



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, August 13, 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 August 13, 2025. The agenda for this meeting was published on August 8, 2025. Chair John Hicks called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Sarah Pollyea.

Present 6 - John Hicks, James Mako, Sarah Pollyea, Michael Tamarkin, Thomas W. Shapaka, and Michael Greenberg

Absent 1 - Michael Suriano

B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA

Deputy Clerk McGuire explained that item CU-0001-2025 would be removed due to a scheduling conflict.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

2025-0153

Planning Commission meeting minutes 6.25.2025

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

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

Absent: 1 - Suriano

D. SWEAR IN APPLICANTS & SPEAKERS

E. APPLICATIONS - PUBLIC COMMENT

V-0019-2025

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1103.07(e) - Large Lot Residential of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 400 Braemer Court; Parcel ID 025-011408; Current Zoning R-1 - Large Lot Residential; Corey Schoo, applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka introduced the application; see attached staff presentation. The application is a variance request for 400 Braemer Court. Capka shared the zoning map, identifying the property with a red star. The property is zoned R-1, which is Large Lot Residential, similar with the rest of the neighborhood.

Capka shared a brief history of the application. In November of 2024, there was a variance application for a pool house at the subject property. At that time, a pool house with a height of 17 feet was proposed, which exceeded the maximum structure height allowed by code by 2 feet. At that meeting, Capka reported that staff incorrectly stated that if the structure was reduced to 16 ½ feet in height, then it would be administratively approvable. Capka explained this could be done through something called a De Minimis Variance. A De Minimis Variance essentially is when a development/design feature deviates from code 10% or less. In such cases, the application could be administratively considered. However, the 10% deviation cannot be applied to structure or building height. Therefore, for the pool house to exceed 15 feet, a variance application approved by the Planning Commission is required.

In January, the plans on the building permit were revised to show the pool house at 16 ½ feet tall. At this time staff reached out to the applicant through the office's permitting software, over email, and by phone to state that the maximum permitted height is actually 15 feet and not 16 ½ feet as previously misstated. Revised plans were required in order to approve the building permit, however, those plans were never provided to staff. At present, the building permit is still open and is not approved, with no building inspections performed. That same month, code enforcement issued a violation notice at the site because the pool house was built without approved building permits. In May, the new variance application was submitted by the applicant in order to address the outstanding code violation. The applicant is now requesting approval of another variance to allow for the pool house to exceed the maximum height for accessory structures.

The pool house is 542 square feet and is now 16 1/2 feet tall instead of 17 feet tall. The maximum height for accessory structures in residential districts is 15 feet. The structure is between 9.9 and 12 feet from the side northern property line, and approximately 23 feet from the rear property

line. The applicant states that the reason for the increased height above 15 feet is to allow for more sun onto the deck. There is an existing 4-foot tall fence around the backyard and some tall trees along the rear property line that partially screen the structure. There are no trees or additional landscaping along the north property line between the structure and that adjacent property.

Capka shared a site plan showing the location of the pool house in red, along with the 4-foot-tall fence that goes around the pool house in the backyard. Capka noted that the pool house is the closest to the northern property line, in the area with no additional screening besides the fence.

Capka provided an image of the structure taken from along Braemer Court. The variance being requested is for Chapter 1103.07(e), which states that the maximum height for accessory structures is 15 feet. The proposed pool house exceeds that by 1½ . Capka provided an explanation of variance criteria that must be met in order for the application to be approved. Staff recommended disapproval of the variance as submitted, as there are no special circumstances to necessitate a variance in this case. Additionally, staff is unaware of any other accessory structures in this area that exceed 15 feet. As shown in the street view image, the fence is only four feet high and does not screen the majority of the structure and therefore is very visible from the right-of-way as well as the property to the north. The applicant and the property owner were notified many times through multiple means that the structure height needed to be reduced, however the applicant was nonresponsive and application materials were not adjusted. However, a 1½ foot increase is minor in nature and the height was reduced by 6 inches between the present and the previous application.

Chair Hicks opened public comment at 7:08 p.m.

John Esterby, 400 Braemer Court, introduced himself to the Commission as the property owner. Mr. Esterby noted the previous decision was split, and the variance application failed. He noted that all parties were under the impression that the project could be administratively approvable. He acknowledged that negligence is not an excuse, though he noted that they did not receive any type of notice, and therefore installed the already-built structure. Mr. Esterby noted that his neighbor along the north side was present to support the application. He explained that the impetus for the project in this location of the yard was for those living in the home to maximize their ability to enjoy the sunlight, depending on the time of day.

Eric Jones introduced himself as an adjacent neighbor to Mr. Esterby. Mr. Jones explained there is a large maple tree, among other trees, that screen the pergola. He had not heard of any issues that other neighbors had with the pergola, and felt it looked great. He explained his own intent to plant more trees on his property simply to add shade, but not because of the pergola. He again stated he thought it was a well-designed and nice-looking structure.

Chair Hicks closed public comment at 7:12 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg asked Deputy Clerk McGuire if there was other feedback from neighbors. Ms. McGuire replied there was not. Mr. Greenberg then asked the applicant if there were additional plans to screen, such as more trees or a larger fence. Mr. Esterby explained there was discussion of planting arborvitae along the back, but noted the neighbor did not have any concerns with the pergola. Mr. Corey Schoo, contractor and applicant, provided additional comments. He stated the installation started November 8, 2024, and was completed on December 2, 2024. Mr. Greenberg asked if Mr. Schoo was aware of height restrictions within the code when the project was being built. Mr. Schoo replied that he was not aware at the time, prompting the first variance application. He explained the applicants' understanding, per the last Planning Commission meeting, was that if the structure was reduced by a ½ foot, to 16½ feet, the application could be approved administratively. He believed drawings could be resubmitted and inspections could be done. However, he stated he did not receive a reply after submitting for inspections. Mr. Greenberg asked if the building could be modified for it to meet the 15-foot height requirement. Mr. Schoo explained that it would be possible, yet challenging. He elaborated that the upper rafters could be cut back, though they were already reduced to limit the structure's height, after the first application was denied. Another option was to jack the building up, cut the bottoms, and drop it back down. He reiterated that it would be very challenging, though not impossible. He explained that the plans were designed to have a balance of aesthetics. Mr. Greenberg then asked Mr. Esterby about the communication, and whether Mr. Esterby received the City of Gahanna's communications. Mr. Esterby stated he had not, though he was not a primary contact on the application, with Mr. Schoo as the primary contact.

Mr. Tamarkin asked Mr. Schoo if it was standard to begin construction without building permits. Mr. Schoo stated it was not, but reiterated that upon leaving the previous meeting in November 2024, he believed

revised drawings needed to be resubmitted showing the height of the structure reduced to 16 ½ feet. Mr. Schoo understood staff's previous comment on height as permission to proceed. Mr. Tamarkin stated he went back through the minutes and understood where there could be confusion between 17, 16 ½, and 15 feet. However, he struggled to understand why the structure was built without full approvals. He added that even with administrative approval, the approval was still required by staff prior to building the structure. Mr. Schoo stated he had the stamped building plans on site while waiting for all the correct paperwork. Mr. Tamarkin asked staff if stamped building plans were the same as permits. Director Blackford stated that they are separate items, and explained that plan approval is a state requirement, while a permit is a local requirement. Director Blackford reiterated staff's attempts to contact the applicant to gain compliance. The communications went to the applicant, which was the contractor in this case. Mr. Esterby explained that he received a notice for the code violation around March of 2025.

Mr. Shapaka felt that cutting back the overhang to meet the requirement the applicant thought they had to meet was a good move for the applicant. He said he had no questions, only comments.

Mr. Mako asked staff if a zoning certificate would be issued before a structure, such as the pergola was constructed. Ms. Capka replied that due to the size of the structure, a building permit would be issued in this instance. The zoning division does review the permits and comments on them, however.

Ms. Pollyea asked the applicant to clarify what address was used for the correspondence. Mr. Schoo replied he had a warehouse in West Jefferson where mail is received. However, those notices were not received. He received the code violation through the online portal and informed the homeowner. He did not recall any voicemails left by Planning staff. Ms. Pollyea asked staff if there was a way to verify what phone numbers and addresses were used for communication. Ms. Capka replied that the phone numbers are listed in the permitting portal, and staff has records of the emails that were sent. Ms. Capka said comments on the application are sent through the portal and go directly to the applicants' email. Then, they are also emailed outside of the portal and contacted through the phone number listed on the application. Capka reported that the phone number listed in the portal and the one on the application were called, and that voicemails that were left were not returned. She explained that physical notices for the code enforcement

violations would go to the property owner rather than the contractor. Mr. Schoo asked whether the communication being referenced was for the code violation or something else. Ms. Pollyea explained that she was inquiring about communication from administrative staff when they were attempting to reach him to let him know they had made a mistake regarding the height allowance. Mr. Schoo said he was not in receipt of that communication, and stated he maintains detailed records.

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

Discussion on the motion:

Mr. Tamarkin remarked this was a challenging situation, noting that the structure was already built and that any changes would be expensive. He expressed disappointment at the way the project was handled. He acknowledged that he was not the architect, but felt it would be possible to reduce the height to be in compliance without fully lifting the structure up. He stated that he was supportive of the project when it was initially presented to Planning Commission, and that he expected to again this time, though he reiterated it is a challenging situation all around.

Mr. Shapaka noted that neighbors have no concerns and felt the structure looked good. He explained that in his experience as an architect, sometimes the height is measured at the midspan of the roof rather than the peak, because the peak is such a small percentage of the overall height. He said that it would have been nice if the contractor had known 15 feet was the limit, and that perhaps something different could have been done with the pitch. However, he felt that the overhang should be kept. He thanked the contractor for reducing the height to 16 ½ feet, anticipating that the new height would be compliant. He felt it was an unusual situation but said that he was in favor of the project.

Mr. Mako stated that he was not previously in favor and would not be in favor again. He did not feel the variance criteria was met and expressed disappointment at the chain of events. He felt a contractor should not build something without the necessary plan approvals. Additionally, from a zoning standpoint, he did not feel the criteria was met. He stated his intent to vote no on the application.

Ms. Pollyea stated she had previously voted against the application and would be doing so again. She felt the necessity was not present. In her opinion, the sun exposure did not meet the criteria for necessity. Additionally, she felt the contractor should have been more proactive, such as additional follow-up with the administration.

Mr. Hicks stated that he was not at the meeting in which this project was first discussed, and noted the communication breakdown was unfortunate. He did not feel the variance meets criteria, and stated he was not in favor.

The motion failed by the following vote:

Yes: 2 - Tamarkin and Shapaka

No: 4 - Hicks, Mako, Pollyea and Greenberg

Absent: 1 - Suriano

V-0020-2025

To consider a Variance Application to vary Section 1103.15(e) - Innovation and Manufacturing - Development Standards of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 909 Taylor Station Road; Parcel ID 025-006726; Current Zoning IM - Innovation and Manufacturing; Darin Ranker, applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka provided a summary of the application; see attached staff presentation. The application is for a variance at 875 and 909 Taylor Station Road. The site is zoned innovation and manufacturing, along with the majority of the adjacent parcels. She shared a zoomed-in aerial view of the site outlined in red. The site used to be two separate parcels that were recently combined. There are two existing separate warehouse buildings currently on the site. Capka also noted the location of Rosen, which is the adjacent neighbor that would be most affected by the variance. The applicant is requesting approval of a variance for a 25,000 square foot building addition to encroach into a rear yard setback. The addition would connect the two existing warehouses that are now on one parcel. The addition would include space for a storage cooler/ freezer and a service corridor, and would only be located nine feet from the rear property line. The zoning code requires a setback of 20 feet. Side yard setbacks are met. The applicant states that there is a main gas line for the southern building that runs through the middle of the site. Due to this, the addition cannot be moved out of the setback.

The application presented is a variance for the setback. If the application is approved, a Development Plan will be required in the future prior to construction. Capka shared a site plan showing the location of the addition in red with the proposed nine-foot setback shown in blue. Capka shared elevations showing what the addition would look like, as well as another rendering showing size and location of the addition.

The request pertains to Chapter 1103.15(e) of the City of Gahanna Zoning Code, which states that the required rear yard setback for innovation and manufacturing is 20 feet. Capka shared the standard variance criteria that must be met in order for the application to be approved. Staff had no objection to the variance request. There is an existing 7-foot-tall fence on the Rosen property that is between the

addition and the adjacent property. Capka also noted staff received public comment from Rosen indicating they are in support of the variance application. Staff did not believe that granting the variance would have any negative effects on the area.

Chair Hicks opened public comment at 7:34 p.m.

Chris Jolley of Darin Ranker Architects introduced himself to the Commission. He stated HT Hackney has operated out of 875 Taylor Station Road and recently acquired the building to the south, 909 Taylor Station Road, to expand their operations. They rent a facility for their cooler and freezer needs. It is offsite, and they plan to bring all operations onsite. They need 20,000 square feet of cooler and freezer space, plus some additional space for forklift trucks to access the loading dock, totaling 25,000 square feet.

Chair Hicks closed public comment at 7:36 p.m.

Mr. Greenberg asked if any neighboring properties sent in feedback. Deputy Clerk McGuire summarized the correspondence from a Rosen representative, which included a request to add lighting to the west side of the proposed building, and to address parking concerns on Technology Drive. See legislative file for full text. Mr. Greenberg asked the applicant whether the neighbors' concerns could be addressed. Mr. Jolley noted that lighting could be addressed depending on the specific location. He noted that they would not want to put lighting near a property line, which may be a zoning restriction. However, he stated that lighting could be added in the loading area, which is a bit dim. Director Blackford noted that lighting would be evaluated at a later stage.

Mr. Tamarkin asked if the two existing buildings are the same height and at the same ground level. Mr. Jolley replied that the buildings are close enough that the difference could be made up, and the slope was negligible.

Mr. Shapaka asked what was envisioned for the 11-foot space between the site and Rosen, the adjacent property. Mr. Jolley explained there is existing fence that would remain, and a grass strip would be maintained. If the Commission desired additional landscape screening, Mr. Jolley explained that it could be accommodated. Mr. Shapaka noted that the 20-foot setback serves partially as a fire lane, which is typically 15 feet. He then asked if the gas line, which is partially the cause of the variance application, was an internal easement or if the utility was running between

the two properties before they were combined. Mr. Jolley stated he was not aware of an easement. He added that he also spoke with the Fire Marshall and Chief Building Officer Ken Fultz. There will be three-hour fire barriers separating the addition from the existing structures and the property line.

Mr. Mako asked if his interpretation of the schematics was correct, that the reason it was bumped out was because of truck loading in the back. Mr. Jolley confirmed the locations of existing and planned loading dock spaces. Mr. Mako also inquired about trailer parking, and wondered if trailer parking would be an issue with the approval of the variance. Mr. Jolley said there were no additional needs for truck parking. There will be some employee parking added, though.

Ms. Pollyea asked if the lots were purchased separately and then combined. Mr. Jolley explained his understanding that HT Hackney owned 875 Taylor Station, which is the northern structure, then acquired 909 Taylor Station, and combined the parcels. The addition straddles the former property line.

Chair Hicks asked whether the facility owner uses Tech Center Drive for parking, recalling earlier comments submitted via email. Mr. Jolley stated he was unaware whether Tech Center Drive was used. Mr. Hicks noted the concern about lighting, and asked Mr. Jolley if it would be taken into consideration as plans were developed, which Mr. Jolley confirmed.

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

Discussion on the motion:

Mr. Greenberg stated he would be in favor of the application, but echoed hopes that the neighbors' concerns would be considered in the development of the plans.

The motion carried by the following vote:

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

Absent: 1 - Suriano

F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

G. NEW BUSINESS - NONE

H. OFFICIAL REPORTS

Director of Planning

Director Blackford provided a Planning Department update to the Planning Commission. He began with an overview of the department. There are 10 staff members total within the department, which make up three divisions. The three divisions are the Building, Code Enforcement, and Zoning divisions. Between all staff members, there is over 115 years of Gahanna-specific experience within the department. Director Blackford said he is in his 11th year, placing him fifth in seniority.

The Building Division authorizes vertical construction. Director Blackford explained the new OpenGov software, elaborating on the differences between the new and former systems. The new software allows external customers to find information online and increases transparency. It also reduces the burden on staff, allowing staff to increase productivity in other areas. Department accomplishments include the permitting software installation.

Director Blackford shared information on the Code Enforcement division. There were around 1296 cases in 2024, with about 3 ½ inspections performed per case. As of August 11, 2025, there are 951 cases for the year. Frequently asked questions include misunderstandings on what is a code enforcement issue compared to a police issue, such as cars parked inappropriately, or noise complaints. Complaints about tall grass and weeds are most prevalent in the warmer months. Accomplishments for the division include warrants. Code Enforcement can only issue violations and citations, but until recently could not issue warrants. Now, warrants can be issued and properties are becoming more compliant with city codes.

Director Blackford provided a summary of the Planning and Zoning Division. The top question the division receives is when an applicant's hearing date is, followed by what are a property's setbacks. Division accomplishments include the implementation of permitting software and zoning code updates.

Departmental priorities are centered around continuous process improvements. Director Blackford highlighted key 2025 priorities, such as the move to 825 Tech Center Drive. He closed by sharing project updates for the Crescent at Central Park, 825 Tech Center Drive, the

Gahanna Commerce Center, and Morse Road and Johnstown Road apartments.

Mr. Greenberg asked, hypothetically, if he were to obtain a permit, does action need to be taken within a certain amount of time after obtaining the permit. Director Blackford believed there was an expiration date around six months to one year. Final Development Plans include specific language for when construction must commence.

Ms. Pollyea thanked Director Blackford for the presentation. She had a question pertaining to code violations. She asked whether they primarily come through complaints or if staff notices the violations in their course of work. Director Blackford said that about two-thirds of violations are from code enforcement officers and one-third are submitted by residents. The online portal allows residents to submit violations, which are then investigated. The violations themselves are public records, though reporting individuals sometimes do not use their given names or identifying email addresses.

Mr. Mako asked Director Blackford the name of the specific software used for daily processes. Director Blackford explained that OpenGov is the name of the software, and that the department is happy with it, after extensive testing. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, just under 50% of municipalities used any type of software. The department had good procedures in place already, and the new software works well so far. Mr. Mako then inquired about the Land Use Plan, and whether there were updates planned for it. Director Blackford confirmed that a modest refresh for the plan was anticipated for 2026, at the earliest, and a third-party consultant may be hired to oversee it. Mr. Mako then remarked on how impressive it was to have 115 years of experience within a department.

Mr. Shapaka echoed Mr. Mako's sentiments, noting that averaging 10-15 years of experience per person indicates that staff are staying with the department long-term. He wondered if work without a permit began, and then a permit is later granted, whether there were fines for applicants. Director Blackford stated that fines are doubled in that case. If needed, citations can be issued and an individual may be required to go to Mayor's Court. However, the Magistrate cannot solve the issue simply with a fine, and cannot waive code. If a project is still in violation, citations can continue to be issued. Mr. Shapaka noted that in some places there can be a financial way out of a violation, and that while he would not want to set precedent, he noted that some municipalities offer a financial

workaround to the citation. Director Blackford expressed that sometimes staff has to be the bearer of bad news, but that they have the same goal as the applicant, which is to see a project through to the end as quickly and as easily as possible. Mr. Shapaka thanked the Planning Department for their work.

Council Liaison

Ms. Pollyea explained that the Strategic Plan is entering its next phase. The first two phases were about gathering information from residents. There will be a celebration at Creekside on August 26, 2025, from 4:00-7:00 p.m. The theme is sweet treats. At the most recent Committee of the Whole meeting, Senior Director of Operations Kevin Schultz gave a presentation on a possible Creekside redevelopment plan with flood improvement plans for the parking garage, due to its proximity to the Big Walnut Creek. Both the upper and lower plazas will be improved upon. Improvements will include an amphitheater and a splash pad. The total anticipated cost is approximately \$23 million, which would be covered by both the City of Gahanna, the property owner of Creekside, and grant funds. An anticipated timeline is approximately 18 to 24 months. Ms. Pollyea also shared that the tax abatement previously discussed did not pass a City Council vote on August 4, 2025. Designs for the project had previously been approved by the Planning Commission.

Mayor

Mayor Jadwin reiterated Ms. Pollyea's comments regarding the Creekside flood mitigation work that must be done. The work also includes lifting pavers to improve waterproofing underneath to help prevent flooding in the garage. Additionally, residents had opportunities to weigh in on what they would like to see at Creekside in recent years, and improvements are planned based on that feedback. Mayor Jadwin stated the Creekside redevelopment is one of about nine capital improvement projects that are currently being planned. Mayor Jadwin also expanded on the August 26, 2025, event. It will be an ice cream social, with attendees receiving a coupon for a treat at any one of the businesses at Creekside. She said that Creekside has resonated within every demographic of the community in terms of what people want to see improved. Residents want a vibrant Creekside District, and now the City of Gahanna needs to consider what it needs to do in order to make that happen. She encouraged members of the Planning Commission to drive by the 825 Tech Center building to see the progress. Mayor Jadwin said the building will elevate the level of service that the City can provide residents, and expressed that she is most excited for the new Senior

Center space.

Chair

Chair Hicks shared a brief health update, noting that he was absent at the prior Planning Commission meeting. He suffered a grand mal seizure at home, prior to the June 25, 2025, meeting. His wife was able to resuscitate him until paramedics arrived. He expressed gratitude for her role. Mr. Hicks indicated he is feeling better and began to regain energy. Chair Hicks then shared his resignation with the Planning Commission. He stated that his family is moving out of the City of Gahanna, regrettably rendering him ineligible for a seat on any boards or commissions. He shared that he was a member of the Commission since 2017, and remarked on the many interesting applications that the Commission encountered over the years. He said he enjoyed his time on the Commission and working with all its members.

I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS - NONE

J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT

Commission members expressed disappointment at the resignation of Mr. Hicks.

K. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Sophia McGuire
Deputy Clerk of Council

APPROVED by the Planning Commission, this

27 day of Aug 2025.

Sarah Pollyea