CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
Public Hearing Minutes
July 16, 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, Lydia Lopez, Ralph Peterson

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MR. PEREZ: I would call to order the meeting of the Board of Zoning Appeals Commission for July 16th, 2026. It's 5:00 p.m.
Motion for approval of the regular meeting minutes of June 18th, 2026 as written.

MR. PETERSON: Make a motion.

MS. LOPEZ: Second.

Questions/Comments: None

Roll Call: "All in Favor": Cesar Perez, 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.

So the purpose of this hearing, for all three petitions, 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: Is somebody here for that?

MS. AILES: Not yet, if you want to proceed with the next one.

MR. SOLORIO: We can table this one till after the next one.

MR. PEREZ: We'll table it in case they come in later.

The second thing is a petition for a Land Use Variance within an R2 (Two family dwelling) on the property commonly known as 4926 Kennedy Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana 46312. The variance is to permit a convenience store and take-out restaurant. Somebody is here for that?

MS. AILES: Yes.

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: Did we get anything back for or against it?

MS. AILES: I have not received anything in writing in regards to this petition.

MR. PEREZ: Step forward, state your name

and spell your last name.

MR. FLORES: Martin Flores.

MR. PEREZ: So what are we doing?

MR. SOLORIO: Basically this is a petition for a Land Use Variance. Currently it is an R2 family dwelling on a property commonly known as 4926 Kennedy Avenue. It used to be a grocery store that opened up and had a BZA variance previously, but it has lapsed. So they have to come back to this Board to receive a new variance.

What they are seeking is to do a convenience store with a take-out restaurant, but that's what they are seeking currently a variance for.

MR. PEREZ: That's what was there before, correct?

MR. SOLORIO: It was a grocery store and then they added carry-out restaurant after the fact. So like it was at first just a grocery story thing, that's what the variance was for. They are asking to go back to what it was before.

MR. PEREZ: What is the City's recommendation?

MR. SOLORIO: So I have some questions because I think there is a little bit of a misunderstanding. I just need to clarify, so then I can give a recommendation.

The first question is, the gentleman petitioning is the landowner, the property owner. He is seeking a convenience store and take-out restaurant. He was told he can only have a take-out restaurant because of the parking, the amount of parking that's there.

However, the person that is renting the facility or renting the property wants to just do a restaurant. So I need clarify.

If they just want a restaurant with dining, for example, I would allow the dining. We would recommend favorably for the dining and the restaurant with the current parking that's there now. If they want a convenience store and a restaurant, then the restaurant can only be carry-out because there is not enough parking. I need clarity on what they are seeking to do so that I can then give that recommendation.

MR. PEREZ: So this is the property owner?

MR. SOLORIO: Correct, and not the business owner renting from him.

MR. PEREZ: So who is seeking the permit?

MR. SOLORIO: It has to go through the property owner. I need clarity from him on that. I can ask if you would like.

(The following conversation was done in Spanish between Mr. Flores and Mr. Solorio.)

MR. SOLORIO: So he is saying that for him it's preferrable to have the grocery store with just the carry-out because he is serving the kids there and they're picking up things and things like that.

MR. PEREZ: Who's running -- is the restaurant going to be run by one person and the grocery store run by somebody else?

MR. SOLORIO: He's going to get a separate license for the grocery store part because we know for a fact they need a business license for the restaurant. I'm just asking him to clarify.
(Conversation in Spanish.)
So, he's saying that when they initially talked, she was going to put a restaurant and store. So he's not looking to do two separate businesses, like a store or whatever. I think it's a means and method. Meaning if she doesn't choose to do that, he will have to be able to do both.
So we just at this point then approve the grocery store with the carry-out restaurant and let them figure out how they are going to run that business.

MR. PEREZ: I could see that was -- this was a grocery store before and I think they sold food there as well. All right, let's vote. Thank you.

MS. AILES: Cesar Perez.

MR. PEREZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Ralph Peterson.

MR. PETERSON: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lydia Lopez.

MS. LOPEZ: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: You are here for this?

MR. SOLORIO: For the record, he is in favor.

MR. PEREZ: State your names.

MR. CHAVEZ: Santiago and Guadalupe Chavez.

MR. SOLORIO: Santiago Chavez is in favor.

Our next petition is for Special Use Variance within an M1 (lith Industry) on the property commonly known as 3400 Watling Street, East Chicago, Indiana. This is a variance to permit outdoor storage of vehicles as part of the operation of a towing company called Herrara Towing.

MR. PEREZ: Do we have anyone here for this?

MR. HERRARA: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: Go ahead and state your name, spell the last name.

MR. HERRARA: Herrara, H-E-R-R-A-R-A.

MR. PEREZ: What is the property now, a vacant lot?

MR. HERRARA: A vacant lot.

MR. SOLORIO: So this lot is by the Fire Department and it's this weird triangular piece of property with the big billboard attached to it off of Watling. So it's Watling and Guthrie. If you crash straight into Guthrie at Watling, it's literally that property in front.

MR. PEREZ: What I am looking at right there?

MR. SOLORIO: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: How many vehicles can you store there, do you know?

MR. HERRARA: I could probably fit 50 to 75.

MR. SOLORIO: I don't know about 50, 75.

MR. HERRARA: We butt them up.

MR. SOLORIO: I think we would have to stack --

MR. HERRARA: We don't stack cars.

MR. SOLORIO: We would have to go find out what is permissible.

MR. HERRARA: It's pretty big.

MR. PEREZ: It's fenced in all ready?

MR. HERRARA: No, that's why I'm showing pictures of what I am planning on doing. This is what I have on my lot, the one in Whiting and one in Hammond. That's the fencing we use, which is a PVC, and I use that also in Gary, but I never had time to take a picture of the one in Gary.

MR. PEREZ: That's an eight-foot fence?

MR. HERRARA: It's seven with barb wire topping. I think they were saying they want me to add something fancier in the front rather than PVC, something nicer. I'm willing to do that if that's what you want me to do. That's just what I have at the other locations.

MR. PEREZ: All that brush and everything has been removed?

MR. HERRARA: It has. Tru-Green came out and killed everything there.

MR. PEREZ: Do we have anybody that's for it or against it? Did we get all the notices out? I'm not sure there is not many people around that area, just

the Fire Department.

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. HERRARA: The cars wouldn't last there. We process them out. At Hammond we have ten acres and Whiting we have three acres. I'll move cars around and get rid of them. There won't be a whole lot of cars there anyway.

MR. PEREZ: Can we go ahead for a vote?

MR. SOLORIO: Well, I think there is some things we need to discuss as staff.

So the first thing is, I think when -- I know when the property was sold to the gentleman there was aesthetics of a fence that needs to be installed in the front that included masonry. It included a wrought iron fence to be more aesthetically pleasing on the front side. And then after, I think after it reaches like the Fire Department section or that area. So I mean the full front needs to be that and the rest, the side and the rear, can be PVC or whatever, chain-link, whatever.

MR. HERRARA: The wrought iron looks nice, but people can see right through. It's not really like people want to see the cars. To me, I'll do whatever you want.

MR. SOLORIO: I think we can discuss further examples of what we would like to see that could meet the requirements, but that was kind of a condition to the sale.

Secondly, I have a question specifically to this, and is this just another lot where you are just storing temporarily cars or are you moving them, or will you be operating a business out of this yard?

MR. HERRARA: Eventually I will put up a building or trailer for a business. I mean there's nothing till I get approved.

MR. PEREZ: You tow a vehicle from East Chicago, that's where it is going to be. It's going to

be impounded there and not going to Hammond.

MR. SOLORIO: That's a separate distinction. I need to understand if you are just processing vehicles there, dropping them off and, you know, people still have to go to your Hammond or wherever to pay. Where does all that process take place?

MR. HERRARA: Once we get approved, everything is going to be done there for East Chicago, so people won't have to go Hammond.

MR. SOLORIO: So will your tow truck also be in there?

MR. HERRARA: The truck, the driver and the truck will be in the building, or the driver will be parked there. We service 5 police departments and have seven trucks, I'm sure I can park a truck there.

MR. SOLORIO: I am not saying you do or not, I want to know what the business operation is going to be there.

MR. PEREZ: What you are saying, you will have a truck there when somebody is working?

MR. HERRARA: I have to if there is someone working.

MR. PEREZ: Will you be parking the truck overnight?

MR. HERRARA: One guy does the rounds in all my yards.

MR. PEREZ: The day of operation he will be parked there?

MR. HERRARA: Somebody will be there releasing cars.

MR. SOLORIO: Okay.

MR. HERRARA: Like a regular business.

MR. SOLORIO: So then if that's the case, that's all the questions I had.

So we did know when we sold the property that he was going to do this operation and we were in agreement with it at the time. So this is really just procedural. So we have a favorable recommendation, as long as he meets the other conditions at the sale of the property.

MR. PEREZ: So right now we are doing a vote without conditions or putting conditions?

MR. SOLORIO: The conditions were already set in the sale of the property. You would state for the record there was conditions to the sale of the property that he needs to adhere to, but you are approving the use.

MR. HERRARA: The fencing is the condition you are talking about?

MR. SOLORIO: Yes, that's correct.

MR. PEREZ: Go ahead with the vote, Tracy.

MS. AILES: Cesar Perez.

MR. PEREZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Ralph Peterson.

MR. PETERSON: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lydia Lopez.

MS. LOPEZ: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: Okay, you are good to go.

MR. HERRARA: Thank you for your time.

MR. SOLORIO: Thank you.

MR. PEREZ: I know we put this on hold, but anyone here on 4306 Northcote?

MR. MARTA: I am not the owner of that property. They send this letter and I am totally okay with it.

MR. PEREZ: And your names?

MR. MARTA: Juan Marta at 4231 Northcote Avenue.

MR. PEREZ: We'll put that on the record, sir. Thank you.

MR. SOLORIO: Do you know what this is for? This is for the handicap ramp. You received a letter because they want to install a handicap ramp that currently isn't to code. We wanted to know if you were in favor or against.

MR. HERNANDEZ: If it helps, you know, I be in his favor.

MR. SOLORIO: He's favorable. Would you state your name?

MR. HERNANDEZ: Sergio Hernandez, 4308 Baring.

MR. SOLORIO: So, I'm not sure legally -- this is a question for Mr. Fontanez. We are handling -- so our department is giving them a grant for the ramp. So we know of the ramp, we know the situation. No one is here technically. But I'd would like to know if we can move forward since the City has already given them a grant for the handicap ramp, if someone is not here, can it still be voted on or approved.

MR. FONTANEZ: I would probably have to look into that.

MR. SOLORIO: Maybe table it to next meeting. He was more concerned about the easement portion of it.

MR. PEREZ: We'll go ahead and table that till the next meeting. That's pretty important.

MR. FONTANEZ: I'm wondering, if the person didn't --

MR. SOLORIO: They were informed. The daughter said she was going to be here. I don't know, something might have happened. Let's table it.

MR. PEREZ: We'll table it for next meeting.

I need a motion to adjourn.

MS. LOPEZ: Motion to adjourn.

MR. PETERSON: Second.

MR. PEREZ: Roll call.

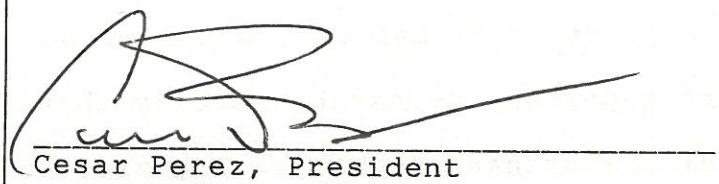
Roll Call: "All in Favor": Cesar Perez, Ralph Peterson, Lydia Lopez Abstain: None Opposed: None

MR. PEREZ: Motion carries. Meeting adjourned.

* * * * *

Approval of the Meeting Minutes of
July 16, 2026

Approved and signed August 6, 2026



Cesar Perez, President

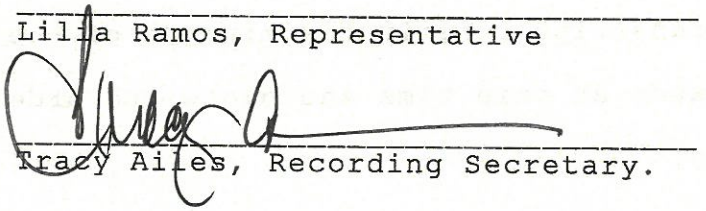


Ralph Peterson, Vice-President



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 20th day of July 2026.

Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde, Court Reporter

