CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
Public Hearing Minutes
June 18, 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:

MR. PEREZ: I would call to order the meeting of the Board of Zoning Appeals Commission for June 18th, 2026. It's 5:00 p.m.
Motion for approval of the regular meeting minutes of June 4th, 2026 as written.

MS. RAMOS: Make a motion.

MS. LOPEZ: Second.

Questions/Comments: None

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

MR. PEREZ: Motion carries.
Has a quorum been established?

MS. AILES: A quorum has been established.

MR. PEREZ: New Business.

A petition for land use variance within an R2 Zoning District (two-family dwelling) on the property commonly known as 4733 Kennedy Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana 46312. The variance is to permit a 5-unit rental.

So the purpose of this hearing is defined by the Zoning Code in accordance with the following sections that I will read. The Ordinance number 2752, which states:

WHEREAS, the Common Council of the City of East Chicago, Indiana, deems it necessary, in order to conserve the value of the property in the City of East Chicago, and to the end that adequate light air, convenience of access, and safety from fire and other dangers may be secured, the congestion of public streets may be lessened or avoided, and that public health, comfort, convenience, morals, and general welfare may otherwise be promoted in accordance with the general plan for the use and development of all property throughout the City of East Chicago.

Ordinance number 0-00-0016 states:

WHEREAS, the Plan Commission and the Common Council of the City of East Chicago, Indiana have determined that proposed uses, at proposed locations within the community should promote the public interest, promote public health, safety, and welfare, should promote public convenience and should not adversely affect property values, and

WHEREAS, the Plan Commission and the Common Council of the City of East Chicago have determined that proposed uses which are not permitted uses within a zoning classification should confirm for the purpose, intent, and the spirit of the Zoning Ordinance, be compatible with the surrounding area, and should not be detrimental or injurious or create excessive nuisance in the surrounding area, and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the citizens of the City of East Chicago to amend the Zoning Ordinance to provide for certain uses to be classified as "Special Uses" and allowed in certain zoning classifications only upon showing that the above criteria have been met; and

WHEREAS, Indiana Code requires that

the Advisory Board of Zoning Appeals hold a public hearing and make Findings of Fact to determine whether the above criteria have been met before forwarding the Special Use Permit request to the Common Council.

MR. PEREZ: Have all required public notifications, documents, and receipts been completed and received for this variance petition?

MS. AILES: I certify receipts for funds to cover public notices, published notice receipts from the local press, and receipts from certified mail have been received.

MR. PEREZ: Any response for it or against it?

MS. AILES: There was nothing received in writing or verbally in regards to this petition.

MR. PEREZ: There is nobody here present in favor or against it, correct? So we'll move on to the Petitioner.

You want to come up, state your name, spell your last name, and let us know what we have here.

MR. BELL: My name is Stanley Bell, Jr. And I'm here on behalf of my father. He did all the paperwork and was dealing with this project. He was hospitalized for the last week or so. He's at home recovering, but could not be here today. I will be able to answer any questions that you might have.

MR. PEREZ: So why are we here?

MR. BELL: We've had to make improvements to rehab the apartment building here throughout the last couple of years. We had permits to get our repairs done. We went to renew a permit recently and we were told it was zoned different, and that the apartment building was not a 5-unit apartment building, and we were told that it was zoned as a 4-unit and not for residential. I think we were trying to get clarification on that moving forward so we can continue with the repairs.

MR. SOLORIO: So, basically this is one of many properties in the City, this is not knowing what

to do with them specifically, but many properties that are just illegal, they are nonconforming to what the zoning code is there.

So, we did speak to Mr. Bell regarding how we would go about trying to rectify this because they have been receiving permits to fix the unit. So technically right now, the only thing that's permissible there is two units, by code. And so what we discussed with him was -- so they have a unit in the back that is used for personal use. So that's that one unit there. And then there is a garage attached to it, which is a massive garage. And so what we stated to him is that that would have to remain for family use. It can't be rented. And so that would allow for that to still be used as a space for someone to dwell in and the garage would have to be only used for private use. Then the units in the front. Those we would allow, the four units that he currently has. That's how we get five units, but then also having one unit for NIPSCO.

So in essence what it would allow, because the gentleman was mentioning that he's not going to have any apartments in the basement, but he needs NIPSCO to be able to heat the pipes and whatever, you know, so it doesn't go bad. And NIPSCO wouldn't give them a fifth meter per se, because technically they are not allowed to put any more units there.

So, for clarification purposes, four units will stand in the front, with a fifth unit allowed for a NIPSCO meter for the heating and all that stuff they need for the basement so that water pipelines aren't bursting and things like that. And then the remaining, the other unit, is to be used for personal or private use, whether it's family or whatever the case may be.

And then the lot, the parking lot portion that's on the front can only be used for either the apartment or, you know, private use in that sense. So I want to make sure that that's clear, because in this picture and in recent, even maybe two days ago or three, there were some commercial trucks parked there. And so the variance is for residential, so commercial trucks cannot -- they are not permitted to be there. And either you want one thing or the other. There is not a code that allows you to cohabit.

MR. BELL: The current unit, the trucks are parked there because they are cleaning out the building around. That stuff is loaded, that is material out of that building. It's not just parked there. We

were working on clearing the building up until this point.

MR. SOLORIO: That's for the construction, for the remodel?

MR. BELL: The work being done there, that's what you see there.

MR. SOLORIO: Okay. So eventually when they get everything done, then this parking lot will be used for people that are living in the units?

MR. BELL: Right.

MR. SOLORIO: So that's pretty much the clarity on what we are recommending and what was discussed with Mr. Bell.

MR. BELL: The issue is that 5th unit in the basement is something that's been there since the structure has been there. There is a utility room next to that. You are not talking unit wise in that specific space. That specific space, it's deigned as a liveable unit, the same way the other four are in the building. I am not aware of, me personally, of the NIPSCO situation. I know for a fact that the unit down there is nothing different. So where it seems like utilities ran through it for the rest of the building, all that stuff is outside of there. So I don't understand.

MR. PEREZ: Let me ask you, that downstairs unit, that was an apartment in the past?

MR. BELL: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: And then you had the other units on top?

MR. BELL: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: Your utilities, do you have gas meters for each one of those units?

MR. BELL: The gas meters are ran -- if you look, I believe, ran on the outside and on that side of the apartment building is where that utility space is. It's not the side that the actual unit, that

5 unit is at.

MR. SOLORIO: When we spoke to Mr. Bell, he mentioned that he does not want any rentals in the basement. Exactly what he stated. So that's what we are basing it off of, you know, on what he stated. He did not want to do that.

MR. BELL: Again, I mean ==

MR. CESAR: I've got a question. You have a bathroom and you have a kitchen downstairs in that unit?

MR. BELL: In that unit, yes.

MR. PEREZ: Anyone have any questions?

MS. RAMOS: So that unit was rented previously, prior to?

MR. BELL: What I can tell, the way the building stands, they were all used.

MR. PEREZ: That's always been an apartment building? That's always been an apartment building?

MR. BELL: All we are doing is rehabbing the specific space.

MR. SOLORIO: Just to be sure, the spaces have not been rented?

MR. BELL: As far as rehab project. I view that question at one point where all those units were rented out, that's the way I viewed that question.

MS. AILES: This has been vacant property from the images, since 2011.

MR. SOLORIO: Correct.

MS. AILES: He purchased it in 2017 and it has never had liveable units.

MR. SOLORIO: Correct.

MR. BELL: Just was a rehab project.

MR. SOLORIO: That's what thought. I just wanted to make sure it's clarified. No one has been living in these units since, from what we know, since 2011.

MS. AILES: 2011, it was boarded up in 2011.

MR. SOLORIO: So past 2011.

MR. BELL: If you guys rode back there, the units there, it's obviously been used. We put money into it, windows and stuff like that were replaced. We are trying to get this thing moving forward, you know. I still, again, just wanted to --

MR. PEREZ: So, Marino, is the request for a 5-unit apartment building, that's the 5-unit apartment building, correct?

MR. SOLORIO: Correct, that's what he's stating. He's not including the back unit also because that's technically another unit.

So there is more. If he was to be awarded the five -- let's just say the front end -- there is still a sixth one on the back end. So when we spoke to the gentleman, the father, we came to a compromise because, again, there is nothing that, as we stated right, now since 2011 that we know of, even past that, that this has ever been rented as units to begin with. And even prior to that, the bottom units used to be block windows and they were not habitable. You were rehabbing them to make them habitable as a fifth one. At some point they were not is what we were saying.

MR. BELL: You can have a unit with block windows.

MR. SOLORIO: Not by code, no, you cannot. You can't. So we said, okay, this is all kind of, you know, how do we get what you need but still get something that's reasonable for that district, because it's an R2. R2, is only for two units. And that's when we sat down and we compromised on what that would look like. So to be clear, the five units in my perspective of the BZA hearing is the four units in the front and that back unit in the back, with the caveat that back unit in the back be used, as the gentleman mentioned, the father mentioned, that's used personally.

MR. PEREZ: I don't know how --

MR. PETERSON: The bottom is office space.

MR. SOLORIO: Connects the garage or whatever that is. It's slike a garage on the back side.

MR. PETERSON: That door, that's frankly a new building. That house next to it, I used to live there.

MR. SOLORIO: On the top is like an apartment.

MR. PETERSON: I'm talking about the back part where the office space is.

MR. SOLORIO: On the bottom you're talking office space and another big garage.

MR. PETERSON: The garage next to the building?

MR. SOLORIO: Correct.

MR. PETERSON: That's a nice building. It always has been. Before that Roticki owned it and he had construction business there. I know the units, nobody really stayed upstairs, nobody used the office space, but the four units, they always had people there. That's a nice building. I know, I live across the street from it now. But that gray house, that's where I used to live and that's a nice place. That's a nice place.

COUNCILMAN HILL: I'd like to speak.

MR. PETERSON: State your name.

COUNCILMAN HILL: Councilman Terry Hill, Third District, 434 Vernon, and I grew up in the Calumet area all my life. This particular unit has been occupied until it got vacant, and even in the back they had individuals that were living there as well. So now I don't know what happened, it got condemned or whatever, but some other individuals had it and that's when they put that fence up, that black gate that closed it all off and they were doing something.

But then I found out Mr. Bell and them bought the property and renovated it, make units out of that so individuals have a place to stay. And, you know, we got a lot of people needs a place to stay. You need excess amount of dollars and hopefully come to great compromise so he can open this property and have more people in my Third District, people to live. I am willing to do whatever we need to do to make this happen. Thank you, Panel.

MR. PEREZ: Any other discussion on this? Anybody have any other questions?

MR. SOLORIO: So I mean the only thing I can suggest at this point is, if the unit on the bottom is already situated, right, for an apartment. Again, just based on what the gentleman had said, he's not looking to rent that. If that becomes another, say for example, his son or his family member, then I think that would be okay with still having the four units, because that's being rented as such, right. It's still being used as a family unit, just the back one would be used. Then I think we, as a department, would not have an issue with that. It's the amount of rental units is way passed what the zoning district allows, so I think we would be okay with that.

MR. PEREZ: We could say five units, and if a family member lives in the back one, still consider that five units, correct?

MR. SOLORIO: So technically five units whether someone lives in them, a family member or not, they are counted as a unit. So in essence this would be six units.

MR. BELL: What do you count as the 6-units?

MR. PETERSON: Counting the back.

MR. BELL: I thought we were talking specifically about the front.

MR. SOLORIO: The parcel of that property is together, it's not separated. It's all together. So we have to look at the property as a whole. And then you can't really sever it because that back property is an L. It goes behind that apartment. It's kind of a

weird setup. It's all kinds of weird.

MR. PEREZ: Same address for both?

MR. SOLORIO: Same address, yes.

MR. PETERSON: Both of them. It was five units and they did not include that back part.

MR. SOLORIO: So, again, going back to our records that we have seen, I'm just speaking from 2011 on forward, there has not been any recorded rental. We don't know what that is. But the County states -- what was it, do you recall?

MS. AILES: Prior to 2011 we don't know.

MR. SOLORIO: It doesn't go that far. At some point these were rented by somebody, but the bottom unit, the basement unit, did not exist. The bottom that we are talking about, that was done through them. They fixed that, rehabbed that.

MR. BELL: Even when you are looking here at the front, that bottom window wasn't replaced. We didn't cut holes or anything in the concrete. That window, it's block windows on the left side, that's not a unit.

MR. PEREZ: That apartment existed when you guys bought it?

MR. BELL: Yes, we haven't done any modifications to the building. What you see is what it has been.

MR. SOLORIO: So the apartment downstairs in the basement existed when you took over the property?

MR. BELL: Yeah, we didn't add that unit. That was there.

MS. RAMOS: It could have been the prior person that did it.

MR. BELL: We haven't made any modifications at all outside of trying to rehab it. But like I said, that window, you can see from here, we didn't cut a hole in there and do that.

MR. PETERSON: That's been there. I lived next door to that. That's been there. That back part, four-unit vacancy, they rented that part out.

MS. RAMOS: So what do you recommend?

MR. PEREZ: Can we change that from five to six since it's already not something they did. They didn't modify. I believe I knew the guy that lived downstairs and he worked in the city -- Winston -- at one time lived there.

MR. SOLORIO: So I would say, technically the variance -- so we learned this recently. When you apply for a variance, it's specific to what you are applying for. They would have to reapply for the sixth one at this point.

What I would recommend is that we recommend the five units as to what now is being stated.

MR. PEREZ: For that building.

MR. SOLORIO: For that building, correct. And that sixth unit cannot be rented, period. It could be used for personal use, whether he or his brother, his father, whomever, whatever family member; those don't count as units in the technical standpoint for this variance.

MR. PEREZ: You know, I'm just confused because 4733 Kennedy, apartment building is what this says, and that's what I am looking at, that apartment building. I am not looking at that back building. I didn't think that back building had anything to do with what we are here for today. From what I understood it was that front building.

MR. SOLORIO: It does because the parcel is not broken. It does have to do with it. Unless that parcel, that building and parcel, is severed, you have to consider it as one parcel.

MS. LOPEZ: Mr. Bell owns both?

MR. SOLORIO: Yes.

MR. PETERSON: Okay, for the 5-unit. But the back part, that's where a family member can live there and it's okay?

MR. SOLORIO: I think a family member currently lives there.

MR. PETERSON: That's probably what happened. Because like I said, nobody lived there, downstairs would be office space where they can pay the rent or whatever, and family members live upstairs.

MR. SOLORIO: That's what I'm saying, from a technical standpoint, he would have to come back or reapply. So then just approve the five, and just the condition put in that that be used for family only, non-rental. And then the items that we discussed, the lot cannot be used for commercial use, only used for the people living there.

MR. PETERSON: They got a parking lot. Like I said they be working on it and they got the parking lot for the people in the building.

MR. SOLORIO: Part of the issue that got us to here, the permits have taken -- they have been getting permits slowly. As we all know, whatever variance is given to them, it's only good for a year. But a year for them to actually do what they got to do and get these rented, because if not, they lose the variance again and they have to start the process over again.

So make sure that if they are going to award this and recommend that you get everything done within this year. Well, a year from when it is approved.

MR. BELL: I understand.

MR. PEREZ: Mr. Bell, are you okay if we approve five units for that front building and you will have a family member -- you are saying a family member can live in the back building.

MR. SOLORIO: They can, yes.

MR. PEREZ: Are you okay with that?

MR. BELL: Yeah, I like it the way it was. I understand.

MR. PEREZ: I thought we were talking about the front building.

MR. BELL: I didn't understand that back part was part of this right now. The front stays as five units. We do have to do that space back there.

MR. PETERSON: Back part for family unit or office space for renters to pay their rent or whatever.

MR. BELL: I understand.

MR. SOLORIO: It cannot be rented.

MR. PETERSON: I'm not saying rented.

MR. SOLORIO: You want to -- I just want to make sure, that back part cannot be rented.

MR. PETERSON: Not the back part.

MR. SOLORIO: That's what we are talking about.

MR. PETERSON: So the office space --

MR. SOLORIO: It cannot be commercial.

MR. PETERSON: Okay.

MR. PEREZ: We can't change five to six right now, you'd have to come back.

MR. SOLORIO: He would have to restart the process.

MR. PEREZ: For the other building?

MR. PETERSON: That bottom space is office space for them.

MR. SOLORIO: They are using that for office space. You had stated rented.

MR. PETERSON: Well, I made a mistake. A family member, they can use it for office space.

MR. SOLORIO: As an extension to the place above, yeah, they can put a little computer and printer for them.

MR. PETERSON: That's what I mean.

MR. SOLORIO: They can -- they would still have to do the same thing again. Come back and do the same thing over again.

MR. PEREZ: You okay with that?

MR. BELL: I know when I talked to my dad, he was extremely worried about the front building right here. I thought the conversation was about that. I think the back, this is going to have to be visited again.

MR. PEREZ: Our biggest concern was just the stuff we already have. Again, in the same breath, so that we are clear, that front building is officially a five unit.

MR. FONTANEZ: Will remain as five.

MR. PEREZ: That's why we hire you. Okay. You can sit down.

MR. BELL: Thank you.

MR. PEREZ: Anything else?

COUNCILMAN HILL: Councilman Hill, Third District. I'd like to say, you saw the trucks there. I saw them as well last week or week before last. Like I say, they were cleaning it out. I stopped and talked with everybody when I see something going on in the Third District. I hope we can work it with the front unit and the back unit to have a relative live there. If they want to come back and redo it for that particular unit, that's up to them. The main thing, Mr. Bell said we wanted this front building renovated and try to get moving to get some occupants in there before next election of course. You all agree on that front building, and I thank you.

MR. PEREZ: I'll make a motion for a vote on this 5-unit, no conditions. The condition would be for the back building.

MR. SOLORIO: Second. And they have to fix everything within a year. The lot cannot be used for any commercial use. There is a garage in the back,

that cannot be used for commercial use, commercial address. They cannot be together unless it's a mixed use and we don't have that type of zoning classification.

MR. PEREZ: So let me just ask this, because they are in business, so you are saying the family member that lives in the back building cannot bring his work vehicle home?

MR. SOLORIO: A work vehicle is fine, pickup or something like that.

MR. PEREZ: Tow truck?

MR. SOLORIO: That would be considered using it for commercial use.

MR. PEREZ: We got a lot of people around the City with tow trucks in front of their houses.

MR. SOLORIO: Tow trucks are not outlawed in front of their houses. They are permissible in the right of way.

MR. PEREZ: So you can park it outside, okay. Let's go ahead with the vote.

MS. AILES: Cesar Perez.

MR. PEREZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Ralph Peterson.

MR. PETERSON: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lydia Lopez.

MS. LOPEZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lilia Ramos.

MS. RAMOS: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: Motion passes. You are good to go with a 5-unit.

MR. BELL: Thank you. Will this go to the Council next?

MR. PEREZ: Yes, it will go before the Council for their review.

MR. PETERSON: On the back, for the back part, that's for family?

MR. SOLORIO: That's already been taken care of here today.

MR. PEREZ: Is there a motion to adjourn?

MS. RAMOS: So moved.

MS. LOPEZ: Second.

MR. PEREZ: Roll call.

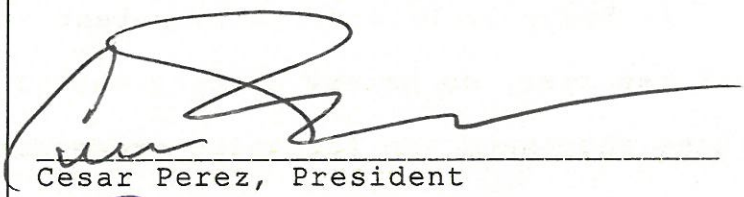
Roll Call: "All in Favor": Cesar Perez, Lilia Ramos, Ralph Peterson, Lydia Lopez Abstain: None Opposed: None

MR. PEREZ: Motion carries. Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of
June 18, 2026

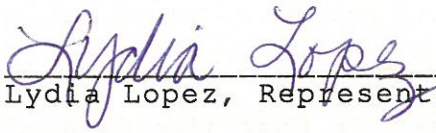
Approved and signed July 16, 2026



Cesar Perez, President

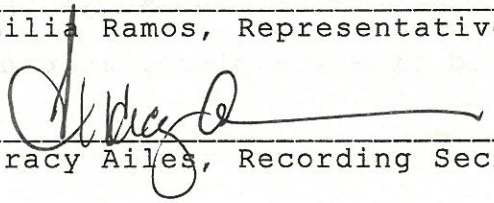


Ralph Peterson, Vice-President



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 22nd day of June 2026.

Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde, Court Reporter

Peggy S LaLonde
Notary Public Seal State of Indiana
Porter County
Commission Number NP0710216
My Commission Expires 2/6/2034