BEFORE THE BOARD OF ZONING AND BUILDING APPEALS

IN RE: BZA-0001-2003:

PROCEEDINGS

in the above-captioned matter, before the City of Gahanna Board of Zoning and Building Appeals, taken before Robin E. Allen, a Registered Professional Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of Ohio, at the Gahanna City Hall, 200 South Hamilton Road, Gahanna, Ohio, commencing on Thursday, April 3, 2003, at 7:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS

Timothy W. Pack, Chairman

Debra Mecozzi

Michael Moran

Robert Fischer

Michael F. Schirtzinger

Isobel L. Sherwood, Clerk

Thomas Weber, City Attorney

Jennifer Chrysler, Deputy Director of Development



e-mail: FraleyCooper@earthlink.net

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2	CHAIRMAN PACK: I call this meeting of
3	the Gahanna Board of Building and Zoning Appeals
4	to order. Let us stand and give the Pledge of
5	Allegiance.
6	(Pledge of Allegiance.)
7	CHAIRMAN PACK: Madame Clerk, will you
8	please call the roll?
9	MS. SHERWOOD: Fischer?
10	MR. FISCHER: Here.
11	MS. SHERWOOD: Mecozzi?
12	MS. MECOZZI: Here.
13	MS. SHERWOOD: Moran?
14	MR. MORAN: Here.
15	MS. SHERWOOD: Pack?
16	CHAIRMAN PACK: Here.
17	MS. SHERWOOD: Schirtzinger?
18	MR. SCHIRTZINGER: Here.
19	CHAIRMAN PACK: Any additions or
20	deletions to the agenda for tonight's meeting?
21	MS. SHERWOOD: No, there are not.
22	CHAIRMAN PACK: Good evening. My name
23	is Tim Pack and I am the Chairman of the City of
24	Gahanna Board of Building and Zoning Appeals.
25	This proceeding is to hear docket No.

BZA-0001-2003, the appeal of James and Janet Worlin of 681 Tim Tam Avenue, Gahanna, Ohio, the denial of variance application V-0031-2002 by the City of Gahanna Planning Commission.

This hearing will be conducted in accordance with the Gahanna City Charter, Chapter 2506 of the Ohio Revised Code, the City of Gahanna Codified Ordinances, and this Board's Rules of Procedures.

A stenographer is recording this proceeding at the expense of the City and, as always, this Board wants our proceedings to be fair and in the spirit of community service.

I would ask that all cellphones be placed off at this time.

On January 16th, 2003, this Board voted to recess the public portion of this appeal having heard oral presentations by both the proponents and opponents of this appeal all within the allotted time governed by this Board's Rules of Procedure.

On February 27th, 2003, this Board reconvened and after questioning of witnesses, voted unanimously to remand this variance application back to the Gahanna Planning Commission with instructions to reevaluate variance application V-0031-2002 in light of the February 6, 2003, memorandum by the

attorney for the City of Gahanna to the Gahanna City Council regarding proposed changes to Chapter 1123 of the Gahanna Codified Ordinances.

On March 12, 2003, the Gahanna Planning Commission acknowledged receipt of those instructions.

A successive denial of variance application V-0031-2002 by the Planning Commission occurred on March 26th of 2003, and therefore has resulted in this application being returned back to this Board awaiting further disposition.

Tonight we have the benefit of the presence of one of our Board members who was absent during this appeal hearing on January 26th (sic) and February 27th. Mr. Moran, have you received and availed yourself to the presented evidence of this appeal and are comfortable in participating in this evening's meeting as a member of this Board?

MR. MORAN: Yes, I have read the transcripts of the testimony and I have looked at the exhibits from the two prior meetings and I am comfortable and I will be participating in the hearing tonight.

CHAIRMAN PACK: Fantastic. Given that the public portion of this appeal was closed on February 27th, is there a motion to reopen the

1	public portion of this appeal?	
2	There being no motion to reopen the public	
3	portion, we will go on to the questioning phase.	
4	Therefore, the Board may resume asking questions of	
5	the witnesses should they choose to do so.	
6	May I remind those that who were sworn in	
7	initially on January 16th, that you should consider	
8	yourselves still under oath.	
9	And having said all that, Mrs. Mecozzi,	
10	would you like to start the questioning session should	
11	you have any?	
12	MS. MECOZZI: I don't have any further	
13	questions for witnesses at this time.	
14	CHAIRMAN PACK: Mr. Schirtzinger?	
15	MR. SCHIRTZINGER: Mr. Chairman, I	
16	don't have any questions at this time.	
17	CHAIRMAN PACK: Mr. Fischer?	
18	MR. FISCHER: I don't have any	
19	questions either.	
20	CHAIRMAN PACK: And Mr. Moran?	
21	MR. MORAN: I don't believe I have any	
22	questions for any of the witnesses at this point.	
23	CHAIRMAN PACK: Okay. I guess that	
24	leaves it down to me. I have some questions.	
25	It was a big one of the things that drove	:

me, particularly in light of Mr. Weber's appeal that I was in receipt -- or Mr. Weber's memorandum to City Council, I thought there was some things in there that I had interest in and I would like to ask some questions of Mr. Weber, who is the city attorney.

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Mr. Weber, in your opinion, are there portions of your February 6th memo to City Council regarding proposed changes to Chapter 1123 that are relevant to this case?

To the extent that I MR. WEBER: made -- well, not as to the actual code amendments because those were denied because although Council passed the original ordinance changes four to three, the Mayor vetoed the ordinance and the override motion failed because it takes five votes to override and there were only four votes. So the ordinance is as it was prior to the proposed code changes so my opinion of course -- a large portion of my opinion did involve the proposed code changes but I did make some comments in my opinion about the variance process and how I -- one reason why I had suggested code changes is I began to question the efficacy of the variance process especially as to Rose Run since there have been 23 to 25,

apparently, variance requests that were made. My concern was that the exceptions, which a variance of course does mean, were in a sense swollowing the Rule. In other words, if you have that many variance applications, just what is the status of a no-build zone and what you can build in a no-build zone?

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So to the extent that my opinion does touch on my concern of the use of the variance process, it may have relevance. Of course the irony is that we are back here on a variance. I understand that.

One of my concerns that I voiced is that although the Planning Commission has a lot of discretion as to how they do render or how they determine from a factual basis when a variance under 1131.04 should be granted, my concern is, you know, is there really a consistent thread that can tell this body as to why some variances are granted and some variances are not? I don't think you have to make this decision in a vacuum, meaning that I think you can -- you could look at some of the variances that were granted by the Planning Commission -- and I think part of those were of the record at one point -- and you can say is this particular variance request, is the Worlin variance request qualitatively different?

Are the reasons advanced in the variance request, are these qualitatively different from some of the reasons advanced in situations where variances were in fact granted? And I think that is something that you can -- that you can consider. I mean you don't -- because there have been a number of variances and/or permits granted there are a number of fences in Rose Run. As I said, this is not some sacrosanct pure preservation zone. There are fences there and that was, of course, the reason why I suggested the code change. So although that failed, there is still --

CHAIRMAN PACK: I'm sorry. You mean fences that are located in the no-build zone?

MR. WEBER: Yes. There are fences in the no-build zone and 23 or 25 -- I've seen various numbers, but there are a number of them. And there are various reasons that the proponents of these variances gave.

Of course the Planning Commission does the best job it can when they apply 1131.04, which they have to do. They have to look at the factual context and then -- and apply the elements of the ordinance and it's not easy to do so it's no fault to them. But I think you have a totally independent process here and when you are reviewing what to do with this

particular variance request I think you can look at some of the other reasons why they were -- why some of those were granted. And I think you can also look to the issue as to whether there were any others denied.

I am not sure there were. So I think that's relevant.

And another -- I mean I am just sort of going ahead with my comments now -- but the other thing I believe you can do on top of the trying to consider whether the Planning Commission properly applied the test under 1131.04, you should take stock in the fact that Section 1203(c) of the Charter says that, "The BZA shall decide its cases to afford justice and to avoid unreasonable hardship to citizens." That is an overarching right that you have that is put in -- that is placed in the Charter.

So when you are interpreting whatever section of the Code that you are being asked to review, you can take this particular Charter section into consideration as part of the process.

You know, I -- that may not make your decision-making process any easier but I think all these points are highly relevant and should be part of your consideration.

CHAIRMAN PACK: I have a question regarding the variance. Once a variance is

1	issued for a residential property owner, is
2	there if it's unconditional, is there an
3	expiration to the original variance?
4	MR. WEBER: Usually not. I think there
1 5	have been times when I think there have been a
6	few where they have been conditioned. I think
7	you can do that but
	CHAIRMAN PACK: If the property owner
8 9	would move, the variance doesn't go with the
10	property owner? The variance stays with the
11	property?
1.2	MR. WEBER: Yes, the variance stays
13	with the property. For example, if you granted a
14	fence variance and the property was in fact sold
15	and the fence is still there, so the variance
16	still does apply to any successive owners.
17	CHAIRMAN PACK: Okay. Mr. Weber, thank
1.8	you.
19	MR. WEBER: You're welcome.
20	CHAIRMAN PACK: Any questions of
21	Mr. Weber?
22	MR. MORAN: I have a question about
23	your legal opinion that you wrote, dated February
24	6, 2003, and it was written to the Council
25	regarding proposed code changes in Chapter
Z	

1	1123
2	MR. WEBER: Yes.
3	MR. MORAN: so it really wasn't
4	addressed to the members of the BZA?
5	MR. WEBER: No, it was not addressed to
6	BZA. It was given to Council because I was asked
7	to give my views on the proposed code change. As
8	I said, some of the things may go beyond the
9	proposed code change. Yes, it was written to
10	Council. It was not addressed to BZA or Planning
11	Commission, just to Council.
12	MR. MORAN: I guess my question to you
13	then is if you look at page 2, in your second
14	paragraph you talk about stringent restrictions
15	and then there's a sentence that says, "Thus the
16	City is placed in the position of imposing
17	limitations upon the reasonable use of private
18	property by homeowners that arguably have no
19	factual or legal justification." Are you opining
20	there is no factual or legal justification or are
21	you saying people could argue that?
22	MR. WEBER: People can argue that
23	because there are times when the point I was
24	making is you have got situations where because
25	of the way the code is currently drafted there

are situations wherein because of our enforcement 1 of that -- of the law, that a builder or 2 developer may not have proscribed fences or even 3 intended to proscribe fences but because of the 4 way the law now exists the fences are, in fact, 5 not permitted. My concern was are we in a sense 6 interfering with private property rights or 7 arguably interfering with property rights in 8 situations wherein we don't have a real -- I mean 9 what is our basis for saying people can't do what 10 they could in fact do in order to enjoy -- in 11 order to have the full enjoyment of the property 12 That's what I was really trying to say 13 here. 14 Just to cut back to the MR. MORAN: 15 original question, you are saying people could 16 argue that? You weren't saying there is no legal 17 justification for this restriction? 18 MR. WEBER: Once the City says -- the 19 City can always impose these kinds of 20 restrictions and say there shouldn't be fences. 21 That is legally permissible. 22 My point is why are we doing something by 23 code that the developer or the -- I mean no-build 24 zones, the reason -- there's plat language or deed 25

1	language that says don't do this and we are actually
2	in the position of imposing additional restrictions
3	sometimes that I question that we should be doing
4	because, you know, I think the presumption is that a
5	private property owner should have the reasonable use
6	of his property and should be able to enjoy the
7	benefits of the private property unless there's some
8	strong public purpose argument to the contrary.
9	That's really what I was saying there. That's the
1.0	point I was trying to make.
11	CHAIRMAN PACK: I have a question for
12	Mr. Worlin. Is there a civic association in Rose
13	Run?
14	MR. WORLIN: Not an active one.
15	CHAIRMAN PACK: Not an active one?
16	MR. WORLIN: No.
17	CHAIRMAN PACK: And my question was if
18	it was active, what was the attitude with respect
19	to the no-build zone fencing?
20	And one last question: The fence that you
21	wanted to put in your rear property area in the
22	no-build zone, what kind of fence was that?
23	MR. WORLIN: It was the same fence that
24	is currently in our yard except, at the back of
25	our yard, that we currently have. It's an open

1	picket fence.
2	CHAIRMAN PACK: About four feet high?
3	MR. WORLIN: Uh-hum.
4	CHAIRMAN PACK: Four feet high?
5	MR. WORLIN: Uh-hum.
6	CHAIRMAN PACK: Thank you very much. I
7	don't have any additional questions.
8	There being none, would anyone like to make
9	a motion to approve appeal BZA-0001-2003?
1.0	MR. FISCHER: Mr. Chairman, is
11	CHAIRMAN PACK: Or another way of
12	saying it is we can affirm or we can approve
13	the
14	MR. WEBER: Granting the positive in
15	this case is a motion to grant the appeal on the
16	variance. In other words, to overturn the
17	Planning Commission. That's the positive and
18	that's how I put the motion in the positive
19	and then if you wish to approve the appeal, you
20	vote yes; and if you wish to deny the appeal, you
21	vote no. That's a
22	MR. MORAN: The code says we may
23	affirm, reverse, modify or remand with
24	instruction, so if you said you move to affirm
25	the decision of the Planning Commission, that

would be in the positive; wouldn't it? 1 MR. WEBER: Yeah, I try to keep a 2 consistent way of doing this. There has been a 3 few times in the past when there has been 4 confusion even among the Board members as to how 5 they are voting. We are here on an appeal so if 6 you say -- so the appeal is the -- the appellant 7 wants a certain action and if you say that you 8 are granting the appeal, then that is yes; and if 9 you are sustaining the Planning Commission, then 10 I just think that makes more that would be no. 11 sense and once we are -- if you do that 12 consistently, there's no confusion among Board 13 members or anybody else as to what you are doing 14 or how it's being framed because there are a 15 couple of times in the past where it got to be an 16 issue. 17 MR. MORAN: For the sake of getting 1.8 into discussion, Mr. Chairman, if I may --19 CHAIRMAN PACK: Absolutely. 20 MR. MORAN: I would move to grant the 21 appeal of James Worlin, which would have the 22 effect of reversing the decision of the Planning 23 Commission in this matter. 24 Is there a CHAIRMAN PACK: Okay. 25

second? 1. MR. SCHIRTZINGER: Second. 2 CHAIRMAN PACK: Any discussion? 3 Mr. Schirtzinger, would you like to go first? 4 MR. SCHIRTZINGER: I don't have any 5 discussion. б CHAIRMAN PACK: Mrs. Mecozzi? 7 MS. MECOZZI: I would just like to say 8 part of my discussion points last week before we 9 made a motion to remand back to the PC was that I 10 felt our primary charge was to look at the 11 actions of the Planning Commission and to make 12 sure that they had given the variance request due 13 process, that they had considered the factors in 14 1131 and in the case of granting a variance, 15 specified the reasons for why they were doing so, 16 that they considered the definitions and the 17 development standards and followed their charge 18 in accordance with ordinance (sic) 1125. 19 understand they are not a legislative body, they 20 are making recommendations on code changes, and 21 that they are -- their responsibility is to 22 interpret and apply the current code. Council 23 did not approve the legislative changes. 24 In looking at the I believe the November 6th

minutes of the Planning Commission, the notes where they took action on this request indicated to me that they did abide by their charge and consider those factors that are required in 1131 and I am ready to vote no.

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CHAIRMAN PACK: Mr. Fischer?

MR. FISCHER: You know we had a lot of talk about the 20 or so variances that were approved and why this one is singled out. And the hardship that comes to light with me is that -- I don't live in Rose Run but if I was a neighbor, and we heard from some of the neighbors here that it is detrimental to them to put a fence up. I mean you have got to look at both sides.

There is a clause in the code and basically it shouldn't pose any undue hardship for the -- that's not the right word -- but that it's not detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to the property in the neighborhood.

Other than that, I don't see any other reason that this variance should go down but we sent it back and had the Planning Commission take a look at it and Mr. Weber provided us with his proposed changes and they were voted down. Obviously people in Gahanna

like the way it is open in Rose Run and want to keep it that way.

We heard from the neighbors. They object to the fact that it's injurious to them to look out the door and see a fence when they can look out into what is a no-build zone.

In light of that, I've got to vote -- I will be opposed to granting the appeal in this case.

CHAIRMAN PACK: Mr. Moran?

MR. MORAN: Well, first I want to tell you again, Mr. Worlin, I think I told you a year ago that I commend you for taking the time and trouble to go through the process. I know you have spent a lot of money and time to do this and I respect the fact that you respected the process and you have done what you are supposed to do to try and resolve this dispute properly.

That said, I feel that my role on this Board is to make sure that you are afforded due process below and that there is a presumption that the Planning Commission -- a presumption of regularity in their proceedings and the burden will always be on the appellant to uphold their burden of proof to show there was some irregularity or that they weren't afforded justice and that they needed to avoid an

unreasonable hardship.

You have made some good arguments as to why you should have this fence. I don't want you to think that I don't think you have. You have made good, logical arguments and you have presented some evidence. What I don't think has happened is I don't think that you have proven an unreasonable hardship by the preponderance of the evidence which is the legal standard that we have to follow here. And for that reason I think I will be voting against the motion and I would not be in favor of granting the variance at this time.

CHAIRMAN PACK: I guess it's down to me. Let me start by referencing Mr. Weber's memo to City Council with regards to the proposed code change.

As a member of a board or a commission, we get the regular mailing of transcripts that occur out of the City Council meetings and one week I got my mailing and in the packet was also Mr. Weber's memorandum to City Council. I read it. It was not evidence that was entered in as -- on behalf of proponent or opponent but I read it. I mean that's my job. I am not going to sit there and throw it in the trash or ignore it. I read it and I felt it had

relevance to this case and therefore that is why I brought up the subject matter to be discussed.

I have been in Rose Run many times and I have driven through just about every section of Rose Run. There are not an overwhelming amount of fences in no-build zones but there are a lot of fences in no-build zones and, of course, that's a defining number that's up to the person who thinks a lot is a lot.

One time I managed to talk to a property
owner in there who had a fence in a no-build zone. I
talked to this property owner as to how the fence
was -- came on the property and it was there when they
bought the property. I was surprised as to somewhat
the indifference with respect to this person that had
a privacy fence -- it was a privacy fence -- and they
said, well, it was here when we bought the house and
we can take it or leave it was basically the attitude
I got from them. And I was thinking at the same time
at least I know a family that would love to have a
fence in a no-build zone.

And I think over the years, 14 years to be exact, in my opinion, with variances that were heard by BZA and as well as the Planning Commission, there's been a lot of fences approved in no-build zones in

Rose Run. And I have had trouble differentiating or identifying the parameters by which the Planning Commission identifies the need to warrant or justify the variance.

I have read cases about dogs and pitbulls and children for public safety from their part. I have read one case also where one address was -- the address was 564 Dark Star Avenue. The variance was approved by simply the property owner coming before the Planning Commission and their argument was, for lack of a better phraseology, their hardship was that they couldn't use the back half of the property and that the property owners to the left and to the right of theirs had a fence and basically they wanted to connect the dots and that was all the evidence that was presented during that case. The Planning Commission did approve it.

And which as far as the argument with respect to the Worlins not being able to essentially for their own identified purposes they can't use the back half of their property, well, these people made the same argument and the appeal was -- or the variance was granted. The -- so I have looked at many, many different variances that were approved.

I think it's just been a liberal

interpretation of the Code, a liberal granting of I don't think it's the fault of anyone. variances. It's just the way it's occurred through BZA and the Planning Commission. And also I think the people of Rose Run have to take a little bit of responsibility in the sense that I haven't really seen a big outcry, other than perhaps in this case and there was one other case that I read where people objected to fences being -- a variance being approved for fences in the no-build zone of Rose Run. I would think that if it was sacrosanct, for lack of a better word, there would have been a lot bigger outcry, but I haven't identified that in the references that I have read for many years, the references to variances being approved in Rose Run.

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The other question that I had was with regards to variances that were approved, when the people left and moved the fence stayed and most of the -- most of the cases that I read about it were cases that were identified with the people that were living there but once they moved, the fence stayed. There wasn't any movement or any identifying action by the Planning Commission or BZA to say, look, you guys have to go back to the original genesis of your idea and move the fence out of the no-build zone.

In fact, Commissioner Turley pointed out in one of the appeals last year -- and I did vote no for this appeal so my represent -- the things that I am saying are basically things that have come up in the last 14 months. She brought out an interesting point. It was there were two variances that were approved conditionally. That once, in one case, a pitbull left, that the fence had to come down. And the other was if the people moved, they promised they would take the fence down.

least some wisdom on the part of a Planning Commission member -- this is contrary to what has been happening in the last 14 years -- to stop the increase of fences in no-build zones in Rose Run. And I thought that was actually a great idea. And there was an identified case and the people moved out, then take the fence down and get it back to the original idea of what was intended by the developer and by the City.

So I go back to the case where the fence was approved, the variance was approved in the no-build zone by simply the virtue of that they couldn't use the back half of the property. And I believe that was on that residence at 564 Dark Star Avenue.

I find great relevance with that case as

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1	CHAIRMAN PACK: Yes.
2	MS. SHERWOOD: Fischer?
3	MR. FISCHER: No.
4	MS. SHERWOOD: Motion fails.
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6	The hearing of this matter concluded at 7:30
7	p.m.
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	1.	CERTIFICATE
	2	State of Ohio : SS:
	3	County of Licking:
	4	I, Robin E. Allen, Notary Public in and for
	5	the State of Ohio, duly commissioned and qualified,
	6	certify that the foregoing is a true, correct and
	7	complete transcript of the public hearing before the
	8	City of Gahanna Zoning and Building Appeals taken on
	9	March 3, 2003, as reported by me in stenotype and
	10	transcribed from my stenographic notes; and that I am
	11	in no way related to or employed by any attorney or
	12	party hereto, or financially interested in the action,
gent to a	13	and I am not, nor is the court reporting firm with
)	14	which I am affiliated, under a contract as defined in
	15	Civil Rule 28 (D).
	16	IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and
	17	affixed my seal of office at Reynoldsburg, Ohio, on
	18	this 16th day of April, 2003.
	19	
	20	Dhise alle
	21	Robin E. Allen, Notary Public in and for the State of Ohio
	22	Registered Professional Reporter
	23	ROBIN ALLEN Notary Public In and for the State of Ohio
	24	Notary Public In and for the State of Ohio My Commission Expires June 22, 2004
	25	The state of the s