of this property without the variance and is the variance requested the least amount needed? (Have they asked for a 20-foot variance, when only a 10-foot variance is needed?)

Huschitt asked for clarification of where the structures were for variations.

Andrew Berlage, petitioner & Donna Berlage, owner

- The report is pretty clear. My plan is that I would like to buy the house and the 2.4 acres and give the house a remodel, it needs a new foundation underneath of it. It needs to be updated, it was built by my Great Grandfather in 1920's and has not had a whole lot of work done since. A little bit of background to the parcel, our family bought the parcel in February 1893 and I am 5th Generation. When my two uncles passed away, my mom and my aunt inherited the farm and I kind of took over the farming operations on it. In order to get this split off so that I can stick money into the house and take a loan out on it and such this is kind of what we got to do. This is all the land that they wanted to sell, this is about all I could afford, we hope that some point in the future, my aunt will probably sell out, we will be able to buy the rest of her out at some point, it could be 15-20 years in the future. We would like to keep it in the family and keep it going. We tried to pick the most logical layout that I could. Whatever the house yard touched would stay with the house. My thought was to follow the driveway down and then everything else on the otherside would stay with the farm property as it is. There are so many buildings on this it was virtually impossible to draw a line anywhere that you wouldn't intersect. Before all of this started I went to the surveyor and we tried everything we could possibly with the little building that is on the larger parcel, we tried going around it, then we got into the other barn further down, there was no other way

to draw the line and not create setback issues. The other little building on the remaining parcel, they are keeping. The building on my side that we are requesting the variance, I do plan on tearing it down, it is in bad shape and we have way too many buildings to cut grass around. Putting a foundation under the house, we have to take the furnace out, water heater, all the duct work, anything that would be in the basement. I have to have a spot to put it while we are doing the basement foundation. This is the only building on the entire farm that is open. We have a serious shortage of buildings as it is and all other buildings are packed with machinery and such. I have to keep it till then, but it was told to me that I would not be allowed to record the plat with the building still being there and this was the logical step that we had to ask for a variance on that. The field out front is the best field on the farm, so it will continue to get farm the way it has been. My mom and aunt will retain ownership of the remaining and nothing really affects them or the neighbors and I have talked to all of the neighbors.

Huschitt asks, not that it makes a difference, but did you say 5th Generation family owned.

- Donna Berlage states that it was my Great Grandfather that bought the original parcel in 1893, then my Grandpa, then my dad, then me and my brothers, and then Andy.

Huschitt congratulates them, it is an amazing feat.

- Andy and Donna states, we feel privileged because it is not a thing anymore that so much of that goes away. We want to do our best to keep it as long as we can to keep it in the family.

Chair Huschitt opened the public hearing.

Meeker read an email he received:

My father purchased the farm adjacent to the Scharpf (now Berlage) farm in 1950. I have owned it since 1987. I also own farmland about a mile to the east that has been in my family since 1846. Now that the Berlage farm is for sale, I am delighted that some of it will continue to be owned by descendants of the Scharpf family who have owned this property for almost 200 years. I strongly support granting whatever variances Andy Berlage needs to continue that legacy ownership. John A. Schultz 27 W. Arrowhead Drive, Galena, IL 61036.

Chair Huschitt closed the public hearing.

A motion to recommend approval of CASE NO 26-14: Scharpf Family Farm LLC/Donna Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036) & Debra Manders (1720 26th ST NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405), owners; and Andrew Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036), petitioner for: Preliminary/Final Plat of "Lot 1 of Andy Berlage's Addition"; Property is zoned Agricultural (AG) District. Site Location: 578 Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036 was made by Steve McIntyre and seconded by Don Hill.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes – Don Hill, Steve McIntyre, Peter Huschitt, Gary Diedrick. Ayes: 4. Nays – None. Nays: 0. Absent – . Absent: 0.

Variance standards reviewed:

1 - met; 2 - true; 3 - correct; 4 - true; 5 - true; 6 - true; 7 - met

A motion to approve CASE NO 26-14: Scharpf Family Farm LLC/Donna Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036) & Debra Manders (1720 26thST NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405), owners; and Andrew Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036), petitioner for: Variance from the rear-yard setback to permit a setback of 20.32-feet where 40-feet is normally required; Property is zoned Agricultural (AG) District. Site Location: 578 Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036 was made by Gary Diedrick stating the variance standards have been reviewed and met and seconded by Peter Huschitt.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes – Steve McIntyre, Peter Huschitt, Gary Diedrick Don Hill. Ayes: 4. Nays – None. Nays: 0. Absent – Ron Mapes. Absent: 1.

Variance standards discussed and indicated met.

A motion to approve CASE NO 26-14: Scharpf Family Farm LLC/Donna Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036) & Debra Manders (1720 26thST NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405), owners; and Andrew Berlage (390 S Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036), petitioner for: Variance from the side-yard setback to permit setback of 15.02-feet where 20-feet is normally required. Property is zoned Agricultural (AG) District. Site Location: 578 Pilot Knob RD, Galena, IL 61036. was made by Don Hill stating the variance standards have been reviewed and met and seconded by Gary Diedrick.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes – Peter Huschitt, Gary Diedrick, Don Hill, Steve McIntyre. Ayes: 4. Nays – None. Nays: 0. Absent – Ron Mapes. Absent: 1.

VII. Citizens' Comments (Matters not otherwise on the Agenda)

None

VIII. Reports and Comments (Commission Members and Staff)

Planning & Development Administrator Meeker noted that he scheduled the study session with the Commission and the Ad Hoc Zoning Subcommittee to review its recommendations for amendments to the County's Zoning Ordinance for April 16, 2026 at 6pm at the Jo Daviess County Highway Department Conference Room. The Subcommittee's white paper (prepared by Chair Corey Cassens) was presented to the County Board at its January 13, 2026 meeting and is available on-line. The public hearing for the amendments will be scheduled thereafter.

Huschitt asks clarification about it being called a study session, so no public hearing, just so that we can get educated on why they are recommending this change.

Meeker states that the point is that you cannot give your opinions because it is not the public hearing, it is a way to get any questions you have answered regarding the recommendations, but you can't show your hand because we haven't conducted the public hearing. Any residents or citizens who want to speak can only speak under the citizens' comments portion of the meeting. Again you cannot respond to anything that is stated, just listen. Calls is a fact finding meeting.

Huschitt states that we don't want the Ad Hoc Zoning Subcommittee to feel that we slighted them by not having an open discussion at the study session. We cannot state opinions to the Ad Hoc Zoning Subcommittee.

Meeker states that at the beginning of the meeting I will state what I previously said about discussion, fact finding, and opinions of the Zoning Board. We have not scheduled the public hearing yet to determine what the regular meeting will have on it for May, if there is only one request we will have it on the regular meeting night, if not we will have a special meeting.

Huschitt asks about the public hearing of these recommendations. The public can speak, but the action of this committee we would be making a recommendation to the County Board on the white paper. Can we attach amendments or suggestions to the white paper with our recommendations?

Meeker states that if you think a recommendation needs to be tweaked, you would make that part of your motion.

McIntyre ask about the two variances that were requested tonight, they are only valid if the County Board approves the subdivision plat. If they don't approve the plat, then the variances we approved are null and void. It is odd that part is our decision and the other is the County Board.

Diedrick says that the other way is if we can't review until the plat is approved, that prolongs the process.

McIntyre states that we have come across this before where banks won't loan on a larger parcel, so that is why he is requesting the smaller acreage. Is there anything in the ordinance that we can put in that could accommodate that. It has to do with subdividing a piece off of the family farm to get a loan on it for the kid that if it is a family member you can do that.

Meeker states that nothing can relate to the property ownership. You can't do that because that is based on the ownership of the property and you cannot do that. Zoning has to be based on the details of the property and no relationship to ownership or loan ability.

Soppe states that you cannot zone based on lineage. The thing is that he could turn around and sell it and not be in the family.

Huschitt states that I heard mention of 5 acres, if he had 5 acres he wouldn't have to go through.

Meeker states that if he had 5 acres with 150 feet of road frontage, he could have done it under the Plat Act exemption. He would still have needed to work with the office, but not the zoning hearing. The larger parcel was not a lot of record, it had splits.

Soppe states it would have also depended on where the lines were drawn with the buildings if he needed any variances.

IX. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made at 07:34 PM by Gary Diedrick and seconded by Steve McIntyre.

The motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes – Gary Diedrick, Don Hill, Steve McIntyre, Peter Huschitt.
Ayes: 4. Nays – None. Nays: 0. Absent – Ron Mapes. Absent: 1.

**The next meeting of the Planning Commission/Zoning Board of Appeals will be held on
Wednesday, April 22, 2026**
