CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
Public Hearing Minutes
May 21, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS:
Cesar Perez, President
Ralph Peterson, Vice-President
Lydia Lopez, Representative
Lilia Ramos, Representative

STAFF:
Eduardo Fontanez
Marino Solorio
Tracy Ailes

Reported by: Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde

Call to Order: 5:00 p.m.

Roll Call: Present in Chambers: Cesar Perez, Lilia Ramos, Lydia Lopez, Ralph Peterson

Staff Present in Chambers: Tracy Ailes, Secretary
Eduardo Fontanez, Attorney
Marino Solorio

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MS. RAMOS: I would call to order the meeting of the Board of Zoning Appeals Commission for May 21st, 2026. It's 5:00 p.m.
Motion for approval of the regular meeting minutes of May 7th, 2026 as written.

MS. LOPEZ: Make a motion.

MS. RAMOS: Second.

Questions/Comments: None

Roll Call: "All in Favor": Cesar Perez, Lilia Ramos, Lydia Lopez, Ralph Peterson Abstain: None
Opposed: None

MS. RAMOS: Motion carries.
Has a quorum been established?

MS. AILES: A quorum has been established.

MS. RAMOS: Old Business.

MR. SOLORIO: For the record, what is your position with the Board, Lilia, so they can understand, because the Vice-president normally should be the one running the meeting. If you could state the reason you are running the meeting is so he understands how to do it for next time, and your position.

MS. RAMOS: Lilia Ramos, I am a representative of the Board of Zoning Appeals. I am currently running the meeting for today for Mr. Peterson since he is newly elected for this year.

Moving on to Old Business. This matter was tabled last meeting. We have a petition for a Special Use variance within an M2 Zoning District on the property commonly known as 5148 Railroad Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana. The variance is to permit truck parking on the property there.

So, I'll now see if there is any other public comments. Anyone from the public? If there isn't anyone, we'll move on to the petitioner. If you want to step up and see if there is anything different, that's changed since the last --

MS. AILES: Just to interrupt. So there was some follow-up that we were suppose to do. So in regards to 152nd Street, so that is currently not able to handle truck traffic. The repairs from the sink hole in the past are only temporary. They are not the permanent fix. Engineering informed me that they are going to get that repaired at the end of this year. That is what he's shooting for. He cannot guarantee the repair work. It probably will be in the Spring of 2027.

And then in regards, he asked for 40 parking spaces.

MR. JONES: Well, we wouldn't have 40. We haven't seen anything over 30 yet. They had us do something with the size of the acreage that we have. We only put a number out there to give to them to fill in the blank per se. It's not like we are ever going to see 40. We assumed 40 trucks, and that's all.

MR. SOLORIO: In relation to the spacing, there is not enough for 40 trucks. If we base it off, say that we have a typical truck stall, that would be 15 by 75 feet, not including the car, which would be another 20 feet. So there is no way that that would fit

so people are able to get in and out in the aisle and things like that.

MR. JONES: Right. Right.

MR. SOLORIO: I think what we calculated was about half of that, about 20 is what fit.

MR. JONES: That's what we have on there now. We do have about 20 on there now. For every car that pulls out, he pulls out. When his truck pulls out, he parks his car in the same spot as his truck.

MR. SOLORIO: Sometimes they are waiting to leave and they park their car in front of the truck. So, that cannot impede any aisle. So, sometimes, for example, they might have their semi truck and their car parked in the same lane, at the same time, for 20 minutes.

MR. JONES: Right, grabbing a bag or whatever.

MR. SOLORIO: That would not count because that aisle has to be unobstructed. We would count their car and the semi, and trailer, as one lane, because in case someone needs to maneuver, that car cannot obstruct. Even if it's temporary, it will still obstruct the lane. That's why we calculated around the 20.

MR. JONES: How wide would the lane be in the middle, the main thoroughfare on our property line? We have trucks back up to the fence and we have this big lane that goes out our main gate. And then we have the trucks back up and go out that way. So how wide would that be for the main travel way?

MR. SOLORIO: We are not engineers here. We are kind of calculating on an average what that would be. If we were not stating the 20, that's what we are comfortable with, 20, and we are accepting that's what you could park. All we are saying is, for the record, stating that 40 cannot fit there.

MR. JONES: Sure. Sure.

MR. SOLORIO: If this does proceed to allow you to do this, I think we are going to request

that someone do -- someone actually lay it out for us, to make sure that it's able to be done correctly. Nowhere in what we are stating today is it stating that we are allowing or that we are recommending to allow you to do it. We are just stating the facts per se.

MR. JONES: Okay.

MS. RAMOS: Is there anything else you would like to add, because I'd like make a comment and ask the Board if they have any comments?

MR. JONES: Go ahead. I'm pretty green here in all of this, go ahead.

MS. RAMOS: Okay. Well, I am just going to make a comment, because I do see the Plan Department's conditions, and I also have issues with that. That area already has a lot of traffic, especially truck parking traffic and complaints from the neighbors on 151st and I know 152nd is going to be redone. I have an issue with the trucking, the parking there, and I don't believe that that area needs more trucks at this time. Those are my concerns.

MR. JONES: Is 151st from my building off of Indianapolis Boulevard, where you have to make a right on 151st?

MS. AILES: To the north of you.

MR. JONES: Where the light is at?

MR. SOLORIO: You are sandwiched between 151st and 152nd.

MR. JONES: Okay.

MS. RAMOS: Both of those streets are highly traffic, trucks go in and out. I work and I live there, not too far from there.

MR. JONES: I believe you. Sims Metal, they got guys parking on the street when they are backed up. Technically even I have a hard time and I drive a truck.

MS. RAMOS: Originally there was no -- and correct me if I'm wrong -- there wasn't a permit for

a truck parking facility. This is why I have an issue with that.

MR. JONES: This is the first time for us. We just had an empty lot. My boys decided, hey, do something with this lot. Like I said before, being ignorant to the ordinance in different towns, I never did look into it and didn't know I needed a permit.

MR. PETERSON: With the trucks, as far as the lighting, there is no lighting over in there.

MR. JONES: We have lights on our property, but I don't want bigger parking lights because of the alleyway. The neighbors are behind us. I never had --

MR. PETERSON: When you drive in, it's dark back there. There is no lighting.

MR. JONES: Like you want me to put parking lights up on the alley face-to-face toward the parking lot? I don't want lights facing the houses, you know what I mean?

MR. SOLORIO: I think we are stating the lot needs to be well lit for safety reasons and things like that. Now there is obviously some lights, but if you were to install lights say on the back end where residential is, it would be pointing towards the lot and not the houses. So they sell different mechanisms to shield the lights to the residential area.

MR. JONES: Like parking lot or like Jewel, directional lighting. I can understand that.

MR. SOLORIO: As the City Planner, my bigger issue here is again, people are taking properties like this and converting them into truck parking. Especially in corridors that we already have a lot of truck traffic. So let's forget the 40, because I stated for the record, you are not going to be able to house 40.

But even 20 trailers or semi trailers, to allow these people to have some of the same functionality when they leave and go. A lot of them leave either morning or they are in the midday or they are at night. So just those are the three kind of main times where trucks are used. And so regardless of that,

the space could be used for something that is more useful or more economic development for the City in my opinion, than just truck parking.

And so when we get, I guess, to my recommendation, I will mention that. But I don't believe that this is a good use of that property based on the corridor, based on what is going on with Harvest Foods Group that just opened up.

MR. JONES: Which increases truck traffic.

MR. PETERSON: 20 truck docks are bringing them in, and I'm sure the building on the back side, another 30 acres. These guys are bringing in trucks by getting a license to operate businesses that bring in trucks. I am a warehouse and distribution, so we even bring in trucks. Over the road guys coming in, and I drive, of course, I am the only one that's local. You have Holland, FedEx, these guys coming in and out doing pick ups and doing our business.

MR. SOLORIO: The difference between a company like that and your company, for at least right now, is that they actually did go through the proper channels and we requested a traffic study to be done for the impact they would have by having trucks on our roads. We made arrangements on the design to accommodate for what the traffic study stated need to be done.

So, in your case, we didn't know you existed until we found out you existed and were operating illegally per se, in the same way that we would have requested say a traffic study, to see what impact you would have on the road. And then whether that stated one thing or another that deters or states something different as the case may be. Unfortunately, legally they came in and they did it properly. They fixed what they needed to fix to make sure they were kind of in tune with what needed to be done with the road in terms of truck traffic. In your case you'd be starting fresh because, again, you are technically operating without a business license.

MR. JONES: Right. Right. They had all the assets to build the building and they have their entrance going in blacktopped, whatever. They've got a 100-car parking lot. That was already in there in the works I'm sure for a year and a half or two years,

ingress and egress on the street again. I understand all of that.

MS. RAMOS: Okay. Are there any questions from the Board?

MR. SOLORIO: I do want to state that what was given to you in the documents is not what we are recommending. It's just in case you decided one way or another what you could use to speak on the record. It's just really for your information.

As a recommendation, I'm not recommending that we let this property be changed into truck parking because I think the property has more value in terms of the land, for something bigger, better, job creation type of thing. Especially what is going down in that whole corridor. There is a lot of new development happening in terms of light manufacturing, things like that. And so I think for those purposes I do not recommend a positive approval of your variance, as a staff member.

Now, the Board can decide what to do with that.

MS. RAMOS: Any other questions or comments? (None) At this time I'd like to take a vote.

MS. AILES: Lilia Ramos.

MS. RAMOS: No, I'm sorry.

MS. AILES: Lydia Lopez.

MS. LOPEZ: No.

MS. AILES: Ralph Peterson.

MR. PETERSON: No.

MR. SOLORIO: So the next step, this the Advisory Board, an Advisory Board to the Council. They have stated that they are denying your request for variance, but from here it goes to the Council. The next Council meeting is when this will be heard and that will be June 10th at 6:00 o'clock in the chambers here. The Mayor may or may not let you speak. They are not obligated to allow you to speak. You are welcome to come to the meeting and they would officially vote on whether they are going to uphold what the Board of

Zoning Appeals states or they will allow you the variance. Ultimately they are the people that would hear that.

So just FYI, that's where we are at today. And we surely apologize, that's maybe not what you wanted to hear today, but that's where we are at.

MR. JONES: That's where we are at. Any recommendation on what I should do with that property to make it any better?

MR. SOLORIO: I do know there are interested people. Planning Department is hearing a lot of people wanting to do different processing, things like that. Maybe you and our department can have a conversation with you separately that might give you some leads or give you some people we know are looking for a property, and you can have a conversation with them.

MS. AILES: Are you looking to lease the property? Are you looking to sell a portion? Those things we can discuss.

MR. SOLORIO: There is a lot of people that come to our office and we can easily point them in your direction.

MR. JONES: There is no building on the property, it's just land.

MS. AILES: We have some property owners that would like to retain the property and looking to invest for the person who wants it. I'm not sure what you are looking for. If you want to divide the property and sell it off, maybe have somebody else develop it.

MR. JONES: All right. That gives me something to think about then. June 10th you said?

MR. SOLORIO: June 10th at 6:00 o'clock.

MR. JONES: For the final hearing.

MR. SOLORIO: Correct.

MS. RAMOS: Can I get a motion to close the meeting?

MS. LOPEZ: Motion.

MR. PETERSON: Second.

Roll Call: "All in Favor": Cesar Perez, Lilia Ramos, Lydia Lopez, Ralph Peterson Abstain: None Opposed: None

MS. RAMOS: Motion carries.

MR. SOLORIO: Just for the record, I don't want it misconstrued that there was a building there. I was mentioning it could be used for a building. Other things could go there other than your trucks parking there.

MS. RAMOS: Our next meeting is Thursday, June 4th and that's just a development variance. Meeting is adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of
May 21st, 2026

Approved and signed June 4, 2026

Cesar Perez, President

Ralph Peterson, Vice-President

Lydia Lopez, Representative

Lilia Ramos, Representative

Tracy Ailes, Recording Secretary.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Peggy S. LaLonde, a competent and duly qualified court reporter, do hereby certify that I did report in machine shorthand the foregoing proceedings and that my shorthand notes so taken at said time and place were thereafter reduced to typewriting under my personal direction.

I further certify that the foregoing typewritten transcript constitutes minutes of the said proceedings taken at said time and place, so ordered to be transcribed.

Dated at Munster, Indiana, this 27th day of May 2026.

Peggy S. LaLonde



Peggy S. LaLonde, Court Reporter