



BOARD OF APPEALS ADVISORY BOARD

March 17, 2026 – 5:00 p.m.
City Center – Council Chambers

AGENDA

- A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

- B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

- C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - 1. November 20, 2024

- D. PUBLIC HEARINGS
 - 1. Variance Request: Case File VA2026-001
915 Autumn Street

 - 2. Variance Request: Case File VA2026-002
409 Clark Street West

- E. COMMISSIONER COMMUNICATIONS

- F. STAFF COMMUNICATIONS
 - 1. Board of Appeals Member Vacancy

- G. ADJOURNMENT

Disclaimer: This agenda has been prepared to provide information regarding an upcoming meeting of the Board of Appeals of the City of Albert Lea. This document does not claim to be complete and is subject to change.

**CITY OF ALBERT LEA
BOARD OF APPEALS
MEETING MINUTES**

*November 20, 2024 – 5:00 p.m.
City Center – Council Chambers*

Board Members Present

Colby Cunningham
Craig Hoium, Chair
Matt Greibrok
Steve Guenthner
Kristopher Moen

Board Members Absent

Aaron Farris

Staff in Attendance

Megan Boeck, City Planner
Cierra Maras, Board of Appeals Secretary

Interested Parties

Landon Plagge, Green Acres Milling
Alan Bakken
Joe Attig

Board of Appeals Chair, Craig Hoium, called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

Approval of the Agenda

Guenthner made a motion to approve the agenda and Greibrok seconded the motion. The agenda was approved unanimously on a voice vote.

Approval of Minutes

Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes from May 8, 2024. Greibrok seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously on a voice vote.

Staff report prepared by Megan Boeck, City Planner, is to become part of these minutes by reference.

Appeal: VA2024-002 – 360 14th Street

Boeck stated that the applicant, Green Acres Milling, seeks a variance from building height limitations for an oat milling operation which includes a warehouse, storage bins, and elevator. The purpose of the building and equipment height is for efficiency due to gravity fall through the milling operations.

Hoium opened the public hearing at 5:09 p.m.

Landon Plagge, representative of Green Acres Milling, explained the request for the variance is driven by the 72-foot kiln which is a key piece of equipment in the milling process.

Hoium asked if the kiln will have a noise impact which Plagge stated it will remain under the noise limit and that the loudest equipment will be housed in a precast concrete structure to dampen sound to a “low grade hum”.

Alan Bakken, neighboring property owner, questioned the shadow profile of the structure as he noted concerns of potential future solar energy installation on his land. Boeck said full size copies of the site plan are available to view if he wanted.

Joe Attig, neighboring property owner, had concerns about additional truck traffic. He explained that since Vortex was built, there is a lot more traffic going past his property where there had not been that volume of traffic before.

Hoium closed the public hearing at 5:30 p.m.

Guenthner made a motion, seconded by Moen, to recommend to City Council approval of the application for a variance from the maximum building height limitations for an oat milling facility to build a mill structure.

The motion passed on a 5-0 voiced vote.

Commissioner Communications

Matt Greibrok introduced himself to the board. He said he has lived in Freeborn County his entire life and works at SANCO Enterprises as the vice-president of business development.

Staff Communications

Boeck asked the board if evening hours work better for meetings. The board agreed that it is easier to address as each application comes through to decide on a time. Maras noted that there is still an open spot to fill on the Board of Appeals.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:34 p.m. The motion to adjourn was made by Cunningham and seconded by Guenthner. The motion to adjourn was approved unanimously on a voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Cierra Maras
Secretary, Board of Appeals

Craig Hoium
Chair, Board of Appeals

GENERAL INFORMATION

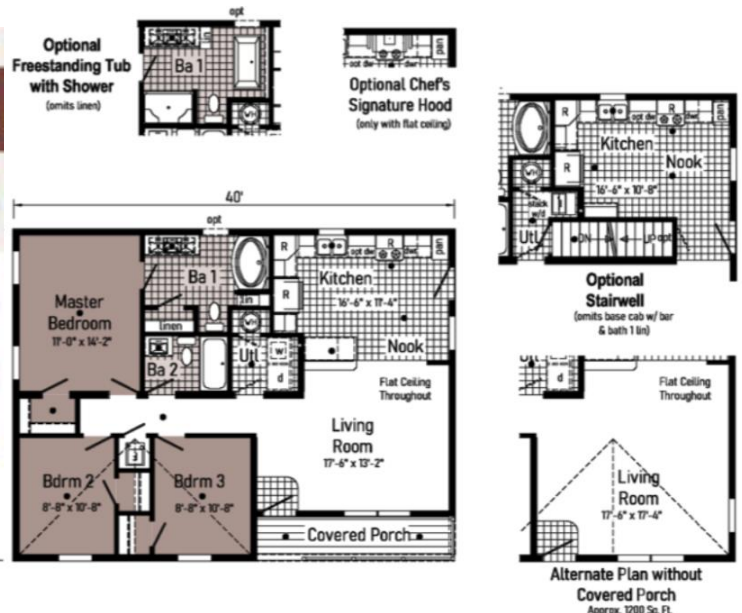
Applicant: City of Albert Lea
 Property Owner: City of Albert Lea
 Purpose: Variance from the minimum side yard setbacks
 Address: 915 Autumn Street
 Parcel Number(s): 34.113.0270
 Zoning: R-1 Single-Family Residence District
 Surrounding Land Use: R-1 Single-Family Residence District
 File Date/Publication Date: March 1, 2026 / March 7, 2026

BACKGROUND

The City of Albert Lea received a proposal for modular housing procurement and placement at 915 Autumn Street. The City has owned the property since November 19, 2025 and demolished the structure on December 9, 2025 due to blighted conditions. The model from GFY Custom Homes includes a durable, code-compliant single-family house that can be delivered on an accelerated timeline with more predictable costs than conventional site-built construction.

The concept stems from the City’s attempt to provide additional affordable housing units on vacant property that already have access to street, water and sewer. New construction, along with other planned community improvements such as the Songbird Trail, access to schools and parks and open spaces is what makes neighborhoods livable and sustainable and will hopefully lessen housing shortages facing Albert Lea. The Albert Lea Comprehensive Plan identifies aging housing stock as an opportunity for reinvestment in order to keep Albert Lea’s quality of life high and cost of living low.

The proposed modular home is a three-bedroom two-bathroom, or 1,128 ft² model that is well suited for small lots. The overall measurements are 32ftx40ft plus an additional 16ft for an attached garage. The lot is 66ft wide and would require 10% of the lot frontage in side yard setbacks (a total of 6 feet on each side). In order to accommodate the attached garage (9ft door) and modest space on each side, the applicant is proposing a 5ft side yard setback which requires a variance.



POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Zoning and Land Use

Chapter 50 – Zoning – Sec. 50.0199. – Tabulation of district requirements.

(3) Yard setback (minimum requirements)

b. Minimum side, building line to property line. Each side requires 10% of the lot frontage up to a maximum of 8 feet.

Lot Frontage	66 feet
Required Side Yard (10%)	6.6 feet
Proposed Side Yard	5 feet
Variance	1.6 feet

REVIEW OF VARIANCE STANDARDS

Article II Administration and Enforcement

Section 50.0080 (3) states:

The Board of Appeals may recommend and the City Council may issue variances from the provisions of the zoning code. Variances shall only be permitted when they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinances; and when the terms of the variance are consistent with the comprehensive plan. Variances may be granted when the applicant for the variance establishes that there are practical difficulties in complying with the zoning ordinance. Practical difficulties are as follows:

(1) The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance.

Sec. 50.0222. – Purpose. (R-1 Single-Family Residence District)

It is the purpose of the R-1 single-family residence district to encourage the establishment and preservation of residential neighborhoods characterized by single-family buildings on medium-sized lots. Nonresidential uses permitted in this district are those that will provide auxiliary service or will contribute to the stability and long-term value of the area for residential purposes.

Principal permitted uses in the R-1 district are single-family and two-family dwellings, day care facilities, and lodginghouses.

The applicant intends to preserve the residential nature of the property by remediating a once vacant and blighted property and improving the neighborhood with new single-family construction.

(2) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

The property at 915 Autumn Street slopes 10ft over 50ft, which is a moderate to steep slope and could present additional engineering and drainage issues for any part of the building within the slope or rear yard. This leaves limited buildable area outside the front half of the property.

(3) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.

College Addition was platted in 1884 and is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Albert Lea. Many of the homes, especially those in older neighborhoods, are at higher risk of becoming substandard or functionally obsolete (Comprehensive Plan, pg. 42). New construction in the form of modular housing will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood, which is residential. In addition, staff finds there are additional properties along Autumn Street and Abbott Street with reduced side yard setbacks which is common in older neighborhoods.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board of Zoning Appeals consider the legal standards set forth by Minnesota Statute 462.357 subd 6 when considering variance applications. This includes the three factor practical difficulties test:

- 1) Reasonableness. Does the landowner intend to use the property in a reasonable manner?
- 2) Uniqueness. Are there unique physical characteristics of the land, not personal preferences of the landowner that creates the circumstance?
- 3) Essential Character. Will the resulting structure be out of scale, out of place or otherwise inconsistent with the surrounding area?

ATTACHMENTS

- 1) Site Drawing
- 2) Plat of College Addition

Required front yard is normally 25', but can be reduced to "average of the block" by ordinance.

66'

66'

66'

Required front yard

Blue line required 6 1/2' side setback

Buildable Area

Green line requested 5' side setback

915

25' required back yard

66'

10'

66'

66'



COLLEGE ADDITION TO ALBERT LEA CITY.

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Explanatory Notes

I, H.C. Lacy do hereby certify that at the request of Daniel G. Parker, the owner and proprietor, I have surveyed a part of the South half of the North West quarter of Section Eight (8) Township one hundred and two (102) Range Twenty one (21) West, into lots, blocks and streets to be known as College Addition to Albert Lea and that the plat here-with is a true and correct plat of said College Addition. That a stone monument has been placed at the South East corner of College Block from which to make further surveys which said stone is 28 rods West and 60 rods North of the center of Sec.

8. College Addition includes all of what is known as the Out Lots to Parker's Addition. Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, of Block 2 are respectively Lots 1, 2, 3, numbered and 4 of said outlots. The East end of Oak Street and the North one rod of Lot 5 is Lot 5 of said Out Lots. Lots 1, 2, 3, 4 of Block 3 is respectively Lots 6, 7 unnumbered and 8 of said Out Lots. All the other said Out Lots are embraced within and covered by Pearl Street and College Block.

All tracts of land West of Summer Street and South of the Rail Road line shown on said plat of College Addition and all North of said Railroad West of said Out Lots are subdivisions of Lots one (1) and four (4) of the subdivision of the South half of the North West quarter of Section Eight (8) Township (102) Range 21, as subdivided by the Auditor of Freeborn County Minnesota for the purposes of taxation and includes what has heretofore been known as Lots 1, 12, 13, 22, 23, 24 & 25, of such subdivision. Lot 1 of Block 1 being identical with Lot 1 of subdivision. Lot 5 in Block 6 with said Lot 11. Lot 6 with said Lot 12, and Lot 7 with said Lot 13. Lot 7 in Block 4 with said lot 22. Lot 6 with said lot 23. Lots with said lot 24, and lot 4 with said lot 25. Summer Street is 62 feet wide. Pearl, Oak and Winter Streets are each three rods wide except Pearl Street West of Winter Street which is two rods wide. Block 4 includes Lots A and B, and extends to College Block line. All lots are sized as indicated by figures on said plat. Said figures representing feet except where rods are expressly stated.

All streets are laid off by the cardinal points of the compass except Winter Street which runs North, three degrees West. Directions are indicated by the arrow hereon. The East Line of Summer Street is concurrent with the West line of Parker's Addition, heretofore laid out, and the South line concurrent with the public highway.

Henry C. Lacy, Surveyor.

I, Daniel G. Parker, do hereby certify that I have caused a part of the South half of the North West quarter of Section Eight (8) Township one hundred and two (102) Range twenty one (21) to be surveyed and platted as an addition to the City of Albert Lea, as in the accompanying plat appears to be known as College Addition to Albert Lea, and dedicate the streets therein to the public.

Witnesses - J. H. Parker, D. W. Goodrich.

Daniel G. Parker (seal)

State of Minnesota
County of Freeborn ss. I, Jas. H. Parker, a Notary Public in and for said county do hereby certify that on this 27th day of December A.D. 1883 personally appeared before me Daniel G. Parker, to me known to be the person who executed the foregoing certificate & dedication and acknowledged the same to be his free act and deed.

James H. Parker (seal)
Notary Public
Freeborn Co. Minn.

We, whose names are hereto appended being owners of or having interest in Lots included in the accompanying plat hereby concur in the action taken in laying out and plating said land.

J. H. Parker (seal) M. Nelson (seal) L. C. Hansen (seal)
L. Anderson (seal) Mary J. Parker (seal) Even Johnson (seal) S. Olson (seal)
Chas. Hansen (seal) H. P. N. Camp (seal) Louis C. Johnson (seal) Annie K. Jorgenson (seal) M. Bessinger (seal)

State of Minnesota ss. I, C. O. Barness do hereby certify that on this 5th day of April A.D. 1884, personally came before me J. H. Parker, Mary Parker, Annie K. Jorgenson, M. Nelson, Chas. Hansen, Even Johnson, M. Bessinger, C. L. Hansen, H. P. N. Camp, and S. Olson who each acknowledged that they executed or concurred in the foregoing plat and that their signatures thereto is their own free act and deed.

C. O. Barness, County Auditor
Freeborn County Minnesota.

State of Minnesota
County of Freeborn ss. I, D. W. Dwyer, clerk of the city of Albert Lea of the county and state aforesaid, do certify that on the 5th day of February A.D. 1884 the foregoing survey and plat of College Addition to the City of Albert Lea within the county aforesaid was duly presented to and approved by the Common Council of said city.

D. W. Dwyer, City Clerk

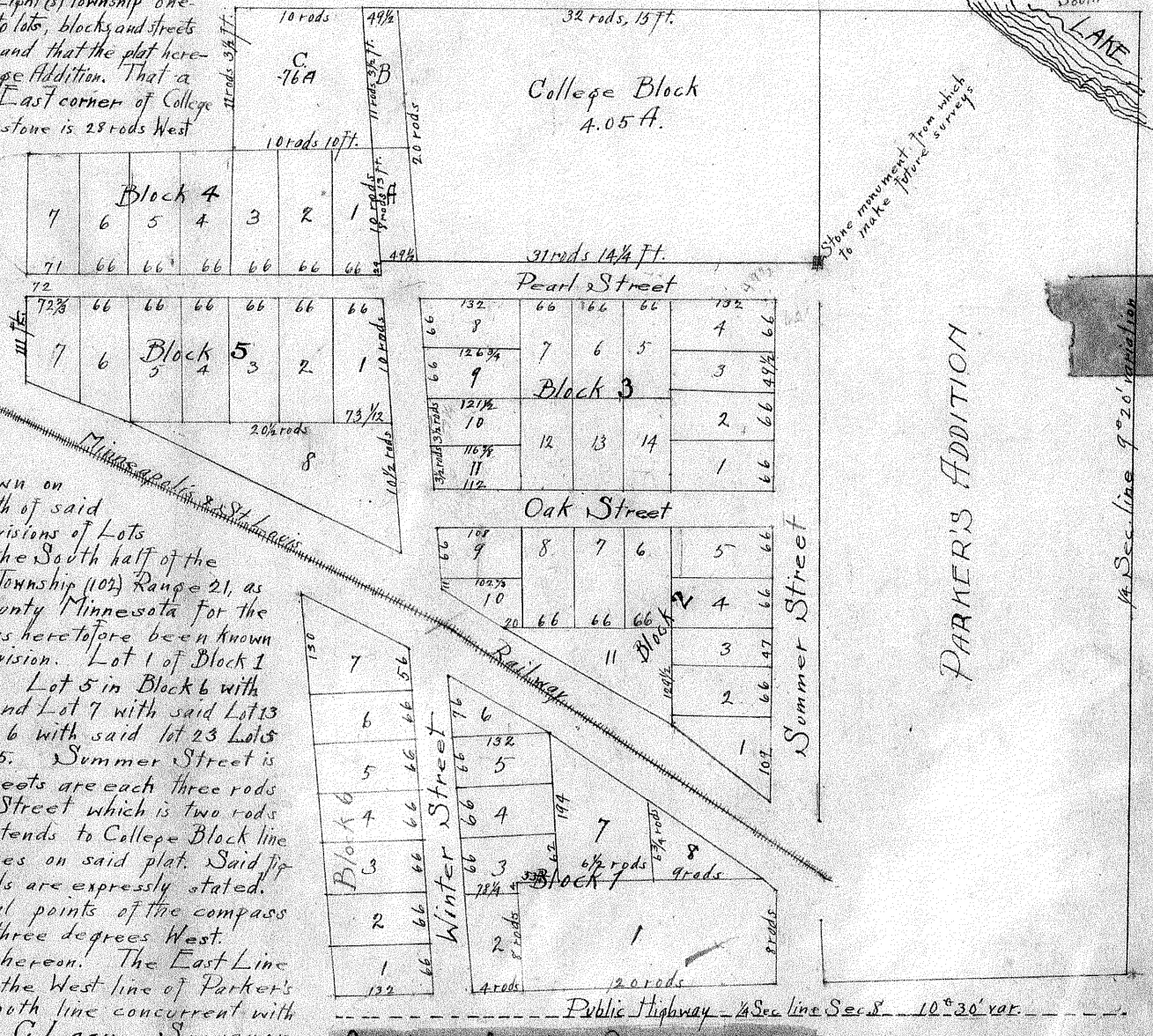
State of Minnesota This is to certify that the accompanying survey and plat of College Addition to the City of Albert Lea, in the County and state aforesaid was duly presented for approval to the Board of Supervisors of the Town of Albert Lea in said county, on the 6th day of March A.D. 1884, and the dedication of all streets or parts of streets therein lying outside of said city limits and within the jurisdiction of said town, was accepted and the same duly recognized as public highways.

Loren Blackmer
Town Clerk

Auditor's Office, A. Lea June 2, 1884 - I hereby certify that taxes on property included in within plat are paid for all years.

C. O. Barness, County Auditor.

Recorded June 2 A.D. 1884 at 9 A.M. - V. Gillman, Deput. Deed Rec. - O. C. Miller, Deput.



Certificate of Correction: Dec. # 305152
Resolution Approving Correction: Dec # 305184
Resolution Correcting Resolution: # 306011



GENERAL INFORMATION

Applicant: City of Albert Lea

Property Owner: City of Albert Lea

Purpose: Variance from Diversified Central District permitted uses

Address: 409 Clark Street West

Parcel Number(s): 34.001.2160

Zoning: DCD Diversified Central District

Surrounding Land Use: DCD Diversified Central District and PD Planned Development District

File Date/Publication Date: March 1, 2026 / March 7, 2026

BACKGROUND

The City of Albert Lea received a proposal for modular housing procurement and placement at 409 Clark St W. The City has owned the property since October 10, 2023 (tax forfeiture) and demolished the structure in May 2024 due to blighted conditions. The model from GFY Custom Homes includes a durable, code-compliant single-family house that can be delivered on an accelerated timeline with more predictable costs than conventional site-built construction.

The concept stems from the City's attempt to provide additional affordable housing units on vacant property that already have access to street, water and sewer. New construction, along with other planned community improvements such as the Songbird Trail, access to schools and parks and open spaces is what makes neighborhoods livable and sustainable and will hopefully lessen housing shortages facing Albert Lea. The Albert Lea Comprehensive Plan identifies aging housing stock as an opportunity for reinvestment in order to keep Albert Lea's quality of life high and cost of living low.

The proposed modular home is a three-bedroom two-bathroom, or 1,128 ft² model that is well suited for small lots. The overall measurements are 32ftx40ft plus an additional 16ft for an attached garage.

In 2013, the area known as Clark and Water was re-zoned from Residential Preservation (RP) to Diversified Central District (DCD) with the hopes of stimulating higher density residential developments within walking distance of the downtown areas. The DCD does not permit single-family uses, which created numerous (300+) nonconformities in the area.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Zoning and Land Use

Chapter 50 – Zoning – Sec. 50.0811. – Principal permitted uses and conditional permitted uses.

(2) Residential uses.

Single-family homes are not listed as a permitted use.

REVIEW OF VARIANCE STANDARDS

Article II Administration and Enforcement

Section 50.0080 (3) states:

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(1) The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the zoning ordinance.

Sec. 50.0809. – Purpose. (Diversified Central District)

The purpose of the diversified central district is to provide for high density residential and mixed use commercial development in the area of the city surrounding the central business core. The intended effect is to establish a greater population base in the downtown to support downtown activities and create an urban village atmosphere. The diversified central district is intended to be a compact, walkable, pedestrian-scale area where people can live, work, learn and play.

The property owner intends to use the property as a single-family, which is what it was previous to tax forfeiture and demolition.

(2) The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

The property is situated amongst several other single-family residential uses that exist as a non-conformity. Since 2013, this area has not seen an increase in higher density residential units and is still more populated by single-family homes than high density.

(3) The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.

Aside from Central Park, Morin Park and the former Mayo parking lot, the essential character of this area is single-family homes – many of which are too narrow in width to support high density housing. Supporting the existing non-conformities in the form of renovation, repair, or expansion and not holding off on improvements with the hopes of high density housing is what could continue to attract people to this area.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Board of Zoning Appeals consider the legal standards set forth by Minnesota Statute 462.357 subd 6 when considering variance applications. This includes the three factor practical difficulties test:

- 1) Reasonableness. Does the landowner intend to use the property in a reasonable manner?
- 2) Uniqueness. Are there unique physical characteristics of the land, not personal preferences of the landowner that creates the circumstance?
- 3) Essential Character. Will the resulting structure be out of scale, out of place or otherwise inconsistent with the surrounding area?

ATTACHMENTS

- 1) Single-Family Homes in DCD District

Areas within the DCD district that have single-family homes

