

**SUMMARY NOTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2026
VILLAGE OF NORTHFIELD**

On Wednesday, January 7, 2026, the Zoning Board of Appeals met at 7:00 p.m. at the Village Hall first floor Board Room located at 361 Happ Road to consider two (2) issues.

Members in Attendance:

Richard Crotty, Chairperson
Cheryl Charnas
Ronald Cohen
Tom Macina
John Goodwin
Robert Hayward
Stephanie Stefanik

Members Absent:

NONE

OTHERS PRESENT: Community Development Director Steve Gutierrez, Planning Technician Amina Awad, Trustee Ed Elfmann and Trustee Charlie Orth.

Chairperson Richard Crotty called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Chairperson Crotty requested a motion on the consideration of the November 5, 2025, summary notes. A motion was made by Member Robert Hayward, and seconded by Member John Goodwin, to approve the November 5, 2025, summary notes.

The following vote was taken:

AYES: 7

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

ABSENT: 0

**Richard Crotty, Chairperson
Cheryl Charnas
Ronald Cohen
Tom Macina
John Goodwin
Robert Hayward
Stephanie Stefanik**

Motion Carried

- 1) **423 CENTRAL AVENUE** - Consideration of a south side yard Class I variation from the required 10.00 feet (Village Code, Appendix A, Article XVIII, Section 18.2) resulting in a 5.75 foot south side yard setback to allow for the installation of a generator.

Chairperson Crotty swore in the petitioner Mr. Tom Bernardi.

Tom Bernardi of Bernardi Securities, was present along with Ron Bernardi, of Bernardi Securites and of Thurber Junction-Bowling Green LLC, the owner of the property. The contractors from Ravinia, Ryan Wolf and Brian Stavroplos, who are installing the generator, were also present. Mr. Tom Bernardi presented the petition, outlining the request for a relatively small generator as a reliable source of back-up power for the office. In stating the variation, he noted the precedent

of other such setback requests being granted, such as a 5.92 foot setback residential approval and a 3.08 foot setback commercial approval. He also noted the decibel levels during exercise and in normal use and the fact that a busy highway was located about 100 feet away.

In presenting the petition, Mr. Bernardi stated the willingness to accommodate exercise after business hours if recommended. He also stated landscaping was originally proposed, but if the Board so wished, they would be amendable to the use of fencing for screening. Mr. Bernardi also made mention that the proposal had been discussed with the neighboring property owner at 415 Central Avenue, immediately to the south, and the property owner did not express any verbal objection to the proposal.

Following Mr. Bernardi's presentation, Chairperson Crotty asked a few questions. Mr. Bernardi confirmed for him it was a 5,000 square foot building with approximately 8-9 parking spaces, already under the Village Code parking requirements. Chairperson Crotty desired to note for the record it would be impossible to locate the generator in a parking space due to this existing nonconformity.

Chairperson Crotty swore in Mr. Ryan Wolf, Electrical Manager, for Ravinia.

Chairperson Crotty also wished for more detail regarding how the frequency of the exercise intervals is determined. Mr. Ryan Wolf, Electrical Manager for Ravina, provided a response, indicating this schedule is determined by the building owner. The generator could be set to run for 5 minutes if desired to cycle oil through it; provided intervals were only manufacturer recommendations. When pressed by Chairperson Crotty for a recommendation, Mr. Wolf stated 20 minute intervals biweekly on Saturday mornings would be appropriate for commercial properties. There was also a brief discussion regarding monitoring of the unit. It was clarified Ravinia will monitor the unit offsite from its own office in case any incident might occur with the generator.

Member Hayward asked about the business at 415 Central Avenue which is the property immediately south of the generator. Mr. Bernardi stated it was an office space for franchises, but he could not confirm whether anyone worked in the office on Saturdays. Member Hayward noted for the record no one from 415 Central Avenue was present at the meeting to express any concerns.

Chairperson Crotty asked if any members of the audience wished to speak. No one wished to speak.

Chairperson Crotty mentioned a condition could be made for the exercising intervals at 20 minute biweekly intervals on Saturday. A discussion followed between the Board members regarding screening and/or soundproofing of the generator. Member Charnas did not see much need for screening, as the unit was tucked next to the HVAC unit already there. Member Stephanik commented she would be surprised should anyone hear the generator noise over the highway noise. Member Hayward noted screening would be consistent with what is required per code, but there would be no need to be particular about the screening since the commercial area was already near the highway, and reiterated no one was present to express concern from 415 Central Avenue. Member Stephanik commented there was no risk of not

having the space beautified, as it already had nice landscaping. Staff did clarify some kind of complete screening is required per Village code. The Board only needed to decide if fencing should be required as a condition. Member Hayward said screening conditions did not seem necessary in this instance, especially since no representative of 415 Central Avenue was present and their office use did not particularly require it to be quiet, such as a psychologist's office, etc.

There being no further discussion, the following motion was made:

A motion was made by Zoning Board of Appeals Member Tom Macina, seconded by Member Robert Hayward, for the following:

- A) Motion to approve a south side yard Class I variation from Appendix A, Article XVIII, Section 18-2, resulting in a 5.75 foot south side yard setback for the placement of a generator, in accordance with the Petitioner's Application and Supporting Materials, date stamped December 10, 2025. The generator can only be exercised bi-weekly for 20 minutes on Saturdays.**

The following vote was taken:

AYES: 7

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

ABSENT: 0

**Richard Crotty, Chairperson
Cheryl Charnas
Ronald Cohen
Tom Macina
John Goodwin
Robert Hayward
Stephanie Stefanik**

Motion Carried

- 2) 90 MEADOWVIEW DRIVE – Consideration of a north front yard Class I variation from the required 40.00 feet (Village Code, Appendix A, Article V, Section 5.4) resulting in an 18.92 foot north front yard setback to allow for a residential addition.**

Chairperson Crotty swore in the petitioners, Jody Gerbie and Mark Zinni, architect.

The petitioners, Jody and Ralph Gerbie, were both present. They are the homeowners at 90 Meadowview Drive. Mark Zinni, of Mark Zinni Architects, Ltd., was also present and is the architect for the project. Mrs. Jody Gerbie opened the presentation stating 90 Meadowview Drive was their fifth prairie home residence. They have resided in this house for 4.5 years with plans for it to be their permanent home since her husband has family in Northfield. They have worked with Mark Zinni for 35 years. The proposal was outlined as part of the Gerbie's plans to age in place after making the decision to move there knowing a first-floor bedroom suite was possible. Medical conditions have accelerated those plans to stay mobile and independent in the home with both of them able to be there. Mrs. Gerbie noted part of the garage was

currently being used as a gym, which was not accessible by wheelchair and they could not use public health clubs for health reasons.

This project was also designed so the house would stay as is and not be affected by the construction of the addition. Mrs. Gerbie also wanted to note the sightlines were not going to be impacted for the surrounding neighbors or for themselves, which was important. The addition was also designed to be placed away from the neighboring properties, which was part of why the north side was chosen, where it would only block Winnetka Road. She also expressed her pleasure with the project's integration of the existing design and lines, as shown on the elevation drawings.

With Mrs. Gerbie's remarks being concluded, Mr. Mark Zinni continued the presentation, offering a detailed overview of the architectural plans. He noted they did not really view Winnetka Road as a front yard, and the importance of the project centered around aging in place at this home with the proposed addition including a pool, exercise areas, greenhouses, etc.

Mr. Zinni outlined the various hardships associated with the property. He indicated the dual front yard setbacks and the nature of the house already being set at an angle on the site. As exhibited in the photos they submitted, Mr. Zinni gave mention to the vehicle traffic of Winnetka Road, and the fact the acoustics were very important for the enjoyment of the residence. The current proposal was also meant to be especially respectful of the front yard along Meadowview, which was truly seen as the front of the house and took into account the other setbacks for the buildable area, with only the exercise room encroaching into the setbacks. Mr. Zinni noted development to the south would also most impact the neighbors with the elimination of open and green spaces. He also mentioned all civil logistics would be accounted for and water issues would be accommodated with a flow-through design. The utility easements were also to be respected and the design kept the garages screened for the neighbors across the street on Meadowview Drive.

Mr. Zinni noted the design included the most functional intersection for the addition, with the mud room being the transition to the pool and adjacent exercise room. He also noted the addition of a greenhouse, art studio and music studio, some of which were to be located on the second floor, and all which accommodated the interests of the homeowners. Echoing Mrs. Gerbie, he indicated the design had intentionally picked up the design lines and elements of the existing house to be best integrated together.

Mr. Zinni listed the conditions the Zoning Board of Appeals would consider in making their decision. There were no covenants or restrictions present for the property and no interest in adjacent properties. The setback regulations were in place when the property was purchased. There had been no changes to the property to create the hardships at hand, nor had any action been possible in the past to avoid the present issues. The proposal would not affect public safety, and alternatives to the present proposal were not cost prohibitive. Mr. Zinni noted all other alternatives would likely require variations and would cause more obstruction to the neighbors. He felt the present proposal was in line with the character of the neighborhood, as the height, floor area ratio and other building specifications were not being altered. To conclude his remarks, he expressed hope that this addition would improve neighboring values and other residences in Northfield had received front setback variations in the past.

Member Hayward opened the period of questions to ask about the waterflow issues. Mr. Zinni stated there is a gully of water that flows along Winnetka Road and with the proposed addition being built on stilts, it would not change the water issues.

Member Macina inquired about the history of the property and when the current residence was built. Mrs. Gerbie and Mr. Zinni said the current home was built in 2000 on an old foundation that existed from the 1950s. The current house came up to, and above, code requirements. Member Macina also asked whether there had been correspondence with the neighbor to the west. Mrs. Gerbie said the neighbor knew about the proposal and was not worried about it.

Member Hayward commented there were other ways to construct the addition and asked if any of these alternatives would be more burdensome from a water management perspective. Mr. Zinni responded by saying they would not be affecting the water issues with the addition, but it was good to note there would be more water to control if the addition was built to the south, to prevent water from shedding to neighboring properties. Member Hayward confirmed the house was not built with setback encroachments already.

Member Macina asked whether the existing driveway was changing. It was confirmed it was not. Member Stephanik commented on the location of the sidewalk. Mr. Zinni assumed it was about 10 feet from the property line and the house would be about 30 feet from the closer edge of the sidewalk once the addition was built. He also confirmed the addition started close to the existing driveway and would extend west beyond the existing retaining wall. Member Stephanik mentioned the number of kids that go to school via Winnetka Road and the aggressiveness of traffic in the area with cars trying to pass each other. She expressed concern if the large addition would obstruct what is now an open space. Mr. Zinni remarked you would still be able to see pedestrians with the same sightlines and the house would be at an angle and not a boxy obstruction.

Member Stephanik did ask whether there were opportunities to add windows on the north side, with the caveat the Zoning Board of Appeals did not do design review. Mr. Zinni remarked this would be difficult given the desire for acoustic soundproofing along Winnetka Road, but perhaps high glass transom windows could be considered. Mrs. Gerbie noted she did not want low windows for the sake of privacy, especially with the heavy foot traffic of school children.

Member Stephanik asked about the square footage which encroaches into the setback. Mr. Zinni stated it was 464 square feet. Member Hayward wanted to note for the record whether the house was already built past the northern front setback and whether the home was already jutting out. Chairperson Crotty indicated the graphic in the staff memo showed the average building line and not the setback line, and the Gerbie's had the legal right to extend about another 16 feet already. It was confirmed for Member Hayward the current house did not encroach into the setbacks. It was clarified there was still room to build further before encroaching in the setbacks, as the houses built along Winnetka Road were on average set further back than actually required.

Chairperson Crotty asked whether the setbacks for Hibbard Gardens had been considered along Winnetka Road. Staff noted the units were set closer to Winnetka Road, roughly 27 feet, but their setbacks were determined under a P.U.D.

Chairperson Crotty also asked about the space to the west, as the memo was noted to have an existing setback of 75 feet, indicating a lot of room was available to put part of the addition there instead of in the front setback. After some confusion and discussion, it was determined this was a misleading typo in the staff memo.

Chairperson Crotty confirmed the thatched portion of the addition on the exhibit is what would be encroaching into the setback. He then confirmed this encroaching portion of the addition included a pool equipment area and part of the spa, but was primarily for the exercise room. He asked whether alternative locations had been considered. Mr. Zinni mentioned if the exercise area would be moved to the south, it would also encroach into the south setback. Chairperson Crotty asked if the exercise area could be moved to where the greenhouse would be and if the greenhouse could be moved to the south 15 or 20 feet so as not to need a variation. Mr. Zinni remarked this would be functionally less preferable as you would lose the relationship of the pool and the exercise area. He mentioned they could still use the 16 feet to the north they were entitled to, but asking for the additional encroachment into the setback for an exercise room seemed a bit much, especially with potential alternatives just stated. Chairperson Crotty noted the property located to the immediate east of 91 Meadowview Drive is the Hibbard Gardens Planned Unit Development which is at the southwest corner of Hibbard Road and Winnetka Road, where the setback from Winnetka Road is approximately 15-20 feet.

The discussion of the Board ensued. There were no questions or comments from the members of the public. Member Goodwin remarked the Board tends to be conservative when it comes to front yard setbacks. He did mention the design was incredibly well done and suited the pattern of new development along Winnetka Road, such as the project at 1386 Winnetka Road, another magnificent building. He stated his support for looking for other possible alternatives to the current proposal on the property.

Member Cohen stated he viewed the corridor between Meadowview and the river to be a very unique corridor. He did not feel it was right to expect this parcel to be conforming as other properties generally would be. He recalled the history of when the original house was built and the uniqueness of the area should be balanced with the general conservative approach of the Board on the front setback encroachment.

Member Macina stated his sympathy for the proposal and the personal circumstances are the reasoning behind it. He also understood Meadowview Drive being seen as the primary front yard with Winnetka Road seen as a side yard, but he expressed struggling with just how much the addition is built toward Winnetka Road. Unlike other variation applications, Member Macina stated there was not a lack of alternatives. It would not be a minor variation related to other homes in the area. In his opinion, it would be something substantially and visually different along Winnetka Road. He felt there must be another way to stay reasonably within the setback requirements without an aggressive breach of the setback requirements, given the logic and reasoning of the current proposal.

Member Hayward also expressed sympathy for the proposal due to the property being located along Winnetka Road, but noted this would be considered a 'hard no' if a similar proposal were brought forward in a more residential area of Northfield, such as those neighborhoods located off of Sunset Ridge Road like Country Lane. He noted his personal case of not bringing such a variation forward to the Board in a similar situation. There was reason for pause, especially given there were other ways to proceed and felt this addition could be built differently with lesser setback variations to meet the needs of the homeowners. He noted from a precedent viewpoint, a 'yes' for this instance could be used against the Board in the future in areas unlike Winnetka Road.

Member Charnas expressed her sympathy for the unique double frontage lot and the fact that the angle of the house presented a challenging situation. She also noted the front yard along Winnetka Road is treated effectively as a side yard and may need to be considered that way. She felt the architect did a good job with the constraints they were given. She expressed there may be ways to distinguish this case without setting precedent by a vote.

Member Macina thought it was important to note there was more room to build in the northwest portion of the lot while still staying within the setbacks to the north and west even if it was a little tricky.

Chairperson Crotty commented if this proposal had been brought in prior years, such as in 2020, it would have been rejected immediately. He felt the part encroaching along the Winnetka Road setback, would have to be removed and it should be noted they were still entitled to build up to the legal setback limit, which had not yet been done - he hoped they would do so.

Chairperson Crotty called for a vote. Member Hayward wanted to note what the implications of voting on the proposal now would mean. Member Stephanik asked about the procedure and the precedent implications of how a 'yes vote' could be used. She asked whether it might be brought up by past applicants or those who never brought an application like this forward because they simply thought something like this could not be done. It was noted each case was unique, but also others often have to go back to the drawing board as well to better meet zoning requirements, despite the cost of doing so. She mentioned her own personal experience of deciding on a design. It was mentioned that Winnetka Road was not a private road and this would be a very visible example.

Member Hayward again echoed that it was important to consider setting a precedent and he too had decided not to build on a similar lot on Briar Lane because he could not build what he wanted without appearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals and asking too much. He again stated sympathy to the fact that this was along Winnetka Road and the design was well done, but he felt there was a need for something different or reduced substantially to better honor the setback requirements for which the Board would have more appetite.

Member Goodwin asked a question about how much the design would be affected by alteration. Mr. Zinni commented the design itself should not be reduced in quality, however, the functional connection between the exercise area and the pool would be lost.

Mr. Zinni then requested the application be moved to the next meeting for a continuation of the discussion on an altered proposal instead of having a vote taken on the current proposal. He expressed appreciation for the input on the current proposal and welcomed any additional feedback.

Member Hayward noted they were amenable to, and actually encouraged, the suggested approach.

Chairperson Crotty asked if anyone in the audience wished to speak. No one wished to speak.

There being no further discussion, the following motion was made:

A motion was made by Zoning Board of Appeals Member Robert Hayward, and seconded by John Goodwin, for the following:

A) Motion to continue the discussion of an altered petition for 90 Meadowview Drive at the next meeting of the Zoning Board of Appeals which is February 4, 2026.

The following vote was taken:

AYES: 7

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

ABSENT: 0

Richard Crotty, Chairperson

Cheryl Charnas

Ronald Cohen

Tom Macina

John Goodwin

Robert Hayward

Stephanie Stefanik

Motion Carried

Chairperson Crotty asked if there was any further public comment. No one wished to speak.

There being no further discussion, a motion was made by Member Robert Hayward and seconded by Member John Goodwin, the Zoning Board of Appeals adjourned their meeting at 8:09 p.m.

Approved 2/4/26 with amendments