

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF HIGHLAND
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
APPROVED MINUTES
June 18, 2025

The meeting was held at Highland Township Auditorium, 205 N. John St, Highland, MI, 48357.

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

David Gerathy, Chair
Michael Borg, Vice Chair
Anthony Raimondo, Secretary
Michael Zeolla, P.C. Liaison
Peter Eichinger
Robert Hoffman
Gary Childs - **absent**
Chuck Benke, Alternate
Jacob Probe, Alternate - **absent**

Kariline P. Littlebear, Zoning Administrator

Visitors: 5

Chair Gerathy welcomed the public to the meeting and reviewed the procedures for addressing the Board, stating that four affirmative votes are required to approve a variance. If a variance is approved, the applicant has one year to act upon the variance. He noted that in Mr. Childs' absence, alternate member, Chuck Benke, will be sitting in at this meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. CASE NUMBER: 25-11
ENFORCEMENT:
ZONING: R3 –Single Family Residential District (3-acre min.)
PARCEL #: 11-27-400-022
PROPERTY ADDRESS: 1736 Pettibone Lake Rd
APPLICANT: Norman Johnson
OWNER: Norman & Lisa Johnson
VARIANCE REQUESTED: A 19-foot variance from the required 40-foot north side yard setback to 21-feet provided.
(Sec. 4.15.)
This request is for a reduction of the north side yard setback for the construction of a covered porch and second story deck.

Chair Gerathy introduced the case and asked if the applicant was present and, if so, to please step up to the podium. He then asked the Zoning Administrator if there was anything new to add. Mrs. Littlebear stated that she received two emails regarding this case but had not provided them to the Board earlier because they were lost in her Junk folder. She apologized and provided copies of each email to the Board members.

Discussion from the Applicant:

Norman Johnson, applicant and property owner, discussed the case noting that the proposal is smaller than the original covered porch and deck so it will encroach less into the north side yard. He further stated that he combined this parcel with his adjacent vacant parcel to the south in order to eliminate the need for a variance

request on the south side. He stated that he and his family are excited to be able to restore this old farmhouse. Mr. Johnson also thanked his neighbors for coming to the meeting in support of his request.

Discussion from the Public:

Michael Zarate, 1562 Pettibone Lake Rd, spoke in support of this proposal noting that he and many of the other neighbors have been granted variances in the past due to the extreme narrowness of all of the parcels in the neighborhood.

Mr. Gerathy read into record an email in opposition to this request from Mark Overberg at 1720 Pettibone Lake Rd and an email in support of this request from Jeffrey Kaiser at 1672 Pettibone Lake Rd.

Discussion from the Board:

Mr. Borg stated that the septic tank is only 3 ft from the proposed deck and asked the zoning administrator if she had information on the Health Division's general concern regarding structures too close to septic systems. Mrs. Littlebear stated that Frank Rhodes, Oakland County Sanitarian, has reviewed the proposal and discussed it with Mr. Johnson. Mr. Rhodes informed Mrs. Littlebear that after his review and discussion with Mr. Johnson he was able to determine that due to the particulars of this specific proposal he can approve the encroachment.

Mr. Borg then asked how far the northern neighbor encroaches into his side yard. Mrs. Littlebear stated that the northern neighbors' home is approximately 15 feet from the property line. Mr. Borg noted that the building envelope created by the setbacks on this approximately 82-foot-wide parcel would be only about 2 feet wide.

Mr. Benke asked the Zoning Administrator to explain more about the land combination that Mr. Johnson applied for. Mrs. Littlebear stated that Mr. Johnson has applied for the combination and it has received approval from Oakland County. The process for parcel combination will be finalized by the beginning of 2026 and it is okay to now move forward with any proposed projects as a new parcel.

Mr. Hoffman stated that he felt that this is a reasonable request because the lot is very narrow and the request will enhance the house and the neighborhood.

Mr. Eichinger stated that he agreed with Mr. Hoffman.

Mr. Raimondo noted that this is a substandard parcel as are all of the parcels in this neighborhood which are often referred to as "bowling alley lots". He further stated that variance requests cannot be approved based on financial concerns.

Mr. Borg agreed with Mr. Raimondo, stating also that the previous dilapidated porch encroached further to the north lot line than this proposal, the parcel combination eliminated the need for a southern variance request, and approving this request will not be harmful to the health, safety, or welfare of the township.

Motion:

Mr. Eichinger made a motion in Case #25-11, parcel # 11-27-400-022, commonly known as 1736 Pettibone Lake Rd, to approve a 19-foot variance from the required 40-foot north side yard setback to 21-feet provided for the construction of a covered porch and second story deck. Mr. Hoffman supported the motion.

Facts and Findings:

This original parcel is substandard in width and area.

This original parcel is very narrow, leaving only a 2.43-foot-wide building envelope.

The property owner has applied to combine his two adjacent parcels, eliminating the need for a variance request on the south side.

The proposed structure will encroach less than the original structure on the north side.

This request is the minimum necessary.

This request is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.

This request will not be detrimental to nor alter the essential character of the neighborhood.

The practical difficulties on this parcel are not self-created.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Eichinger-yes, Mr. Hoffman-yes, Mr. Raimondo-yes, Mr. Zeolla-yes, Mr. Gerathy-yes, Mr. Borg-yes, Mr. Benke-yes (7 yes votes). The motion passed and the variance request was approved.

Motion:

Mr. Hoffman made a motion in Case #25-11, parcel # 11-27-400-022, commonly known as 1736 Pettibone Lake Rd, to approve a Final Decision form. Mr. Borg supported the motion, and it was approved with a unanimous voice vote.

MINUTES:

Mr. Borg made a motion to approve the minutes of June 4, 2025, as presented. Mr. Benke supported the motion, and it was approved with a unanimous voice vote.

DISCUSSION:

Mrs. Littlebear reminded the Board that there is not a meeting scheduled for July 2, 2025 so the next meeting will be on July 16, 2025.

Mr. Borg asked how many cases will be heard on the July 16, 2025 meeting. Mrs. Littlebear stated that there will be three cases, two in the LV district and one in the IM district.

ADJOURN:

At 7:55 p.m., Mr. Hoffman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Raimondo supported the motion, and it carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Raimondo
AR/kpl