



# City of Gahanna

## Meeting Minutes

### Planning Commission

200 South Hamilton Road  
Gahanna, Ohio 43230

*Sarah Pollyea, Chair*  
*Michael Suriano, Vice Chair*  
*Michael Greenberg*  
*Elizabeth Laser*  
*James Mako*  
*Thomas Shapaka*  
*Michael Tamarkin*

*Sophia McGuire, Deputy Clerk of Council*

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Wednesday, June 10, 2026

6:30 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 June 10, 2026. The agenda for this meeting was published on June 5, 2026. Chair Sarah Pollyea called the meeting to order 6:30 p.m. and led members in the Pledge of Allegiance.*

**Present** 4 - Chair Sarah Pollyea, Thomas W. Shapaka, Michael Greenberg, and Elizabeth Laser

**Absent** 3 - James Mako, Vice Chair Michael Suriano, and Michael Tamarkin

#### **B. ADDITIONS OR CORRECTIONS TO THE AGENDA - None**

#### **C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

[2026-0124](#)

Planning Commission meeting minutes 5.13.2026

#### **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-0009-2026](#)

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 345 Invicta Place; Parcel ID 025-002240; Current Zoning R-1 - Large Lot Residential; Deck Build; Jeremy Steckel,

applicant.

City Planner Maddie Capka presented the staff report explaining that the property was a corner lot with two front yards, two rear yards, and no side yards. The applicant requested approval of a variance to allow a 495-square-foot wooden deck within the required rear yard setback. Ms. Capka stated that construction of the deck began without obtaining a permit and that the applicant filed the variance application following a Code Enforcement action.

Ms. Capka explained that the zoning code required 10-foot setbacks from both rear property lines and that the proposed deck sat directly on the west rear property line with a zero-foot setback. Ms. Capka noted that zoning code amendments scheduled to take effect on June 18, 2026, would reduce the required setback from 10 feet to 5 feet; however, the deck would still require a variance under the new regulations. Ms. Capka explained that the reduced setback would increase the area on the property where the deck could relocate while complying with the zoning code.

Ms. Capka reviewed the submitted site plan and aerial imagery, noting that the north rear yard provided the largest area for a compliant deck. Staff identified an area north of the home where the applicant could relocate the deck without requiring a variance. Ms. Capka displayed photographs of the partially constructed deck, noting that it extended to the property line adjacent to the existing fence. She pointed out that the home's rear door also faced the west side of the property.

Ms. Capka reviewed the requested variance from Section 1103.07(E), which required decks to maintain a minimum 10-foot setback from side and rear property lines. She highlighted variance criteria, including whether the variance was necessary for the economical use of the property, whether another feasible alternative existed, and whether the request represented the minimum variance necessary. Staff concluded that the request did not satisfy the necessary criteria. Staff explained the property contained alternative locations for a deck, which complied with the zoning code, even if those alternatives proved less convenient or more expensive. Staff also determined that the requested variance constituted a substantial deviation, because it eliminated the entire required setback.

Based on those findings, staff recommended denial of the variance. Ms. Capka acknowledged that the home's rear door faced the west side of the property, however, stated that steps or a walkway could provide access because those improvements could exist within the setback without requiring a variance. Ms. Capka also noted that the applicant indicated a previous deck occupied the same general location.

Chair Pollyea thanked staff and opened the public hearing at 6:37 p.m., inviting the applicant to address the Commission.

Jeremy Steckel, the applicant and owner of 345 Invicta Place, addressed the Commission thanking the members for considering his request. He explained that the primary purpose of the deck extended beyond recreation and centered on providing a safe place from which he and his family could supervise their three young children. He stated that the majority of the yard lay on the north side of the home, and lacked fencing, allowing it to extend to the street. He explained that the deck's depth would provide the best possible line of sight to monitor the children while they played. Mr. Steckel also stated that the unattached, ground-level deck would add value to the property while having little to no impact on neighboring properties.

Jerry Welch, 357 Invicta Place, stated that he and his wife did not object to the proposed deck. He explained that his property lay north of the applicant's home and that the deck remained largely hidden from the street. Although his bedroom faced toward the proposed deck, he did not believe it would create a disturbance. Mr. Welch described the Steckels as good neighbors and elaborated that the proposed location would allow convenient access from the kitchen door to the outdoor living area.

Linda Snyder, 172 Andelus Drive, stated that she lived immediately west of the applicant's property and that her fence marked the shared property line. She acknowledged the challenges the Steckel family faced because the lot lacked a traditional backyard for young children. Although she did not oppose having a deck behind the home, she expressed concern that the deck sat too close to the fence, making fence maintenance difficult. Ms. Snyder stated that she would support the deck if it sat approximately five feet from the fence, although she recognized that such a change would reduce the deck's size. She also expressed concern that future

owners of the property could create additional noise beneath the master bedroom window if the home changed ownership.

Mr. Steckel responded to the comments. He acknowledged that the concerns raised by the neighboring property owner were valid. He explained that a brick paver patio previously occupied the area behind the house, stating that the location beneath the neighboring bedroom window could not change regardless of who owned the property. He believed homeowners should be able to enjoy that area because it served as the home's only exterior exit. Mr. Steckel explained that the north side of the home connected to the garage and lacked an exterior door, making a deck in that location impractical because access would require walking outside and around the house. He stated that the proposed location provided the best functional solution. Mr. Steckel also acknowledged that he began construction before obtaining a permit because he mistakenly believed an unattached ground-level deck did not require one. He stated that he corrected that misunderstanding by submitting the variance application after learning of the permitting requirements.

Chair Pollyea closed the public hearing at 6:43 p.m.

Commissioner Shapaka asked whether anyone in the applicant's household required wheelchair accessibility or another condition that necessitated a flush transition from the home to the deck. Mr. Steckel stated that no one in the household currently required such accommodations.

Commissioner Shapaka confirmed that Mr. Steckel personally constructed the deck. He commented that consulting a contractor likely would have alerted the applicant to the permit requirements. Commissioner Shapaka complimented the workmanship but noted that zoning regulations existed for a reason and that the application demonstrated the importance of those requirements. He observed that the previous brick patio likely suited the property's layout better and suggested that a ground-level patio could provide many of the same benefits in a constrained space. He then asked who maintained the existing fence. Mr. Steckel stated that Ms. Snyder maintained the fence. Ms. Snyder added that the fence sat approximately four inches inside her property line.

Commissioner Shapaka asked whether the applicant had any fencing along the north side of the property. Mr. Steckel stated that no fence existed and explained that the yard remained open to Andelus Drive. After reviewing photographs of the property, Commissioner Shapaka confirmed that the single rear door from the kitchen opened onto the proposed deck while the sliding glass door served a home office. Mr. Steckel also confirmed that the equipment pad adjacent to the deck supported an existing whole-house generator installed before he purchased the home.

Commissioner Shapaka expressed concern that furniture, umbrellas, or other improvements could reduce the neighboring property's privacy. Mr. Steckel responded that his long-term plan involved constructing a pergola with slats and shade elements to create additional privacy for his family and reduce views into the outdoor space from the neighboring property. He explained that he had not yet applied for permits because he first needed approval for the deck. Commissioner Shapaka thanked the applicant concluding his questions.

Commissioner Laser stated that she visited the property and believed the proposed location behind the home represented the most appropriate location for outdoor living space. She noted that she had not observed similar side-yard patios on other corner lots in the neighborhood. However, she expressed concern that the deck's proximity to the fence would make fence maintenance difficult. She acknowledged the work the applicant already completed, however, suggested that a ground-level patio could better satisfy the family's needs while addressing the neighboring property's concerns, particularly if future property owners removed the fence.

Mr. Steckel explained that the area behind the home contained a significant slope that would require extensive grading to accommodate a patio. He stated that the slope currently provided effective drainage and that a wood deck offered a more practical and affordable solution. He also noted that his family had recently welcomed a new baby and that his wife wanted convenient, level access from the kitchen to the outdoor space. He added that the deck would also provide a safer area for family gatherings and children's activities.

Commissioner Greenberg asked whether the rear, north side of the home contained any doors or windows that provided access to the yard. Mr. Steckel stated that the garage contained one small window approximately five to six feet above the ground, but no door or other means of accessing the north yard from inside the home.

Mr. Greenberg asked Mr. Steckel to describe the investment he had made in the project. Mr. Steckel stated that he invested approximately \$2,000 in materials, contributed an estimated 60 to 70 hours of labor, and borrowed equipment from friends to complete the work.

Mr. Greenberg asked what work remained if the variance received approval. Mr. Steckel stated that he needed to complete installation of the deck boards. He explained that he also intended to construct a pergola with a slatted privacy wall extending above the neighboring fence to create a private outdoor space. He stated that he remained willing to consider modifications that would address his neighbor's privacy concerns and emphasized that he had not yet finalized those plans.

Mr. Greenberg acknowledged the competing interests presented by the application. He noted that the neighboring property owner expressed concerns, while staff identified an alternative deck location that would comply with the zoning code without requiring a variance. He stated that he supported allowing property owners to improve their properties but also recognized the Commission's responsibility to uphold the zoning regulations. Mr. Greenberg then asked Deputy Clerk McGuire whether any additional public comments were received. Ms. McGuire reported that no additional comments were submitted.

Chair Pollyea asked Ms. Capka whether replacing the previous patio with another ground-level patio would have required a variance. Ms. Capka explained that a ground-level patio or walkway would not require setback compliance because the raised deck triggered the variance request.

Chair Pollyea then asked for clarification regarding the location of the fence. Ms. Snyder confirmed that the fence sat approximately four inches inside her property line. Chair Pollyea asked whether the deck encroached onto the neighboring property. Mr. Steckel responded that the deck remained several inches away from the fence and that he

believed it remained entirely within his property. He also confirmed that he had not obtained a survey before constructing the deck.

Chair Pollyea asked how Mr. Steckel intended to manage the narrow space between the deck and the fence. Mr. Steckel explained that he planned to install pergola posts along the rear edge of the deck and construct the pergola across its entire length. When Chair Pollyea asked about the height of the pergola, Mr. Steckel stated that he continued to research the applicable requirements. He explained that one concept involved attaching the pergola to the roof to reduce the number of vertical posts near the home's doors and that the deck was reinforced to support the additional weight.

Chair Pollyea asked how the applicant intended to address the narrow gap between the deck and the fence. Mr. Steckel stated that he planned to install four 6-by-6 posts spaced approximately eight to nine feet apart along the rear of the 33-foot-long deck and attach vertical pressure-treated boards to create a privacy wall. He stated that he still needed to determine whether the proposed height would comply with applicable regulations. To prevent animals from entering the narrow gap, he proposed installing a mesh barrier attached to the deck. Chair Pollyea confirmed that he referred to a mesh material. Mr. Steckel agreed.

Chair Pollyea also asked how the applicant intended to prevent vegetation from growing between the deck and the fence. Mr. Steckel stated that he had already installed weed barrier material to the fence line and planned to cover it with decorative stone. He explained that the area previously contained a brick paver patio, which prevented vegetation from growing there. He added that he removed the deteriorated paver pathway, leaving only dirt and paver base, which routinely became overgrown with weeds and muddy during rain events. He stated that those conditions prompted his decision to construct the deck. Chair Pollyea then noted that the applicant previously indicated he considered locating the deck on the north side of the property.

Mr. Steckel stated that he had not seriously considered locating the deck in the north yard because doing so would require walking outside and around the house to access it. He explained that the kitchen door opened directly toward the proposed deck location and that his family wanted convenient access from the area where they regularly gathered for meals.

Chair Pollyea asked whether the applicant investigated the cost of grading the area to accommodate a ground-level patio. Mr. Steckel stated that he obtained estimates for a concrete patio but found the cost prohibitively expensive. He explained that his previous experience installing paver patios led him to conclude that the amount of grading required exceeded his abilities and budget. As a result, he pursued a wood deck that he could construct himself.

Commissioner Shapaka asked procedural questions regarding the variance process. He inquired whether an applicant could withdraw or postpone an application after hearing the Commission's discussion or whether an applicant could submit a revised application if the Commission denied the request. Assistant City Attorney Roth explained that a three-to-one vote would approve the application because only a majority of the members present were required for approval. He further stated that he believed an applicant could submit another application following a denial and asked staff to confirm. Ms. Capka confirmed that no waiting period existed and stated that an applicant could even resubmit the same variance request, although staff would not recommend doing so.

Commissioner Greenberg asked several questions regarding the existing fence. Mr. Steckel explained that he intentionally terminated the deck where Ms. Snyder's fence turned toward her house because he believed that alignment created the best appearance. Ms. Snyder explained that her fence continued north until it connected with Mr. Welch's fence. Mr. Welch confirmed ownership of that section of fencing. Mr. Steckel added that the structural members of Ms. Snyder's fence all faced her property, allowing maintenance without entering his yard.

Commissioner Greenberg asked whether the applicant explored installing fencing on his own property. Mr. Steckel stated that he begun pricing fencing options and described plans to install fencing behind the generator and along the north yard to connect with Mr. Welch's fence, thereby creating a more enclosed backyard. He explained that he did not favor relocating the deck to the north yard because that area served as the family's primary play space and relocating the deck would reduce usable yard area while still providing no direct access from the home.

Commissioner Greenberg expressed uncertainty about whether sufficient space existed between the deck and the fence to install pergola posts. He also asked whether the zoning code allowed a 15-foot-tall accessory structure in that location. Ms. Capka confirmed that a pergola would remain subject to setback requirements under the new zoning code, requiring a minimum five-foot setback from the property line. Ms. Capka also noted that attaching a pergola to the home would require a building permit and could complicate the proposal.

Mr. Steckel explained that he intended to mount the pergola posts directly on top of the deck using post brackets. Commissioner Greenberg suggested that the applicant consider constructing a pathway from the existing door to a deck located within the north yard rather than pursuing additional variances. He observed that a 15-foot-deep deck could fit within the available yard while still preserving play space for the children. She also cautioned that placing the pergola near the property line would likely require another variance.

Mr. Steckel acknowledged that concern and stated that he remained open to locating the pergola farther from the property line. He explained that a traditional four-post pergola set back approximately ten feet from the edge of the deck would satisfy his family's primary goal of creating a shaded outdoor space.

Chair Pollyea asked whether any additional questions remained. Hearing none, she requested a motion on Application V-0009-2026.

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

**Discussion on the motion:**

**Commissioner Shapaka stated that variances should address unusual conditions and acknowledged that the property presented some unique circumstances. However, he believed the situation could be resolved through a different design. He commended Mr. Steckel for constructing the deck himself but stated that he could not support the variance. He explained that a 33-foot-long deck exceeded what he considered reasonable and suggested that a smaller 15-foot by 15-foot deck extending only to the sliding door would provide direct access while allowing access to the north yard and a patio beyond. He stated that the reduced size would also lessen privacy impacts. Commissioner Shapaka explained that setback requirements existed to address issues such as vegetation growth and rodents beneath structures. He expressed concern that the proposed gravel and mesh solutions attempted to**

address problems that proper setbacks already prevented. He encouraged Mr. Steckel to review the zoning code further, noting that the proposed pergola also would not comply with setback requirements. He concluded that the property offered better alternatives than the proposal before the Commission and stated that he would consider supporting a revised application with a smaller deck and a clearer understanding of any future pergola proposal.

Commissioner Laser stated that she remained concerned because other feasible options existed. She acknowledged the challenges of purchasing a new home, raising young children, and working within a limited budget. However, she believed the property owner had alternatives and suggested the city could help identify contractors or other resources to explore additional solutions. She also expressed concern that the applicant's future plans for the property might not prove feasible. For those reasons, she stated that she would vote against the variance.

Commissioner Greenberg stated that he carefully considered the application and went back and forth while reviewing it. He agreed with his fellow Commissioners that other options existed and also considered the concerns expressed by the neighboring property owner during public comment. He stated that he would vote against the variance.

Chair Pollyea stated that she also agreed with her colleagues and would vote against the application. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Shapaka's suggestion that the applicant consult a contractor or design professional before submitting another application. She stated that she generally did not favor granting variances for projects that had already begun because homeowners should consult the city before starting construction, to determine what the zoning code permitted. Although she understood the applicant's objectives and carefully considered the request, she believed the proposed deck attempted to accomplish too much within the available space. Chair Pollyea encouraged Mr. Steckel to consult with a professional, explore additional options, and return with a revised proposal. She stated that she would remain open to considering a different application in the future.

The motion failed by the following vote:

**Yes:** 0

**No:** 4 - Chair Pollyea, Shapaka, Greenberg and Laser

**Absent:** 3 - Mako, Vice Chair Suriano and Tamarkin

## **Stoneridge Plaza**

[MSP-0001-2026](#) To consider a Master Sign Plan Application for property located at 323 Stoneridge Lane; Parcel ID 025-010785; Current Zoning GC - General Commercial; Stoneridge Plaza; Grant Woods, applicant.

Ms. Capka presented Application MSP-0001-2026, a Master Sign Plan for Stone Ridge Plaza. She explained that the site included Cinemark and reviewed the property's sign history. Phase I of the Master Sign Plan,

approved in 1995, established signage requirements for Cinemark. Phase II, approved in 1996, established signage requirements for Kroger. In 2018, Planning Commission approved an updated Master Sign Plan for the entire plaza that superseded the earlier plans, except for the requirements applicable to Kroger and Cinemark. She also noted that Planning Commission denied a variance request in May 2024 for a larger Cinemark sign, because its size and design did not complement the building façade. A variance approved in April 2026 allowed larger Kroger signage than the existing Master Sign Plan permitted.

Ms. Capka explained that the proposed Master Sign Plan applied to all tenants except Kroger and the outparcels, and would supersede all previous Master Sign Plans except the 1996 requirements for Kroger. She stated that the proposal retained the existing standards for non-anchor tenants, allowing one internally illuminated wall sign with individually mounted letters, a maximum sign area of two square feet per linear foot of storefront width, a maximum width of 80% of the storefront, a maximum height of 30 inches, and one blade sign per tenant.

Capka stated that the proposal introduced new standards for the theater tenant space. The revised standards allowed a 118-square-foot wall sign in the location of the existing "Movie 16" sign and a 72.5-square-foot primary wall sign above the theater entrance. She explained that these standards provided greater flexibility than the previous regulations, which prescribed specific dimensions, wording, and exposed neon requirements. The proposal also established standards for tenant signage on the plaza's pylon signs, allowing up to 54 square feet of tenant signage beneath the primary Stone Ridge identification.

Ms. Capka reviewed the site plan, noting that the proposal excluded Kroger and the outparcels. She identified the existing Cinemark signage, the larger sign proposed and denied in 2024, and the locations designated for the updated theater signage under the proposed Master Sign Plan. Capka also reviewed the pylon sign tenant areas and the applicable review criteria.

Staff recommended approval of the Master Sign Plan because it met all applicable criteria. Capka explained that the proposal maintained the existing standards for non-anchor tenants, provided greater flexibility for theater signage, addressed Planning Commission's previous concerns

regarding the size and placement of the theater signs, and established clearer regulations for pylon signage.

Chair Pollyea opened public comment at 7:15 p.m. and invited the applicant to speak.

Eric Leibowitz, representing Casto, introduced himself and Grant Woods, providing the business address of 250 Civic Center Drive, Suite 500, Columbus, Ohio. He thanked city staff, particularly Ms. Capka, for their assistance in developing the proposal. He stated that the revised Master Sign Plan represented a significant improvement over the proposal presented two years earlier and better fit the shopping center.

Mr. Leibowitz explained that the proposal updated a 30-year-old sign plan at an important time for Stone Ridge Plaza. He stated that Casto and Cinemark were working to extend Cinemark's tenancy and that both companies planned significant investments in the property. He explained that Cinemark currently lacked visibility from Hamilton Road and Morse Road and had no presence on the plaza's pylon signs. The proposed Master Sign Plan addressed those deficiencies by improving visibility while maintaining compatibility with the shopping center.

Mr. Leibowitz stated that Cinemark agreed to a 10-year lease extension and that Cinemark and Casto together planned to invest approximately \$10 million in the theater and shopping center. He emphasized that Cinemark remained one of the few nationally recognized theater brands making that level of investment in a community theater and stated that the investment reflected both the strength of Stone Ridge Plaza and the surrounding Gahanna community.

Mr. Leibowitz thanked staff for helping develop a thoughtful Master Sign Plan and stated that he wished the current approach was pursued two years earlier. He explained that previous circumstances reflected tenant preferences at the time but believed the current proposal aligned with modern market conditions while updating one of Gahanna's oldest shopping centers. He requested the Commission's support and offered to answer any questions.

Chair Pollyea asked whether anyone from the public wished to speak. Hearing no comments, she closed the public comment portion at 7:20

p.m. and invited the applicant back to the podium for questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Shapaka asked whether the amendment addressed only the Cinemark signage or whether it included additional changes throughout the shopping center. Mr. Leibowitz explained that the amendment only addressed Cinemark signage. Commissioner Shapaka asked whether the proposal added another sign above the existing signage. Mr. Leibowitz clarified that the proposal simply replaced the existing "Movies 16" sign with new Cinemark branding.

Commissioner Shapaka referenced the previous proposal that Planning Commission denied and asked about the existing logo and proposed branding. Mr. Leibowitz offered additional reference images that were not part of the application, illustrating the type of signage Cinemark intended to install. Chair Pollyea and Commissioner Shapaka accepted the offer to review the additional images.

After reviewing the images, Commissioner Shapaka recalled that the Commission denied the previous proposal because it featured a box-style sign rather than one that complemented the building's arched façade. Mr. Leibowitz explained that Cinemark's current branding simply displayed the company name and that the proposed Master Sign Plan intentionally established permitted sign areas rather than specifying a particular sign design. He stated that the previous 1996 Master Sign Plan applied only to Cinemark and included highly specific requirements. Working with staff, Casto instead proposed a more flexible Master Sign Plan that established permitted sign locations and maximum sign areas for any future theater tenant rather than prescribing exact wording or materials.

Commissioner Shapaka stated that the additional images clarified the proposal. He commented that he frequently visited the Gahanna Cinemark and supported improving the theater's visibility because of the site's topography. He stated that additional branding and higher placement of the signage appeared appropriate. He then asked whether the pylon signs referred to the freestanding entrance signs.

Mr. Leibowitz confirmed that the pylon signs referred to the freestanding entrance signs. He explained that the existing signs displayed "Stone

Ridge Plaza" with a single tenant name. Under the proposal, Casto would remove the word "Plaza" and replace it with "Cinemark" without increasing the overall sign area. He noted that residents generally referred to the development simply as "Stone Ridge," so removing the word "Plaza" preserved the existing appearance while providing visibility for Cinemark.

Commissioner Shapaka stated that he supported that approach.

Commissioner Laser stated that the additional images clarified the proposal. She confirmed that HomeGoods and Marshalls would remain, and that only the word "Plaza" would be replaced. After receiving confirmation, she stated that she had no further questions.

Commissioner Greenberg stated that the additional images also clarified the proposal and that he had no further questions.

Chair Pollyea asked whether the existing "Movies 16" sign would remain. Mr. Leibowitz replied that it would be removed. Chair Pollyea asked whether the new signage would simply read "Cinemark" or continue to reference "Movies 16."

Mr. Leibowitz explained that staff encouraged Casto to make the Master Sign Plan more flexible than the 1996 version, which prescribed exact wording, materials, and dimensions. The revised Master Sign Plan established only the permitted sign locations and maximum square footage. As long as future signage complied with those requirements and received staff approval, it could display "Cinemark," "Movies 16," or another permitted theater identification. He added that Cinemark indicated it intended to submit signage displaying the Cinemark name.

Chair Pollyea asked whether the proposed signage improvements related to Cinemark's 10-year lease extension. Mr. Leibowitz confirmed that the signage formed part of the overall lease agreement and investment package. He explained that improved signage and visibility played a critical role in supporting Cinemark's continued investment in the property.

Chair Pollyea asked whether other Cinemark theaters in the area used similar signage. Mr. Leibowitz stated that he could not answer with

certainty but believed most theaters had more extensive signage than the Stone Ridge location. He explained that Stone Ridge had less visibility than other theaters because of its location within the shopping center and surrounding sight lines. He added that visibility on the pylon signs was a major component of discussions with Cinemark.

Chair Pollyea asked whether any additional questions remained. Hearing none, she thanked the applicant.

**A motion was made by Greenberg, seconded by Shapaka, that the Master Sign Plan be Adopted.**

**Discussion:**

During discussion, Commissioner Shapaka stated that this represented the third signage proposal he considered for the property during his tenure on the Commission. He noted that the shopping center consistently maintained a high occupancy rate and expressed appreciation for Casto's continued investment in improvements. He stated that he believed the request was appropriate and that he supported the application.

Commissioner Laser stated that although she had not served on the Commission during consideration of the earlier proposal, she heard about it. She stated that the revised proposal looked attractive, fit well with the existing shopping center, and reflected thoughtful work. She expressed her support for the application.

Commissioner Greenberg stated that he participated in the earlier review process and believed the revised proposal represented a significant improvement. He stated that he supported the application.

Chair Pollyea stated that she also participated in the Commission's review of the 2024 proposal and thanked the applicant for returning with a substantially improved plan. She commented that the revised proposal would improve both the shopping center and the visibility of the theater for visitors unfamiliar with the area. Having grown up in Gahanna, she always knew the location of Stone Ridge Plaza and the theater but recognized that others might not. She expressed appreciation for the investment in Stone Ridge Plaza and stated that she supported the Master Sign Plan.

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

**Yes:** 4 - Chair Pollyea, Shapaka, Greenberg and Laser

**Absent:** 3 - Mako, Vice Chair Suriano and Tamarkin

## **McDonald's**

### [DP-0004-2026](#)

To consider a Development Plan application for property located at 359 Agler Road; Parcel ID 025-001112; Current Zoning GC - General

Commercial; McDonald's; Alexis Carlson, applicant.

*Chair Pollyea read the application titles into the record. In accordance with Planning Commission Rules Section 7.4.1.1., if there is more than one application on the same project, they may be discussed as one.*

Ms. Capka explained that the applications involved redevelopment of the existing McDonald's restaurant at 359 Agler Road. She noted that the site fronted three public rights-of-way, Agler Road, Stygler Road, and U.S. Route 62, which created significant site constraints.

Ms. Capka reviewed the property's approval history, noting that Design Review and Final Development Plan applications received approval in June 2018 for façade improvements to the existing building. In July 2018, Planning Commission approved a variance allowing additional signage totaling 209 square feet, including 94 square feet of wall signage. She clarified that the previously approved signage variance did not affect the current applications. Additional Design Review revisions also received approval in October 2018.

Ms. Capka explained that the proposal called for demolition of the existing McDonald's building and construction of a new 1,978-square-foot restaurant featuring a drive-through and service window. The building would function as an employee-only facility, with customers served through the drive-through and designated service window. Exterior materials included horizontal and vertical composite wood siding in "Roman Antique" and "Peruvian Teak" finishes.

Ms. Capka explained that zoning regulations required 20 parking spaces, while the proposal provided 12 spaces because of the site's size and configuration. She stated that the proposal included a single drive-through lane with two ordering stations and approximately 16 stacking spaces. Because the site could not accommodate a required 10-foot-wide bypass lane around the drive-through without eliminating additional parking, the applicant requested a variance.

Ms. Capka reviewed the submitted landscape plan and noted that the proposal included a walkway and crosswalk connecting the service window and building to the public sidewalk.

Ms. Capka summarized the seven requested variances:

- A reduction in the required 25 percent transparent glass on the primary façade to approximately 4.5 percent, similar to a variance previously approved for Biggby Coffee, because the building would serve employees only.
- A variance allowing parking closer than the required setbacks, due to the site's three front yards and reduced rear setback along the east property line.
- A reduction in the required parking from 20 spaces to 12 spaces.
- Elimination of the required 10-foot bypass lane around the drive-through.
- Placement of the dumpster enclosure in the parking lot to the front of the principal building rather than behind it.
- A reduction in the required 10-foot landscape buffer, six-foot continuous screen, and tree plantings along portions of the property line because of limited available space.
- A reduction in the monument sign setback from 15 feet to 1.5 feet from the right-of-way.

Ms. Capka recommended approval of all seven variances. She explained that the site's 0.62-acre size, utility easements, and three street frontages created unusual physical constraints. Capka stated that the employee-only nature of the building made additional transparent glass impractical, that parking and circulation requirements could not reasonably be met because of the site's size, and that no rear yard existed for relocation of the dumpster enclosure. She noted that a six-foot screening fence and existing right-of-way trees would help buffer the site and that the monument sign would actually comply more closely with current code than the existing pylon sign, which sat less than one foot from the right-of-way. She further explained that the wide rights-of-way along U.S. Route 62 and Stygler Road created substantial separation between the sign and the roadway despite the reduced setback.

Ms. Capka recommended approval of the Major Development Plan, stating that the proposal satisfied all applicable review criteria. She concluded that the compact employee-only building and reduced parking supply appropriately fit the constrained site and that the requested variances primarily resulted from the property's unique size and three street frontages.

Chair Pollyea opened the public comment at 7:44 p.m. and invited the

applicant to address the Commission.

Bob Bumbarger, Project Manager and Architect of Record with Larson Architects, introduced himself and stated that the Area Construction Manager and owner were also present to answer questions. Mr. Bumbarger agreed with the staff presentation and emphasized that the site's small size and extensive gas company easements created significant design constraints. He explained that some of the proposed trees along the west property line could potentially be removed by the gas company if utility work became necessary. He stated that the proposed redevelopment represented a significant improvement over the existing site and would improve traffic flow, circulation, and customer service. Mr. Bumbarger requested the Commission's approval and offered to answer questions.

Chair Pollyea closed the public comment at 7:45 after receiving no additional requests to speak and opened the floor for Commission questions.

Commissioner Shapaka asked to view the monument sign and commented that he preferred the previous McDonald's sign prototype featuring the large golden arches. He inquired whether the prototype remained in use elsewhere. Mr. Bumbarger explained that the arch-style prototype was phased out around 2011 or 2012.

Commissioner Shapaka acknowledged that the property's location justified many of the requested variances because of the constrained site. He asked whether the existing walk-up service window would remain available for customer orders. Mr. Bumbarger explained that the window would primarily serve delivery drivers and customers who placed orders in advance.

Jason Ramsey, Area Construction Manager for McDonald's, identified himself and elaborated on the new service window. He explained that delivery drivers would use dedicated pickup lockers located near the service window. Drivers would park, enter a code, retrieve their orders from the lockers, and leave without entering the drive-through, allowing drive-through traffic to move more efficiently. He noted that no menu boards or point-of-sale equipment would be installed at the service window.

Commissioner Shapaka remarked that the delivery system effectively separated delivery traffic from drive-through traffic. He then asked how many of the 12 parking spaces would serve delivery drivers.

Mr. Ramsey explained that small sites required unique operational solutions. He stated that McDonald's would prefer to dedicate three or four parking spaces to delivery drivers while still reserving spaces for employees. He added that the company would monitor operations and adjust parking assignments as needed. Commissioner Shapaka suggested that employees could potentially park in nearby off-site parking areas to preserve more on-site spaces for customers and delivery drivers. He then asked how business performed at the location. Mr. Ramsey stated that business continued to improve each year and emphasized that McDonald's intended to maintain and invest in the location for the future.

Commissioner Shapaka asked whether the project involved a lease renewal similar to the previous application. Mr. Ramsey responded that McDonald's owned the property and intended to remain at the location.

Commissioner Shapaka asked about landscaping around the proposed monument sign and suggested adding landscaping to soften its appearance. Mr. Ramsey explained that landscaping would surround the monument sign. He noted that existing public trees along the roadway limited where additional trees could be planted, because new plantings would compete with the established tree canopy. He stated that the monument sign would occupy a natural opening between the existing public trees, include surrounding landscaping, and connect to the proposed fence line.

Commissioner Shapaka commented that the location served as a gateway into Gahanna and suggested that McDonald's consider a more creative monument sign design. He stated that he supported the requested setback variance but encouraged the applicant to revisit the sign design because the golden arches alone sufficiently identified the business. He also questioned whether the "McCafe" graphic might mislead people into thinking the site functioned as a café. Mr. Ramsey explained that the McCafe graphic represented a standard corporate sign design. Ms. Capka clarified that staff reviewed only the size and

placement of the sign as part of the application and did not regulate the sign graphics.

Commissioner Shapaka concluded his questions.

Commissioner Laser asked whether children currently could walk up and order from the existing service window. She expressed concern that eliminating walk-up ordering would negatively affect neighborhood children who regularly walked to the restaurant. Although she recognized that the issue did not relate directly to the requested variances, she encouraged McDonald's to consider maintaining walk-up ordering for neighborhood residents who might not use the mobile application.

Mr. Ramsey acknowledged the concern and explained that the drive-through-only prototype remained very new within McDonald's, with only a few locations operating in Dallas and on the West Coast. He stated that the company continued evaluating the concept and agreed to share the Commission's comments with McDonald's United States design group. Commissioner Laser remarked that neighborhood children on Gahanna's west side enjoyed walking to McDonald's and encouraged the company to consider their needs.

Commissioner Laser asked how many parking spaces currently existed on the site. Mr. Ramsey stated that the existing restaurant had nine parking spaces and confirmed that the proposed redevelopment would increase that number to 12 spaces. Commissioner Laser asked whether the dumpsters would move from their current location adjacent to the roadway. Mr. Ramsey explained that the existing dumpsters sat near the front of the restaurant by the exit drive. Commissioner Laser observed that the current location faced one of the less-traveled sides of the site and asked whether the proposal moved the dumpsters closer to the intersection of State Route 62 and Stygler Road.

Mr. Ramsey clarified that motorists traveling on the roadway could currently see the dumpsters, but the proposed location would not be visible from the west because of existing development. He explained that only customers entering the site would likely see the new enclosure, making it an improvement over the current placement along the right-of-way. He added that the dumpsters would remain enclosed within a split-face concrete masonry unit enclosure. Mr. Ramsey further

explained that relocating the dumpsters removed the structure from the gas utility easement, avoiding the possibility that the utility company would have to demolish the enclosure if future gas line maintenance became necessary.

Commissioner Laser acknowledged the explanation and asked about the proposed fence, noting that no fence currently existed. She asked what type of fence would be installed along the rear property line. Mr. Ramsey explained that existing trees lined the rear property boundary.

Commissioner Laser asked whether the presentation included an image of the proposed fence. Ms. Capka stated that the application packet included images of both the fence and the dumpster enclosure, however, staff had not included them in the presentation.

Matt Harper, the McDonald's operator, addressed Commissioner Laser's earlier question regarding the dumpster location. He explained that although the dumpster would relocate, its doors would continue to face Agler Road. He stated that relocating the dumpster would create space for pull-forward parking stalls where employees could temporarily direct vehicles to keep the drive-through moving efficiently. He added that the relocation also addressed the utility easement constraints.

Commissioner Laser thanked Mr. Harper for the clarification.

Commissioner Greenberg asked about the crosshatched area shown near the dumpster enclosure on the site plan and whether it represented a wall.

Mr. Ramsey clarified that the crosshatched area represented pavement striping rather than a physical barrier. He explained that the striped area provided additional maneuvering space for garbage trucks and carbon dioxide delivery vehicles. He added that the civil engineer completed truck-turning analyses to confirm that refuse trucks, delivery vehicles, and service trucks could safely access and exit the site.

Commissioner Greenberg then asked whether city departments reviewed the site's traffic circulation, because vehicles entering the drive-through could not exit the queue once committed.

Ms. Capka stated that both the Engineering Department and Mifflin Township Fire Department reviewed the plans and had not raised any objections. She noted that Engineering staff would have documented concerns in the staff report if they identified any issues.

Commissioner Greenberg observed that vehicles still could not leave the drive-through queue once they entered. Ms. Capka responded that the proposed configuration functioned the same way as the existing drive-through.

Commissioner Greenberg asked how long construction would take. Mr. Ramsey estimated that demolition, reconstruction, and reopening typically required approximately four months and noted that McDonald's prides itself on completing projects quickly.

Commissioner Greenberg then asked about the proposed six-foot fence and questioned who would use several nearby picnic tables if the fence restricted access. Mr. Ramsey stated that he did not believe the picnic tables were located on McDonald's property and confirmed they belonged to another property.

Commissioner Greenberg acknowledged the explanation, joked that reducing the amount of fencing might help, and concluded his questions. Chair Pollyea stated that she generally supported the requested variances and understood the site's unique constraints. She noted that she grew up in Gahanna and remembered the original McDonald's at the location, observing that the new prototype represented a significant change.

Chair Pollyea expressed concern about the proposed monument sign graphics, although she acknowledged that the Commission was not reviewing the graphic design itself. She commented that the "McCafe" and "Wi-Fi" messaging could mislead people into believing the site functioned as an internet café. She questioned why the sign promoted Wi-Fi when customers would not have access to an indoor dining area and wondered whether the signage might encourage people to occupy the limited parking spaces simply to use the wireless internet rather than patronize the restaurant. Mr. Ramsey stated that he would relay the Commission's comments regarding the monument sign graphics to McDonald's signage team and noted that the McCafe branding was a

common corporate element. Chair Pollyea suggested that alternative graphics might better reflect the drive-through-only concept than the current McCafe and Wi-Fi messaging.

Commissioner Shapaka asked what type of fence the applicant proposed. Mr. Ramsey explained that the proposal included a gray composite privacy fence. He stated that the design team attempted to comply with as many code requirements as possible while minimizing additional variances and providing the required screening. Ms. Capka explained that the fence addressed the city's buffering and screening requirements for commercial parking areas adjacent to public rights-of-way. She noted that applicants could satisfy the requirement through mounding, landscaping, or fencing, but landscaping alone still had to provide at least 80% opacity. She explained that the limited available space along the west and south property lines made a fence the most practical solution.

Commissioner Shapaka observed that the six-foot fence met the code requirement but commented that a shorter decorative fence might provide adequate headlight screening while allowing greater visibility of the new building. He encouraged the applicant to consider returning with an alternative fence design in the future if appropriate. He then asked about delivery hours. Mr. Ramsey initially asked whether Commissioner Shapaka referred to food delivery drivers or truck deliveries.

Commissioner Shapaka clarified that he meant truck deliveries. Mr. Harper stated that stock deliveries typically arrived around 7:30 a.m., although delivery times varied seasonally. Commissioner Shapaka confirmed that delivery trucks would park along the roadway parallel to Agler Road to unload without occupying customer parking spaces. Mr. Harper confirmed that arrangement.

Commissioner Greenberg asked whether any future changes to the monument sign graphics would require city approval. Ms. Capka explained that staff had not yet issued the sign permit because the requested variance remained pending. She stated that any revised sign design would require staff review to ensure compliance with applicable code requirements, excluding the approved setback variance.

Chair Pollyea closed questions and requested a motion on Variance Application V-0010-2026.

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

**Discussion on the motion:**

During discussion, Commissioner Shapaka commended McDonald's for reinvesting in the property rather than allowing an aging building to remain unchanged. He stated that the improvements reflected a commitment to Gahanna's future and expressed his support for the development plan.

Commissioner Laser stated that she also supported the development plan. She commented that the new building complemented other recent development in the area, including Tim Hortons, and appreciated the continued investment in updated commercial buildings.

Commissioner Greenberg stated that he was pleased McDonald's would remain in Gahanna and jokingly expressed hope that the restaurant's ice cream machine would remain operational.

Chair Pollyea agreed humorously and remarked that a functioning ice cream machine helped maintain public support for McDonald's.

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

**Yes:** 4 - Chair Pollyea, Shapaka, Greenberg and Laser

**Absent:** 3 - Mako, Vice Chair Suriano and Tamarkin

[V-0010-2026](#)

To consider a Variance Application to vary Sections 1107.01(g) - City-Wide Design Standards; 1107.01(a)(1)/(4), 1109.01(c)(6), and 1109.01(n)(1) - Parking, Access, and Circulation; 1109.02(e) - Setbacks and Structure Placement; 1109.04(c) - Buffers and Screening; and 1111.03 - Permanent Sign Standards of the Codified Ordinances of the City of Gahanna; for property located at 359 Agler Road; Parcel ID 025-001112; Current Zoning GC - General Commercial; McDonald's; Alexis Carlson, applicant.

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

**Discussion on the motion:**

During discussion, Commissioner Shapaka stated that the property presented an atypical situation that justified the requested variances. He commented that McDonald's had long served as an important business in Gahanna and expressed appreciation for the company's continued investment in the community. He stated that he supported approving all of the requested variances.

Commissioner Laser stated that she also supported the application. Although she did not favor the proposed fence because she believed the entrance to

Gahanna appeared more welcoming without it, she understood the site's constraints. She reiterated her hope that neighborhood children would continue to have an opportunity to order from the restaurant and stated that she supported the variance request.

Commissioner Greenberg stated that he supported the application and appreciated that Mifflin Township Fire Department reviewed the plans without objection.

Chair Pollyea stated that she also supported the variances. She agreed that the property's unique characteristics warranted the requested relief, expressed appreciation for McDonald's investment in Gahanna, and stated that she looked forward to seeing the new prototype.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Yes:** 4 - Chair Pollyea, Shapaka, Greenberg and Laser

**Absent:** 3 - Mako, Vice Chair Suriano and Tamarkin

**F. UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None**

**G. NEW BUSINESS - None**

**H. OFFICIAL REPORTS**

**Director of Planning**

In the absence of Director Blackford, Ms. Capka reported that the July 2026 agenda currently contained one application and anticipated that two or three total items would likely appear on the agenda.

**Council Liaison**

Commissioner Laser reported that the opening of the 825 Tech Center was delayed until approximately mid-July because of electrical utility issues that required corrective work. She also reported that City Council discussed the zoning code rewrite under Ordinance 0018-2026, including concerns regarding variances, deviations, Creekside development, and Big Walnut Creek. City Council approved the zoning code amendments after adding language addressing sustainability and environmental considerations within the Creekside area. The amendments would take effect in eight days. Ms. Laser reported that Council approved revisions to the electric vehicle charging station requirements by expanding the language from multifamily developments

to include mixed-use developments.

**I. CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS - None**

**J. POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT**

Commissioner Shapaka confirmed that the Commission would receive advance notice if future meetings moved to the new building.

**K. ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.*