



# City of Gahanna

## Meeting Minutes

### Planning Commission

200 South Hamilton Road  
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

*James Mako, Chair*  
*John Hicks, Vice Chair*  
*Michael Greenberg*  
*Sarah Pollyea*  
*Thomas W. Shapaka*  
*Michael Suriano*  
*Michael Tamarkin*

*Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council*

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Wednesday, September 25, 2024

7:00 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

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#### A. CALL MEETING TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/ROLL CALL

*Gahanna Planning Commission met in regular session on September 25, 2024. The agenda for this meeting was published on September 20, 2024. Chair James Mako called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by John Hicks.*

**Present** 7 - Michael Greenberg, John Hicks, James Mako, Sarah Pollyea, Thomas W. Shapaka, Michael Suriano, and Michael Tamarkin

#### B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA - NONE

#### C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[2024-0177](#)

Planning Commission meeting minutes 9.11.2024

**A motion was made by Hicks, seconded by Tamarkin, that the Minutes be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 7 - Greenberg, Hicks, Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

#### D. SWEAR IN APPLICANTS & SPEAKERS

Assistant City Attorney Matt Roth administered an oath to those persons wishing to present testimony this evening.

#### E. APPLICATIONS - PUBLIC COMMENT

[V-0024-2024](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary 1109.05(e)(1)(A) and (B) Fences - Location of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for

property located at 302 Crossing Creek; Parcel ID 025-008838; Current Zoning R-2, Medium Lot Residential; Megan Workman, applicant.

Director Blackford provided a summary of the application; see attached staff presentation. Director Blackford stated that this application is about the type of lot rather than its zoning. The lot backs up to Johnstown Road, causing it to have two frontages. Without a variance, the house cannot have a fence. The request is for a six-foot privacy fence. Director Blackford shared an outline of where the fence is anticipated, along with an image of the street view from Johnstown Road. The area is heavily wooded, and it is anticipated that the fence would not be visible from the road.

Two variances are necessary. Fences cannot extend past the front elevation of the principal structure, and privacy fences are prohibited in the front yard. Director Blackford shared the variance criteria and noted that around 9 or 10 other lots that have fencing in this area. He stated staff is working on code changes to improve this area. Per Director Blackford, the most pertinent criteria item is that the variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood. He stated it would not be out of character for the area, and Johnstown Road is not the only area where this occurs. It should not have any impact on adjacent properties. Staff supports the request.

Chair Mako opened public comment at 7:07 p.m.

Mr. Ben Workman introduced himself as the owner of Arrow Fence. Mr. Workman noted there are already six-foot privacy fences along this stretch, which is partly covered by foliage.

Chair closed public comment at 7:08 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg asked if the fence would be tied into neighbors on either side. Mr. Workman replied that it would be tied into a neighboring fence, which was a different aesthetic style.

Mr. Mako asked for clarification from Director Blackford, wondering if the double frontage was the only reason for the request. Director Blackford replied in agreement, adding that the applicant applied for a permit, and this was not Code Enforcement action.

**A motion was made by Shapaka, seconded by Pollyea, that the Variance be Approved.**

**Discussion on the motion: Mr. Suriano expressed his support for the variance, adding that this property having two front yards is simply a technicality.**

**The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 7 - Greenberg, Hicks, Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

[V-0025-2024](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary section 1165.08(b)(10) Permanent Signs of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 306 W. Johnstown Rd.; Parcel ID 025-002810; Current Zoning MFRD; Gahanna Commons Apartments; Greg Kitzmiller, applicant.

Director Blackford provided a summary of the application; see attached staff presentation. He noted that this application was filed under the previous zoning code, prior to May 1, 2024. In this case, the setback from the right-of-way is what is being discussed. It has frontage on Johnstown Road. The request is for a new monument sign that is one foot from the edge of the right of way. The sign meets code for size and height.

Director Blackford shared an overhead view of the site. The site has never had the requested type of signage in the front. While it is a one-foot setback from the right of way, it is about 20 feet from pavement. This is because Johnstown Road is one of multiple in which there has been right-of-way taking, however the pavement has not encroached on the lot. It has been reviewed by the Engineering staff. There are currently no improvements scheduled for the area, and there are no concerns about site triangles. The site has about 550 feet of frontage, which Blackford described as a large space to have no sign. He shared a rendering of the proposed sign. Director Blackford explained why the applicant cannot meet the setback, due to existing lines and other impediments. If the setback was met, it would not be visible from the road.

Director Blackford shared the variance criteria under the previous code. He stated that High Bank has a setback of four feet on Morse Road and two feet on Johnstown Road. The Columbia Gas facility was built in recent years, there was a one foot setback for that as well. So, there is some precedence for similar setbacks in the area. He stated staff is in favor of approval of this application.

Chair opened public comment at 7:18 p.m.

Mr. Greg Kitzmiller introduced himself. The original plan to meet the setback would have put the sign in the middle of the parking lot. He stated that through conversations with the Engineering Department, the sign location would be changed to the west of the west entrance due to a storm sewer located at the original intended location. It will be a single-sided sign perpendicular to the road.

Chair closed public comment at 7:20 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg asked Director Blackford if it would be necessary to note that Engineering would need to remove the sign if there are issues with the right-of-way. Director Blackford stated that is built into code, and he did not feel it was necessary to add to the vote. Mr. Kitzmiller stated that the way the sign is to be built would make it very easy to relocate if necessary.

Mr. Suriano asked Director Blackford if the applicant would need to come back for signage approval. Director Blackford replied it will be administratively approvable.

Mr. Tamarkin noted that the sign would be parallel to the road, not perpendicular, as it will be going the same direction as the road. He felt this would be difficult to read. Mr. Kitzmiller stated that was not their first choice for placement; however, due to the storm sewer issues, there were limitations on placement. Mr. Kitzmiller noted it will still be 21 feet off the road and did not have concerns about visibility.

Ms. Pollyea asked if this is the only signage for the property. Mr. Kitzmiller confirmed it is the only signage.

Mr. Hicks asked if a future road improvement or thoroughfare plan required the sign to move, would Mr. Kitzmiller be agreeable to that. He described the process by which the sign can easily be moved. Mr. Hicks wondered why Gahanna Commons wanted the sign now. Beginning in 2022 there were refurbishing plans that took place. This sign is the next step.

Chair Mako asked for clarification on where the sign will be. He then asked Director Blackford if the City has any thoroughfare plans that would affect this area. Director Blackford noted that the plans would not reside within the Planning Department, but shared his understanding that the City has identified this area for improvement at some point in the future.

**A motion was made by Suriano, seconded by Hicks, that the Variance be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Yes:** 7 - Greenberg, Hicks, Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

[V-0026-2024](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary section 1109.04(b)(6) Buffers and Screening of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 1160 Gahanna Pkwy.; Parcel ID 025-006170; Current Zoning IM, Innovation & Manufacturing; The Grote Company; Alison Crumley, applicant.

Director Blackford provided a summary of the application; see attached staff presentation. The site is located in Innovation & Manufacturing zoning district, previously known as the Office, Commerce, & Technology (OCT) district. This application started administratively as a minor development plan that was approved. It involved a building refresh. Through the building permit process, it was determined a variance was needed. The variance is to not screen rooftop mechanical equipment. The roof is pitched, and equipment is 13.5 feet tall at its highest point. Director Blackford shared an overhead view of the building. Code requires screening from the right-of-way and adjacent properties. Similar language was in the prior code as well. Screening in the industrial area has always been required.

Director Blackford shared elevations from the Gahanna Parkway point of view. The variance is for buffering and screening. Director Blackford shared variance criteria. He felt the most pertinent criterion is that the variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood. He shared a street view of the site and a rendering for the redesign. He noted where the mechanical equipment is intended to be placed, right above an architectural detail. Staff felt that this building looks better than most in this area of the city. Director Blackford stated similar variances have been granted, and staff supports the request.

Chair opened public comment at 7:35 p.m.

Allison Crumley with MA Design expressed her appreciation for Director Blackford's presentation. She reiterated that the screen element is one small portion of the overall project. She stated the original intent of the screen, which is an architectural detail, was to attract attention to the entrance while covering the mechanical equipment. Due to budget constraints, the screen had to be made smaller, thus exposing the rooftop equipment.

Bob Grote, an owner of Grote Company, offered additional insight. He said that the cost is less of a factor; however, he was reluctant to spend unnecessary money and felt that even without the full screening, the building would be the best looking structure in the area.

Chair Mako closed public comment at 7:38 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg asked what equipment specifically will be on the rooftop. Ms. Crumley said heating and cooling equipment for the office component of the building.

Mr. Suriano asked if the unit would be on a sloped surface. Ms. Crumley replied that there was a slight pitch to the roof. The equipment would sit on dunnage, which made it appear taller. It will be sitting flat on the rooftop dunnage. Mr. Suriano asked if the reason for it to be located in that particular spot was due to the existing mechanical equipment. Ms. Crumley confirmed, and added that roof support for the equipment is already there.

Mr. Tamarkin asked if the existing screening would be removed. Ms. Crumley confirmed it would be. She added that the existing screening and equipment will be removed and the new equipment would then be installed. She was unsure of the exact size, but speculated it would be similar to the size of the existing equipment.

Ms. Pollyea wondered if the existing screening could be reused if it was similar in size. Ms. Crumley noted it had a different aesthetic and was sloped. The entire building was being modernized and the existing screening was dated. Mr. Grote said this new unit would be larger. The existing equipment is made of multiple units that were added overtime. The new unit is larger because it will be a single unit. The existing screening, even if was aesthetically aligned with the renovated building, would not adequately screen the new equipment. Ms. Pollyea wondered if the applicant had researched any design that complemented the aesthetic and adequately screened the equipment. Ms. Crumley replied that it had been explored, but once choices were made on which elements of the project to follow through on, it was not a high priority.

Mr. Shapaka asked Ms. Crumley if she considered the mechanical equipment to be an architectural feature. She replied she did not. Mr. Shapaka wondered if it was possible to color the equipment in a way that was aesthetically pleasing. He noted that something similar is done with dumpster enclosures. While it makes the feature larger, it can be more aesthetically pleasing.

Mr. Mako asked if the equipment was typical of what would be found on this type of building. Ms. Crumley confirmed it was.

**A motion was made by Tamarkin, seconded by Shapaka, that the Variance be Approved.**

**Discussion on the motion:**

**Mr. Tamarkin noted that the unit is 13 ½ feet tall. The building is 26 feet tall, so the unit is essentially the height of a third story. He acknowledged the money and effort being put into making the building look nicer. He expressed support for the project considering its location in the Industrial Zone. He considered Mr. Shapaka's previous comments, and encouraged the applicant to make the equipment more aesthetically pleasing.**

Mr. Hicks expressed his sympathy for the applicants' position. He noted that while they did not want to unnecessarily spend the money and time for the additional screening, there was a cost in the variance application. He noted that perhaps this is an area for revision within the zoning code. He felt it is not unique to a parcel and could be argued for any parcel within the IM district.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Yes: 7 - Greenberg, Hicks, Mako, Pollyea, Shapaka, Suriano and Tamarkin

**F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - NONE**

**G. NEW BUSINESS - NONE**

**H. OFFICIAL REPORTS**

**Director of Planning**

Director Blackford noted there would not be a meeting on October 9, 2024 and that code changes would be anticipated for the October 23rd meeting. Mr. Greenberg asked Director Blackford for a general number of applications still exist that were filed under the previous zoning code. Director Blackford believed there were five or six that had yet to go before Planning Commission. He said that when an application is filed, some type of action needs to be taken on it every six months. If it is idle too long, it expires. Mr. Greenberg said that in the past, there was a list of all approved projects that went to Planning Commission, and wondered if that could be provided again this year. Director Blackford stated it could be.

**I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS - NONE**

**J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT**

Members of the Planning Commission acknowledged National Daughters' Day.

**K. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.