



6:30 PM, Monday, January 6, 2025
CITY HALL – COUNCIL CHAMBERS

I. CALL TO ORDER

Assistant City Manager Jonathan Bowman called the meeting of the Ionia Zoning Board of Appeals to order at 6:30 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

Roll call revealed a Quorum with Board Members Troy Waterman, Logan Bailey, Mike Kirgis, and Amanda Ondersma present.

III. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

(III.1.) Chairperson

Board Member Waterman made a motion, seconded by Board Member Bailey, to nominate and elect Mike Kirgis as Chairperson.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

(III.2.) Vice-Chairperson

Board Member Waterman made a motion, seconded by Board Member Kirgis, to nominate and elect Logan Bailey as Vice-Chairperson.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

(III.3.) Secretary

Board Member Waterman made a motion, seconded by Board Member Bailey, to nominate and elect Amanda Ondersma as Secretary.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairperson Kirgis introduced the agenda and asked if there were any changes. With no changes or additions, Board Member Bailey made a motion, seconded by Board Member Waterman, to approve the agenda as presented.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

(V.1.) January 8, 2024 – Regular Meeting

Minutes from the January 8, 2024, meeting were reviewed. Board Member Bailey made a motion,

seconded by Board Member Ondersma, to approve the January 8, 2024, meeting minutes as presented.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING

(VI.1.) Conduct public hearing to receive comments on a 4 ft. variance request from Appendix I – “Schedule of Regulations” that requires a 20 ft. front yard setback in the Medium-Density Residential (MDR) District for the Ionia County Historical Society property located at 253 E. Main Street.

Assistant City Manager Bowman provided background information on the variance requests from the Ionia County Historical Society. Bowman informed the Board that proper notice was provided to all properties within 300 feet of the subject property in addition to a newspaper publication. Chairperson Kirgis requested the applicant to provide information on the first request.

On behalf of the Ionia County Historical Society, Kathleen Cook explained the need for additional storage space and the uniqueness of the situation due to the property being one of three in the City listed on the National Historic Register. She noted that the Historical Society has been working with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office to design the new structure and match its appearance to buildings from the 1880's as the historic Blanchard House and Carriage House featured on the property were built during that time period.

Assistant City Manager Bowman provided a staff review of the 4 ft. variance request from the front yard setback at 253 E. Main Street.

Standard 1

That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applying to the property in question that do not apply generally to other properties in the same zoning district.

Staff comments: The parcel is a through lot with frontage on both Main and Adams Streets. This may be considered a unique circumstance as a majority of parcels within the MDR District are not through lots.

Standard 2

That the condition or situation of the specific piece of property or the intended use of such property for which the variance is sought is not so general or recurrent in nature as to make reasonably practical the formulation of a general regulation for such conditions or situations. Unique circumstances include: exceptional narrowness or shape of a specific property on the effective date of this chapter, or by reason of exceptional topographic conditions or other extraordinary situations on the land, building or structure or by reason of the use or development of the property immediately adjoining the property in question, the literal enforcement of the requirements of this chapter would involve practical difficulties.

Staff comments: As discussed in the previous standard, the property is a through lot creating two front yards. Front yards require a greater setback distance and the enforcement of the setback makes the southeast corner of the property difficult to use because of its shape and the other required setbacks.

Standard 3

That such variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right similar to that possessed by other properties in the same zoning district and in the vicinity. The possibility of increased financial return shall not of itself be deemed sufficient to warrant a variance.

Staff comments: While the accessory structure could be built in a different location on the property, setbacks make using the intended portion of the property more difficult due to its shallow depth in comparison to the rest of the parcel. The status of the property on the National Historic Register should also be considered.

Standard 4

The variance will not be significantly detrimental to adjacent property and the surrounding neighborhood.

Staff comments: The setback is not detrimental to adjacent property. As previously mentioned, the average front yard setback for adjacent properties is less than what the applicant has proposed.

Standard 5

The variance will not impair the intent and purpose of this ordinance.

Staff comments: The intent of the ordinance is to create uniformity in the City of Ionia and preserve the historic nature of the EMP District. The front yard setback from Adams Street will not impair this intent especially due to the unique circumstances of the property and comparison to adjacent structures.

Standard 6

That the immediate practical difficulty causing the need for the variance request was not created by action of the applicant.

Staff comments: The ICHS is working to comply with the City's zoning ordinance and the requirements of the National Historic Registry. While the location of the accessory structure is within the control of the applicant, there are many factors at play.

Board Members asked the applicant a few questions about the request.

Chairperson Kirgis opened the floor at 6:44 PM to receive comments on the variance request and subsequently closed the public hearing at 6:45 PM following no comments.

(IX.1.) Variance Request #1: 253 E. Main Street – Ionia County Historical Society: A 4 ft. variance from Appendix I – “Schedule of Regulations” that requires a 20 ft. front yard setback in the Medium-Density Residential (MDR) District.

Chairperson Kirgis reviewed the general standards for all variances with the board determining through consensus that the proposed variance would not:

- a. Impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property.
- b. Unreasonably increase the congestion in public streets.
- c. Increase danger of fire or endanger public safety.
- d. Unreasonably diminish or impair established property values within surrounding area.
- e. Impair the public health, safety, comfort, morals, or welfare of the inhabitants of the City of

Ionia.

Board Member Waterman made a motion, seconded by Board Member Bailey, to approve a 4 ft. variance from Appendix I – “Schedule of Regulations” for the Ionia County Historical Society located at 253 E. Main Street. The approval was based on the findings that the non-use variance complies with the General Standards of Section 5.185(3)(h) and the six non-use standards, as detailed in the staff comments.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

(VI.2.) Conduct public hearing to receive comments on a 7 ft. variance request from Section 1286.01(b)(3) – “Accessory Buildings” that limits accessory structures to a maximum height of 20 ft. for the Ionia County Historical Society property located at 253 E. Main Street.

Chairperson Kirgis asked the applicant for any additional information on the second request.

Kathleen Cook explained the need for a taller structure in order to match the roof pitch seen on the carriage house. She further expressed the high standard for properties on the National Historic Registry and described the materials intended for construction.

Assistant City Manager Bowman provided a staff review of the 7 ft. variance request from the maximum height allowed for an accessory structure at 253 E. Main Street.

Standard 1

That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applying to the property in question that do not apply generally to other properties in the same zoning district.

Staff comments: The property is listed on the National Historic Register which creates unique circumstances that do not apply generally to other properties in the zoning district. The applicant referenced that this property is only one of three in the entire City with this historic designation.

Standard 2

That the condition or situation of the specific piece of property or the intended use of such property for which the variance is sought is not so general or recurrent in nature as to make reasonably practical the formulation of a general regulation for such conditions or situations. Unique circumstances include: exceptional narrowness or shape of a specific property on the effective date of this chapter, or by reason of exceptional topographic conditions or other extraordinary situations on the land, building or structure or by reason of the use or development of the property immediately adjoining the property in question, the literal enforcement of the requirements of this chapter would involve practical difficulties.

Staff comments: Section 1269.05(a) of the East Main Preservation District intends to maintain historic architectural features. Matching the roof pitch on the new accessory structure to the carriage house from 1880 would seem to align with this intent. The age of the structures on the parcel may be considered to provide unique circumstances.

Standard 3

That such variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right similar to that possessed by other properties in the same zoning district and in the vicinity. The possibility of increased financial return shall not of itself be deemed sufficient to warrant a

variance.

Staff comments: The design of the structure was approved by a historic architect recommended by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office in part because of the proposed roof pitch. The property is held to a higher historic standard due to its status on the National Historic Registry.

Standard 4

The variance will not be significantly detrimental to adjacent property and the surrounding neighborhood.

Staff comments: The increased height of the accessory structure caused by the roof pitch would not be detrimental to adjacent property nor the surrounding neighborhood. Furthermore, the variance may help the structure preserve the historic character of the neighborhood as required by in the EMP District.

Standard 5

The variance will not impair the intent and purpose of this ordinance.

Staff comments: In this situation, it may be argued that a variance would support the intent and purpose of the EMP District by replicating the roof pitch common in the time period when other structures on the property were built.

Standard 6

That the immediate practical difficulty causing the need for the variance request was not created by action of the applicant.

Staff comments: The historic nature of the property was not created by the applicant.

Chairperson Kirgis opened the floor at 6:51 PM to receive comments on the variance request and subsequently closed the public hearing at 6:52 PM following no comments.

(IX.2.) Variance Request #2: 253 E. Main Street – Ionia County Historical Society: A 7 ft. variance from Section 1286.01(b)(3) – “Accessory Buildings” that limits accessory structures to a maximum height of 20 ft.

Chairperson Kirgis reviewed the general standards for all variances with the board determining through consensus that the proposed variance would not:

- a. Impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjacent property.
- b. Unreasonably increase the congestion in public streets.
- c. Increase danger of fire or endanger public safety.
- d. Unreasonably diminish or impair established property values within surrounding area.
- e. Impair the public health, safety, comfort, morals, or welfare of the inhabitants of the City of Ionia.

Board Member Bailey made a motion, seconded by Board Member Waterman, to approve a 7 ft. variance from Section 1286.01(b)(3) – “Accessory Buildings” for the Ionia County Historical Society located at 253 E. Main Street. This approval was based on the findings that the non-use variance complies with the General Standards of Section 5.185(3)(h) and the six non-use standards, as detailed in the staff comments.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

None.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Conducted following each corresponding public hearing.

X. MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

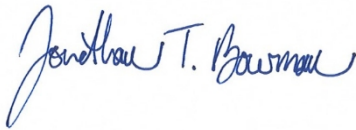
XI. ADJOURNMENT

Board Member Ondersma made a motion, seconded by Board Member Waterman, to adjourn.

MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:54 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonathan T. Bowman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Jonathan T. Bowman, Recording Secretary
for Judy Swartz, Secretary