



City of Gahanna

Meeting Minutes

Planning Commission

200 South Hamilton Road
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

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

Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

7:00 PM

City Hall, Council Chambers

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

Gahanna Planning Commission met in regular session on April 9, 2025. The agenda for this meeting was published on April 4, 2025, Chair John Hicks called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Sarah Pollyea.

Chair Hicks welcomed Clerk Hilts who was covering the meeting in the temporary absence of Deputy Clerk of Council Sophia McGuire.

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

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA - None

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

[2025-0077](#)

Planning Commission Meeting Minutes 2.26.2025

D. SWEAR IN APPLICANTS & SPEAKERS

City Attorney Priya Tamilarasan administered an oath to those persons wishing to present testimony this evening.

E. APPLICATIONS - PUBLIC COMMENT

[V-0008-2025](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1103.06(e) - Estate Residential of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for

property located at 4444 Shull Road; Parcel ID 025-011937; Current Zoning ER - Estate Residential; Labocki Homes, Inc; Jordon Labocki, applicant.

Director of Planning Michael Blackford provided a summary of the application; see attached staff report. Director Blackford reported that the applicant requests approval of a variance related to a Subdivision Without Plat (SWP)/lot split application. The proposal involves dividing the existing parcel into two parcels, one north and one south, approximately 2.8 acres and 2.5 acres. The southern parcel would have approximately 137.5 feet of frontage, which is approximately 12.5 feet short of the 150-foot requirement for Estate Residential (ER) zoning. The site currently contains one single-family residence and a driveway. No development plans or permit applications were submitted at this time.

Director Blackford then reviewed the variance criteria. They are: the variance is not likely to result in substantial change to the essential character of the neighborhood; the variance is not likely to result in damage to adjoining properties; the variance is not likely to affect the delivery of governmental services (e.g., water, sewer, garbage); the variance is not likely to result in environmental impacts greater than what is typical for other lots in the neighborhood; the variance is necessary for the economical use of the property, and such economical use of the property is not easily achieved through some method other than a variance; the variance is not likely to undermine the objectives of the Land Use Plan; whether the variance is substantial and is the minimum necessary to make possible the reasonable use of land or structures; the practical difficulty could be eliminated by some other method, even if the solution is less convenient or more costly to achieve. He focused specifically on the first criteria: the variance is not likely to result in substantial damage to the essential character of the neighborhood. He stated lot frontage is in zoning code is that it is used as a tool to regulate the development of a property. If the variance is granted, in staff's opinion, it would not damage the area's character because it would not permit future lot splits without several additional variances.

Director Blackford explained that staff recommended approval of the Variance application as submitted. The requested variance was minor, and both parcels met the frontage requirement, if the front property line was the same length as the rear one. Staff did not believe that granting the variance would cause negative effects.

He then addressed a letter Planning Commission received from a contiguous property owner. He recalled there was a concern related to access raised by the neighboring property owner. After discussions with

Engineering, it was determined here would be no issues accessing the property via Shull Road.

Jordan Labocki, Deeds Road Granville, Ohio. Mr. Labocki stated he would be the contracted builder for the land if the variance were granted. Mr. Labocki had nothing to add to Mr. Blackford's presentation, at that time.

Chairman Hicks directed Mr. Labocki to remain available for questions by the Commission. Chairman Hicks announced he had two speaker slips for V-0008-2025, inviting speakers forward.

David Cooper, 4420 Shull Road, introduced himself. Mr. Cooper referred to a letter of opposition he sent to Commission members on the variance request. Mr. Cooper spoke in opposition to the application. Mr. Cooper shared concerns related to the possible location of a new driveway on the proposed additional lot. Mr. Cooper questioned the location of a new drive, in context of the topography of the area and the adjacent Schull Road. Mr. Cooper also noted the neighborhood across the street. Mr. Cooper described traffic concerns, including cars driving off the road and speeding in the area. Mr. Cooper related his wariness of possible collisions resulting from those speeding and the hill on the road, in proximity to a new drive. Mr. Cooper expressed concern for access to the proposed additional lot. Mr. Cooper speculated on alternative configurations of the lotsplit. Mr. Cooper stated that the current lot retains access to Shull Road, via an easement on Mr. Cooper's drive. Mr. Cooper explained he would not extend that easement to the proposed additional lot. Mr. Cooper questioned whether the property will be on septic or tied into City of Gahanna utilities.

Mark Sull, 1070 Brookhouse Lane: Mr. Sull asserted an interest in development activities in the area. Mr. Sull echoed concerns related to possible traffic collisions, noting he experienced a near collision that morning, in the area. Mr. Sull described the area as a frequent deer crossing. Mr. Sull stated a Home Owners Association (HOA) fence, in the area, was recently damaged, for the third time in 14 months, noting the Mayor's Office was contacted. Mr. Sull elaborated that he was not certain if the night's forum was the correct one for discussing his concerns, however, he believed it was an opportunity to amplify the situation.

Chair Hicks directed public speakers to remain available for questions by the Commission. Chair Hicks invited Applicant, Mr. Labocki, to the

podium to respond to comments made by Mr. Cooper and Mr. Sull.

Mr. Labocki responded to the inquiry regarding whether future structures would tie into City utilities or a septic system. Mr. Labocki explained he contacted the City of Gahanna, to evaluate utility access opportunities. Mr. Labocki asserted future development on both lots, old and new, would tie into City of Gahanna sewer, not septic.

In response to questions about site access, Mr. Labocki acknowledged that turns along Shull Road can be tight, and that speeding is a known concern in the area. He noted that the proposed new driveway is designed to align directly with Brookhouse Lane, the roadway located across Shull Road from the development site. Brookhouse Lane is perpendicular to Shull Road. Staff displayed a map on the meeting room screen, illustrating the area and key points of discussion. Mr. Labocki stated that, based on his estimates, traffic generated by the new drive will not create conditions more hazardous than those already present, due to existing traffic volumes from Brookhouse Lane.

Chair Hicks closed public comment at 7:26 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg acknowledged the hill on Shull Road is in a precarious location. Mr. Greenberg confirmed with Mr. Labocki that the existing drive easement will be maintained from the property to the south, with the existing lot. Mr. Greenberg inquired if the anticipated building plans for the proposed lot would be two stories tall. Mr. Labocki speculated it might, clarifying that plans were not finalized at that time. Mr. Greenberg questioned whether the applicant/property owner was aware of the concerns voiced at the meeting or the letter received by the Planning Commission. Mr. Labocki shared that the applicant/owner recently returned to the United States, from out of the Country, however, not to Columbus. Mr. Labocki was uncertain of the owner's knowledge on the matter. Mr. Greenberg noted Mr. Cooper's suggestion to move the lot-lines to an alternate location. Mr. Labocki explained the rationale for the lot-lines as depicted in the application. Mr. Labocki shared the existing home on the present lot will not move. Mr. Labocki shared the goal was to evenly divide the lots in two, while accounting for the location of the existing home. Mr. Greenberg confirmed with Mr. Labocki that the existing pool on the site of the proposed lot split will be demoed. Mr. Greenberg inquired if there were existing drainage issues on the site of the proposed development. Mr. Labocki stated there was not, describing a drainage line that currently emanates from the existing house to the Shull Road, and the north lot as at a slightly higher elevation in comparison to the existing lot.

Mr. Tamarkin acknowledged the existing concerns of traffic on Shull Road, observing past collisions, including a fatality further up the road. Mr. Tamarkin questioned the impact of adding an additional drive to the area if it aligns with Brookhouse Lane. Mr. Tamarkin noted that existing travelers from Brookhouse Lane currently make similar turns onto Shull Road. Mr. Tamarkin confirmed with Mr. Labocki his intention to line up the new drive with Brookhouse Lane. Mr. Labocki confirmed that was his and his client's intention, elaborating that any plans would need to be reviewed and approved by the City of Gahanna's Engineering Department for regulation compliance, including site lines. Mr. Tamarkin confirmed with the applicant that if the variance is not approved, the applicant will proceed with the smaller lot, per code, including the same drive, which would not require a variance application, resulting in the installation of the new driveway regardless of variance approval. Following confirmation from Mr. Labocki, Mr. Tamarkin concluded his comments.

Mr. Shapaka noted that many of his questions were addressed. Acknowledging that Director Blackford is not an engineer, Mr. Shapaka asked whether it is generally preferred for a driveway to align with the street opposite a development. Director Blackford clarified that he could only speak in general terms but indicated that, in the development process, it is typically preferred to align driveways with existing streets. He stated that this would be his expectation in this particular case, minus any site challenges. Mr. Shapaka voiced a desire for this to be kept in mind as final site plans are developed.

Mr. Mako echoed Mr. Shapaka's statement that many of his questions were addressed. Mr. Mako questioned Mr. Labocki on how far the sanitary sewer line would be extended to tie into the city's system. Mr. Labocki stated the city notified the applicant that the line runs behind the property, and that was the recommended location to tie into the sewer line. Mr. Mako confirmed that Mr. Labocki was aware and compliant of the tie in costs incurred. Mr. Mako confirmed with Director Blackford that any site curb cuts would be reviewed for compliance by the Engineering Department. Director Blackford clarified that Planning Commission's review was the Public Hearing portion of the project, and that the administrative portion of reviewing the project would fall under a future submitted building permit. Under the building permit, items like curb cuts and utility locations would be considered.

Chair Hicks confirmed with Mr. Labocki that there was no intention to extend the existing easement from the neighbor's drive to tie in a new

drive on the proposed new lot. Mr. Labocki agreed, explaining there was no desire to obtain necessary permissions from the property owners and the City of Gahanna, in order to extend the easement.

Mr. Cooper addressed Chair Hicks, from the audience, inquiring if he could report further comments. Chair Hicks informed Mr. Cooper that the public comments portion of the review was concluded, not allowing for further public comment at that time. Mr. Cooper stated he wished to respond to statements he described as untrue. Chair Hicks invited Mr. Cooper to speak with Commission members or staff at a later time, as public comments were closed.

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

Discussion on the motion:

Mr. Suriano communicated he would be in favor of the variance, clarifying the lot split request pertains to the impact of a difference of 12 feet, which does not appear to be significant in this case.

Ms. Pollyea expressed support for the variance, acknowledging the concerns raised, however, clarifying that the objections appeared to relate more to the lot split than to the variance request itself. She noted that the Planning Commission's jurisdiction pertains specifically to the variance request. Ms. Pollyea described the variance as minor and stated that she did not believe it would result in a negative impact.

Mr. Mako stated his intention to vote in favor of the variance. He shared that, over the course of his career, he has reviewed thousands of lot splits. Mr. Mako characterized the variance as minor and agreed with fellow Commission members that the concerns raised were not directly relevant to the variance request or within the Commission's jurisdiction.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

[V-0009-2025](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1109.01(a)(4) - Parking, Access, and Circulation of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 991 E. Johnstown Road; Parcel ID 025-008946; Current Zoning NC - Neighborhood Commercial; King Avenue 1.0 LLC; Ryan Paolini, applicant.

Director of Planning Michael Blackford provided a summary of the application; see attached staff report. Director Blackford reported that the applicant requested a variance in connection with a Subdivision Without Plat (SWP)/lot split application. The applicant intends to divide the property, originally developed in 2017, with the intent to create a north

and south parcel. The site currently includes a medical office building, three parking areas, and two access drives. The proposed lot split would place the new property line through two existing parking areas and a sidewalk, resulting in a new nonconformity with the required 10-foot parking setback. No development or permit applications were submitted; the request pertains only to existing site conditions. Pre-existing nonconformities do not require a variance.

Director Blackford provided the variance approval criteria. Staff recommended approval of the variance application as submitted. The requested variance is for existing conditions on the lot, but it is now nonconforming due to the proposed SWP. The new nonconformity is due to the proposed SWP/lot split. Additionally, the building still meets all setbacks. Staff does not believe that granting this variance will cause negative effects.

Chair Hicks opened public comment at 7:27 p.m.

Jim Saab, Front Street, Columbus introduced himself as an attorney for the applicant and spoke in support of the application. Mr. Saab described the proposed development of the vacant lot as an advantage to the community, providing tax revenue for the city and schools. Mr. Saab described the utility points and access points as already in place and not in need of change. Mr. Saab expressed he would be in appreciation of the Commission's approval on the variance request.

Ryan Paolini, Front Street, Columbus introduced himself as the applicant and paralegal on the application. Mr. Paolini thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present the variance.

No additional public speakers were present for the agenda item. Chair Hicks closed Public Comment at 7:35 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg questioned Director Blackford on the outline of the property as shown in the presentation materials, noting the lower corner of the outline appeared odd. Director Blackford acknowledged the irregularity, explaining that the GIS (Geographic Information System) imagery is collected from the county.

Mr. Tamarkin referred to the photograph, inquiring if there would be two owners for the two parcels, if the lot split was approved. Mr. Saab shared that currently there was one owner, acknowledging the potential for more owners in the future. Mr. Saab noted that as part of the lot split

agreement, the applicant will record reciprocal easement agreements for the shared drives, utilities and cost sharing.

Mr. Mako asked whether the parking areas would be shared between the proposed parcels. Mr. Saab responded that he did not believe shared parking would be necessary. Mr. Mako then inquired if the applicant anticipated any potential conflicts related to parking arrangements between the two parcels. Mr. Saab stated he did not foresee any issues, reiterating that reciprocal easement agreements for shared drives, utilities, parking, and cost-sharing would be recorded as part of the lot split agreement. Mr. Mako also asked whether there were plans to develop the southern parcel. Mr. Saab confirmed, and explained that the desire to develop the southern parcel was the primary motivation for the lot split.

Ms. Pollyea asked the administration to explain why the intent to split the lot in 2017 was not pursued until now. Director Blackford responded that, while he believed the original intent was to initiate the lot split much earlier, he could not say with certainty why it was delayed. He speculated that the delay was due to the absence of a clear user or immediate need. Director Blackford also recalled that the project may have experienced a slow start, which could have contributed to the postponement.

Chair Hicks inquired as to the current zoning of the parcel. Director Blackford responded he believed it was Neighborhood Commercial. Chair Hicks addressed the applicant, clarifying he was not holding him to a site plan or a development plan, inquiring what was the intention of the owner for the development on the parcel. Mr. Saab responded the intent was to build an office building with a similar use, and to conform to the use in the neighboring parcel. Chair Hicks inquired if there were additional questions from the commission.

Mr. Shapaka informed Chair Hicks that he had additional questions. Mr. Shapaka asked Director Blackford whether the Neighborhood Commercial zoning designation would permit a gas station. Director Blackford responded that it would not. Mr. Shapaka then inquired about the required curb cuts for the site. Director Blackford explained that he could not speak to curb cuts, as those decisions fall under the jurisdiction of the Engineering Department. Director Blackford noted that the application reflects an intent to minimize and share access points where possible. Director Blackford elaborated on the typical uses permitted under the Neighborhood Commercial zoning designation, such as office, medical, and neighborhood retail, uses that generally produce low traffic

volumes, primarily during daytime hours. In contrast, he noted that gas stations function more as community-serving uses rather than neighborhood-serving, which is why the zoning code rewrite made a clear distinction between the two.

A motion was made by Mako, seconded by Pollyea, that the Variance be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

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

[V-0010-2025](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1111.03 - Permanent Sign Standards of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 1250 N. Hamilton Road; Parcel ID 025-009897; Current Zoning GC - General Commercial; Giant Eagle; Zack Cowan, applicant.

Director of Planning Michael Blackford, provided a summary of the application; see attached staff report. Director Blackford reported that the applicant requests a variance to replace the existing west wall sign on the Giant Eagle building with a new sign measuring approximately 111 square feet, which is 77 square feet smaller than the current sign. The west sign was not included in the original 2001 variance, so a new variance is required for its replacement. The request is part of a larger sign package to update the site's branding, including a new sign on the north elevation that is 17 square feet smaller than the existing sign, at 238 square feet. The total signage on the site would be reduced from approximately 740 square feet to 645 square feet. Although the zoning code allows only 400 square feet of signage, a prior variance from 2001 permits the larger total. The only sign requiring a variance under the current code is the west wall sign, which exceeds the 50 square foot maximum by 61 square feet. Director Blackford stated staff did not believe there would be any negative impact with approval of the variance, and conveyed surprise that there were not any previous updates for the sign in over 20 years. Director Blackford shared staff are supportive of local businesses and maintaining structures and zoning throughout the jurisdiction

Chair Hicks opened public comment at 7:42 p.m.

Jim McFarland, Skyline Drive, Ashville Ohio: Mr. McFarland, Founder of Zoning Resources, spoke on behalf of the applicant, Zack Cowan. Mr. McFarland noted Mr. Cowan's apologies for being unable to attend the meeting. Mr. McFarland noted that his organization represents Kroger,

in addition to Giant Eagle locations, that are non-conforming in the mid-west. Mr. McFarland thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present the application, noting it was unique to present an application request reducing square footage and variance impacts. Mr. McFarland thanked staff for their work, stating he did not have any additions to the presentation, other than to note it would be beneficial to see the sign, calling attention to the mature tree in front of the sign, which currently obscures the view.

Mr. Greenberg recalled he approved the last grocery store sign, describing it as a similar request and an improvement, communicating his intent to vote in support of the application.

Mr. Suriano inquired if the existing sign was grandfathered into approval. Director Blackford acknowledged staff performed extensive research, describing the subject as difficult due to numerous code changes and variances over the duration of the installation of the signs in question, on the application. Director Blackford noted three significant code changes in that time frame. Mr. Suriano evaluated the variance did not have a gross impact and was an improvement, an uptake in branding and smaller than the existing sign.

Mr. Shapaka inquired if the existing sign was a block sign with internal LED (light-emitting diode) illumination and if the proposed sign would be the same. The applicant confirmed. Mr. Shapaka also inquired if there was any consideration given to trimming the tree to improve visibility of the sign. Mr. McFarland shared he was unaware of plans from Giant Eagle to trim the tree, noting the applicant's appreciation of the tree.

Mr. Mako thanked staff for the presentation.

There were brief comments between staff and commission members related to staff simplifying presentations, providing minimal mathematical details in the meeting presentation, with full detailed information included in written reports and applications.

Chair Hicks invited members of the public to share their comments. No additional public speakers were present for the agenda item. Chair Hicks closed public comment at 7:50 p.m.

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

Yes: 6 - Hicks, Mako, Pollyea, Suriano, Shapaka and Greenberg

Abstain, COI: 1 - Tamarkin

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

G. NEW BUSINESS - None

H. OFFICIAL REPORTS

Assistant City Attorney

City Attorney Tamilarasan shared an appreciation for participating in the meeting in place of Assistant City Attorney Matthew Roth. Chairman Hicks thanked City Attorney Tamilarasan for her attendance in Mr. Roth's absence.

Director of Planning

Director of Planning Michael Blackford made light jokes in reference to the absence of Applicant Zack Cowan and wished City Planner II Maddie Capka a happy birthday.

Council Liaison

Council Liaison Sarah Pollyea provided an update on the City of Gahanna's strategic planning initiative, Our Gahanna. She reported that phase one of the initiative was complete, with phase two set to begin, including a weekend of community events scheduled for early May. Ms. Pollyea noted that City Council recently adopted the Planning Commission's recently recommended revisions to the zoning code. Additionally, she highlighted that City Attorney Tamilarasan proposed legislative changes aimed at standardizing review processes and fee structures, related to appeal withdraws, across City review boards, promoting more cohesive and consistent regulation and

Mayor

Mayor Jadwin echoed Director Blackford's teasing comments regarding the absence of Applicant Zack Cowan. Mayor Jadwin expressed appreciation to all who participated in the recent State of the City event, held in late March 2025. She described the event as a success and

encouraged those who were unable to attend to view the recording titled 2025 State of Our City - Our Gahanna, available on YouTube. The recording highlights the City's recent accomplishments and ongoing initiatives. Mayor Jadwin echoed Council Liaison Sarah Pollyea's remarks on the Our Gahanna strategic planning initiative, providing additional detail on the upcoming events scheduled for May 6, 7, and 8, 2025. She noted that Council received a progress update in March of 2025, emphasizing that phase two builds on the results of phase one with more in-depth exploration. Mayor Jadwin also announced the hiring of Jeff Gottke as the City's new Director of Economic Development.

Chair

Chair Hicks informed the Commission that the appeal to the Board of Zoning and Building Appeals (BZBA) on an application from One Church, was rescheduled and encouraged Commissioners to anticipate its forthcoming review. City Attorney Tamilarasan added that the appeal may return to the agenda later in April of 2025. Chairman Hicks also noted the upcoming federal tax filing deadline and, with light humor, encouraged individuals to check in on their local Certified Public Accountants (CPAs).

I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS

Chairman Hicks requested that staff include an email from a public speaker David Cooper as part of the official record for the application, in keeping with the Commission's standard practice. Clerk Hilts confirmed that staff would attach the referenced correspondence received about the agenda item V-0008-2025 to the agenda and meeting materials.

J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT

Mr. Tamarkin explained his earlier abstention from agenda item V-0010-2025, citing a prior professional relationship with Giant Eagle, approximately 40 years ago, in the state of Florida. He shared an anecdote reflecting the environmental values of a former leader within Giant Eagle, recalling a time when Giant Eagle declined to remove a tree that would have improved sign visibility. Mr. Tamarkin noted that the individual has since retired but speculated that his influence may still be present within the organization. Mr. Tamarkin noted his abstention was due to his former affiliation with Giant Eagle. Commission colleagues

thanked Mr. Tamarkin for the context.

K. ADJOURNMENT

*There being no further business before the Planning Commission,
Chairman Hicks adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m*