

CITY OF COUNTRYSIDE

*803 Joliet Road
Countryside, IL 60525
www.countryside-il.org*



Meeting Minutes

Regular Meeting of the Plan Commission

Zoning Board of Appeals

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

7:15 P.M.

City Hall

Board Members

**Chairman Robert Schwarz, Secretary Tina Grotzke,
Marco Gutierrez, Ronald Ward, Steve Kehr, Jack Benton,
Tom Geraghty, Danielle Edenfield, Jonathan Gertsmeier**

Meeting called to order at 7:15 p.m. by Chairman Schwarz.

Roll Call: Secretary Grotzke called the Roll of Members physically present:
Present: Chairman Robert Schwarz, Tom Geraghty, Jack Benton, Marco Gutierrez, Danielle Edenfield, Tina Grotzke, Jon Gertsmeier, Ronald Ward, Steve Kehr
Also Present: City Attorney Erik Peck, Planning Manager Richard Trent

Approval of Minutes - The Regular Meeting Minutes of August 5, 2025 were previously distributed to Board Members. There were no corrections; motion made to approve the minutes as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Benton, seconded by Mr. Gertsmeier, that this matter be APPROVED as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 9 Schwarz, Geraghty, Gertsmeier, Benton, Edenfield, Grotzke, Gutierrez, Ward, Kehr

Nay: 0

Chairman's Comments - Chairman Schwarz discussed a new procedure beginning tonight. The current Recording Secretary is retiring at month end. We are working with an outside vendor to transcribe the minutes using an assisted AI program. Keeping that in mind, Board members must identify themselves by name each time prior to speaking. Chairman Schwarz stated he will remind the parties and call them by name so that the record is accurate. In the future, please state your name prior to speaking.

Action Items:

1. CASE #PZV25-0004: Consideration of a Variance

- a. To consider a Variance to exceed the maximum floor area lot coverage of an accessory building from 1,500 sq. ft. to 2,400 sq. ft. in the rear yard in the R-7 Zoning District at the subject property of 10637 71st Place.

Mr. Gutierrez moved to open the Public Hearing in this matter, seconded by Mr. Ward and carried by unanimous voice vote. PM Mr. Trent presented the Staff Report: he stated that the legal Notices have gone out and were received. The Petitioner is Mr. Michael Siambanes, present this evening. The subject property is zoned R-7, Rural Residential. The request is to exceed the maximum lot coverage for the construction of a new pole barn in the R-7 Zoning District.

The subject property is west of Burr Oak Lane and south of 71st Place. The Petitioner owns the subject property and the adjacent one on the west side. There is an existing shed on the premises measuring 10' x 14'; the Petitioner would like to replace that shed with a much larger structure to house the equipment used to maintain his property. The subject property is approximately 96,268 sq. ft. (or 2.21 acres) in size. A similar-sized property (2.21 acres) in size is adjacent to the subject property that is vacant; the properties combined are approximately 4.5 acres in size.

The next slides are directional elevations, north showing a secluded area, mature trees along the roadway and a driveway gate; the south elevation with a depth of greater than 300' to the rear property

line. The east elevation depicts the current home and an expansive open area on the west elevation. A gravel walkway extends throughout the property and leads to the existing shed.

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan (adopted in March 2024) identifies the subject property as being a part of the “**Southern Tier Subarea Plan**”. The Future Land Use designation for the property has been identified as *Single-Family Detached*. The Comp Plan notes -- *this area has a rural character that is significantly different from Countryside’s other neighborhoods, and as such should be treated differently by the Community*. Mr. Siambanes plans to construct a large structure in a secluded area that would not create a problem or disturb any adjacent neighbors to the east, west, or south. The proposed structure would be approximately 2,400 sq. ft. The Code states that any such structure shall not exceed 1,500 sq. ft. or 2.76% of the square feet of the lot, whichever is less. The rear yard is quite large, approximately 75,030 sq. ft. in size. The proposed structure would occupy a little over 3.12% of the rear yard. There would be no other detached accessory buildings on site. The Petitioner wishes to remove the existing structure (shed) and replace it with a larger one. Staff would note that the subject property is one of the largest properties in the immediate area.

The next slides presented were renderings of the proposed steel pole barn; the exterior would match the house exterior (grey & black). The size would be approximately 40 x 60’ (or 2,400 sq. ft.) in size. There would be two (2) doors for ingress/egress of equipment. The height from grade to the highest point is approximately 18 feet. In the R-7 District, accessory buildings are allowed to go as high as the principal structure’s height – which in this case, is approximately 24-25’. Further photographs were provided to show extensive views of the entire property.

Based on all the information provided and the scale and uniqueness of the subject property, Staff is recommending approval to grant a Variance to exceed the maximum floor area lot coverage of an accessory building from 1,500 sq. ft. to 2,400 sq. ft. in the rear yard in the R-7 Zoning District at 10637 71st Place, as requested, subject to the conditions as presented in the Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025.

Mr. Gutierrez asked if the equipment to be stored in the proposed pole barn would be strictly for maintenance of the lots. Mr. Siambanes responded yes, that is correct; nothing else; only personal lawn care tractors and tools. Ms. Edenfield asked about paved access to the proposed barn and the specific material to be used. Mr. Trent noted that the exterior of the proposed building would be steel; it should match the house color, which is a light gray with a black roof. Regarding the roadway, the only vehicles to be stored are lawn mowers, and other items to maintain the property. There are no full-size vehicles being stored in the proposed building that would require a paved drive from 71st Place to the pole barn.

Chairman Schwarz swore in the Petitioner, Michael Siambanes, who made a brief presentation to the Board. He stated that the property is just under 5 acres and he has a lot of equipment to do yard work (for both properties). He needs the tools and equipment to be stored and protected in the pole barn. There were questions re: the size of the garage (barn) doors. Mr. Benton asked if any trees would be removed in the construction of the proposed pole barn. Mr. Siambanes responded no. There were no

further questions by the Zoning Board of Appeals or the public. Mr. Ward moved to close the Evidentiary Portion of the Public Hearing, seconded by Mr. Benton; motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Chairman Schwarz entered into evidence Petitioner's Application as Exhibit 1, and the Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025 as Exhibit 2, for the record.

Mr. Gutierrez moved to approve the Variance to exceed the maximum floor area lot coverage of an accessory building from 1,500 sq. ft. to 2,400 sq. ft. on the property commonly known as 10637 71st Place, subject to the conditions set forth in the Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025, seconded by Ms. Grotzke and carried by unanimous Roll Call vote.

A motion was made by Mr. Gutierrez, seconded by Ms. Grotzke, that this matter be APPROVED as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye: 9 Schwarz, Geraghty, Gertsmeier, Benton, Edenfield, Grotzke,
Gutierrez, Ward, Kehr**

Nay: 0

Chairman Schwarz stated that this matter will be presented to the City Council at its Regular Meeting on September 10, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.

2. CASE #PSU25-0001: Consideration of a Special Use Amendment

- a. To consider an Amendment of the existing Special Use (Ordinance 20-17-O) to lower the height of the perimeter fencing from 12' to 6' pursuant to Condition #2 of the subject Ordinance in the B-3 Zoning District at the subject property of 10000 75th Street.

Ms. Edenfield moved to open the Public Hearing in this matter, seconded by Ms. Grotzke; motion carried by unanimous voice vote. PM Mr. Trent made the Staff presentation; this is a Special Use Amendment requested by Ms. Thao Huynh, representing Duckees Travel Center. Back in 2020, a Special Use was granted by the City Council to permit a truck fueling station on a portion of the real estate commonly known as 10525 74th Street (Lot 2) in the B-3 Zoning District located at 10000 75th St. known as Hoffman AODG, LLC – 75th Street Project. That project (now Duckees Travel Center) was required to install a twelve foot (12') fence along the entire north and west property line to screen residential properties from the intended use. The new property owner, Hodgkins Tollroad Plaza Partners, LLC -- Duckees Travel Center, seeks to amend the Special Use to permit a six foot (6') fence instead of the required twelve foot (12') fence to be installed along the retaining wall (photos of all elevations were shown and discussed).

The subject property was subdivided and rezoned with the southern portion, Lot 2, rezoned from R-7 (Rural Residential District) to B-3 (Service & Wholesale Business District) at this location. The project was approved, with conditions. Lot 2 is approximately 82,537 sq. ft. (or 1.895 acres) in size. The Site

Plan illustrates the project as it stands today. There is an Inter-Governmental Agreement between the City of Countryside and the Village of Hodgkins for this project. The “truck fueling station” is on the City’s portion of the development; 75th Street is under the jurisdiction of the Village of Hodgkins. The retaining wall along the western and northern property line was shown. The request has been made for the following reasons: (1) A six foot (6’) retaining wall has been constructed along the property lines; (2) The proposed six foot (6’) fence would be installed above the retaining wall, providing a combined barrier that would exceed the screening intent of a twelve foot (12’) freestanding fence; and (3) The combination of grading, the retaining wall and the six foot (6’) fence would ensure that the commercial use is fully screened from the neighboring residences.

The neighbors along the southern boundary (Johnsons Double J Riding Club) have asked for a fence; the Petitioner has agreed to install a fence along the southern boundary from the southwest corner (of Double J) to the end of the Johnson property. The retaining wall stops short of the egress drive to 75th Street. The Petitioner is willing to extend the fence along the entire length of the Johnson property (southern property line).

The retaining wall slides provided by the Petitioner were not included in the Board’s packet – Staff extended apologies. Looking at the southwest corner of the property; the Petitioner would like to amend the requirement of installing a twelve foot (12’) fence on top of the retaining wall; they are instead requesting a six foot (6’) fence. There is a significant grade change, extremely high along 74th Street and drops as you head south towards 75th Street. The northern retaining wall illustrates the significant grade change. A few detached accessory buildings were noted on the Johnson property, used by the owners for housing equipment, horses, etc. The change in elevation is at least six feet (6’) if not more in some locations. The northwest corner of the property illustrates the elevation height and the grade change; the retaining wall then goes up and a fence is expected to be installed along that portion of the wall as well, providing a barrier. The City Code indicates that, *“when a real estate used and/or zoned for a business purpose or purposes adjoins real estate zoned and/or used for residential purposes, the owner or owners of the real estate zoned and/or used for a business purpose or purposes shall construct and maintain a solid fence to a height of eight feet three inches (8’ 3”) above existing grade immediately inside the boundary line (on said owner’s or owners’ side) which separates said business real estate from the residential real estate.”* In 2020, Staff brought this information to the attention of the Plan Commission but they believed at the time that eight feet (8’) was not sufficient so a twelve foot (12’) fence was recommended. City Council approved the twelve foot (12’) height. Based on the information provided, reviewed, and the circumstances of the project, Staff recommends approval of granting the Special Use amendment to Ordinance 20-17-O to permit an eight foot (8’) solid fence along the entire north, south and western property lines to screen the neighboring residential properties, subject to review and approval of the Community Development Department (CDD) under Exhibit A, Findings G, Condition #2, as presented in the Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025.

Chairman Schwarz stated that the Petitioner is asking for a six foot (6’) fence and the CDD is recommending an eight foot (8’) fence. The Plan Commission can recommend something different. Mr.

Trent stated that in 2020 the height of the retaining wall was not known and/or established; on top of the proposed wall would be a solid wood and/or vinyl fence. On the west property line, the retaining wall is six feet (6') if not more above grade. At grade, a minimum of eight feet three inches (8' 3") should be maintained. Mr. Kehr stated that the bottom step of the concrete wall is less than both; he commented that the existing concrete wall looks terrible; one should never do steps like that on a retaining wall. How will they install the fence onto the retaining wall where it meets that point (the varying steps)? Mr. Trent stated they will be drilling holes to create the solid posts (following along the grade of the wall) – but how are they going to do that? Staff suspects they will drill now before final landscaping is installed.

Mr. Gutierrez asked for the definition of "grade" in the Building Code on a lot with different levels. Mr. Trent stated that the subject property's current grade (not the adjacent property's grade) should maintain a minimum fence height of eight feet three inches (8' 3"); there just happens to be a retaining wall at grade that would require a fence on top of the wall. There is no specific definition of "grade" with a split-level property. The fence should follow the grade of the subject property. Mr. Gutierrez stated that the grade varies substantially on the property. This is the problem on the west property line. The fence would be stepped to follow the grade. How will that look? There would have to be borings into the retaining wall; generally, with fences they must be installed at least 42" below grade and 36" of that must be surrounded by concrete. Ultimately, the Building Commissioner would make that determination.

Ms. Edenfield stated that since the elevations are not consistent throughout, is there any precedent like this for a commercial property? Could there be some sort of compromise? Mr. Trent noted that the supports for the fencing and/or the anchors for the posts have hopefully been factored in by the Petitioner. There does not appear to be accommodations for anchoring the posts in the retaining wall; is that a problem? Mr. Trent indicated he was unsure at this time. Regarding the height and the stepping, some locations (of the wall and fencing) will be higher, others lower. The neighbors on the west, the Johnsons, spoke to the Petitioners and documented their conversation. Mr. Trent paraphrased portions of the letter written by Mrs. Johnson. The Johnsons are okay with a six foot (6') fence; Mrs. Johnson had requested that barbed wire be placed on top of the fence for fear of climbers. Staff noted that typically industrial properties have barbed wire for outdoor storage of equipment; City Council, however, would have to approve any proposed barbed wire. Mr. David Johnson was present and spoke about the discussion he had with the Developers. They were persuasive about the retaining wall; the Johnsons believe the eight foot (8') fence would be better.

Ms. Edenfield asked if there was any precedent in the past. Mr. Trent stated in 2020, the Plan Commission recommended a twelve foot (12') fence; that would be considered a precedent. She also asked about light spillage onto their property; a Photometric Plan has been submitted and approved. Mr. Trent noted that any light cannot exceed .10 light spillover at the property lines; they have met that requirement. Mr. Trent clarified that the height of 8' 3" includes "the cap" on the fence.

(Whereupon a brief recess was had).

Chairman Schwarz asked the Petitioner to make their presentation. He swore in Ms. Thao Huynh representing Duckees Travel Center. Ms. Huynh stated that in 2020 the twelve foot (12') fence was approved based on the existing grade, which at that time was level and even with the adjacent property. Since that time they have raised the property over six feet (6'), so now they stand very high and the adjacent property is very low. With the retaining wall, in addition to the raised six feet (6'), they feel they far exceed the original twelve foot (12') fencing requirement. Some of the grading goes from eight feet (8') to two feet (2'); it is hard to tell from the photos. Ms. Huynh said whether the fence is six feet (6') or eight feet (8'); there would not be a significant difference. They believe they have already exceeded the twelve foot (12') requirement. Additionally, the original plan did not include putting a fence on the south end for protection from the trucks coming and going but they agreed to it; so they have included the fence. Ms. Huynh indicated that she would be happy to answer any questions.

Ms. Grotzke -- what do you mean by a block fence -- is a concrete block fence or a wood fence being built on top of the retaining wall? Mr. Gutierrez stated the original grade was level; what was the reason for raising the entire grade? Ms. Huynh indicated for the trucks -- to enter/exit the site safely. Mr. Gutierrez asked if they are proposing a concrete block fence above the retaining wall. Ms. Huynh -- a concrete retaining wall and an additional six feet (6') of concrete block or plastic is being considered. Ms. Huynh clarified that either a wood fence or plastic/composite fence -- leaning towards a composite fence.

Chairman Schwarz asked the next speaker to identify themselves for the record. John Siff -- He is the manager of the Hodgkins Tollroad Plaza Partners, LLC.

Mr. Geraghty -- the spot between the curb and the retaining wall will be landscaped with what -- bushes, grass? Mr. Siff - the Landscape Plan that was approved will soften the wall but not the vents; there will be trees. Chairman Schwarz swore in Mr. Siff -- they originally proposed a masonry block wall all around the entire property. When the final grading was known, they determined there was too much load from the block wall. Upon advice of their engineers, they built the concrete wall, which is a barrier quality retaining wall. It is twelve inches (12") wide and sits on an eight foot (8') wide footer below. At the original grade, they are in excess of six feet (6') above the Johnson's property. They tried to soften the transition from 75th Street onto the property -- it comes down and then goes back up; trucks come through the five (5) chutes that is solely dedicated to diesel fuel on this City's side of the property. The automobile fueling station is on the Village's side of the property. Mr. Siff also noted that the other thing that may have some bearing -- they originally were going to build a 7 or 8 story hotel as part of the original plan -- a gigantic structure, approximately 80 or 90 feet tall. That changed the scale of the wall that was going to be needed because of shading a high-rise building. Therefore, the initial approval of a twelve foot (12') wall may have had other considerations, which are now not necessary; that precipitated other changes in the Site Plan in 2023 with the first amendment. They made the decision to build the concrete retaining wall as the right thing to do for both parties because this is a very substantial project. Large heavy trucks will be driving along the west barrier.

Mr. Kehr asked why not put a form liner on both sides and make it a retaining wall like it's supposed to be. Mr. Siff said they could not make a block wall with structural integrity. Mr. Kehr stated it is just a liner that goes on the concrete form. Mr. Siff said it was not presented to him – and not considered.

There were no more questions from Board Members. Chairman Schwarz asked if any interested parties had comments to make. Attorney Peck clarified the Petitioner's position – at present, a twelve foot (12') wall should be installed – Staff's recommendation is to permit an eight foot (8') fence. The Petitioner has requested a six foot (6') fence.

Chairman Schwarz swore in Gerald Gluszek, 10565 W. 74th Street, adjacent to the Johnsons on the west - He commented re: changing from a block retaining wall to a concrete retaining wall, which is good because heavy equipment will be moving. If it were a block retaining wall similar to the north end of the property, it would collapse within a few years – it would not hold up to heavy truck traffic – so this is good. There is a concrete retaining wall, which may not look pretty, facing eastward, but it is substantial and will serve the purpose. The recommendation by the Board to install an eight foot (8') fence on top of the retaining wall is excellent. Comments about the step corner – that's typically the way they do things on a slope – this really isn't a slope, it's level. Mr. Gluszek asked if the original plans called to have a dirt ramp against the retaining wall – it's a substantial height, 15 or 20 feet in the very northwest corner. He did not know the solution to make it more esthetically pleasing – possibly tapering the fence height on top – it still would go eight feet (8') or higher from the driveway. The retaining wall should hold the supporting posts and everything should be good.

Chairman Schwarz entered into evidence Petitioner's Application as Exhibit 1, and Staff Presentation and Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025 as Exhibit 2 for the record. Mr. Geraghty moved to close the evidentiary portion of the Public Hearing, seconded by Mr. Gutierrez; motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Grotzke moved to approve the Special Use Amendment to Ordinance 20-17-O to permit an eight foot (8') solid fence, instead of the required twelve foot (12') solid fence, on the entire north, south and western property line, subject to the conditions set forth in the Planning & Zoning Memorandum dated September 2, 2025, for the property commonly known as 10000 75th St., seconded by Mr. Geraghty; motion carried by unanimous Roll Call vote.

A motion was made by Ms. Grotzke, seconded by Mr. Geraghty, that this matter be APPROVED as presented. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye: 9 Schwarz, Geraghty, Gertsmeier, Benton, Edenfield, Grotzke,
Gutierrez, Ward, Kehr**

Nay: 0

Chairman Schwarz stated that this matter will be presented to the City Council at its Regular Meeting on September 10, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. in City Hall.

Public Comments - Members of the public present this evening have no further comments.

Other Business

PM Mr. Trent stated that per the suggestion of Mr. Gertsmeier, the parking statistics for 2024 have been included for comparison. Staff would note that two (2) days of statistics are missing for August; the statistics will be updated and included in next month's report.

Ticket Statistics (for August 2025) - In August, 6 tickets were issued in total – better than last year; 4 tickets were issued for parking/storing tractor/trailers; and 2 tickets were issued for trucks parked on property not registered to the business. The 2024 numbers were much higher – 10 for parking/storing tractor/trailers and 3 for trucks parked on property not registered to the business. Staff noted that at the end of eight (8) months last year, the total number of tickets issued was 101 in comparison with this year's total of 92.

2018-25 Zoning Cases - The list of past cases was updated.

Next Meeting - October 7, 2025 - Two (2) items are on the agenda for next month.

Upcoming Cases - A Special Use (Amendment) request at 102 Countryside Plaza – former Party City location – on the southwest corner of the plaza. The user would like to open a fitness center (national chain), which generally do not generate a sales tax. As such, they would be required to enter into a "PILOT" fee, which requires a Special Use for these types of businesses.

A Preliminary/Final Plat of Resubdivision at 9644 W. 58th Street (a property closer to East Avenue). The new owner purchased the property, razed the house, cleared the lot, and now seeks to subdivide the property into two (2) lots; the current property is zoned R-3, One-Family Residence District.

A third case may come in with a request for a Variance at 19 W. Plainfield Road – directly north of Buona Beef and west of the BP Gas Station. At this point, they have not submitted a completed application.

Other Business - Discussion ensued re: entertaining a different start time for the PC/ZBA meetings. Mr. Trent spoke to Messrs. Kehr and Ward regarding their thoughts on the subject. Last month, members tentatively discussed a 7:00 p.m. start time. Chairman Schwarz stated that moving the start time is worth considering. He emphasized that the general public must also be considered; 7:00 p.m. is not a significant change but we can hear from the Board. Mr. Trent pointed out the availability of those people who are working as number one; second is the general public's availability. Seven (7) p.m. would be fine assuming everyone is on board. After some discussion, it was determined that the October 7, 2025 meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. *instead* of 7:15 p.m. The Board members all agreed.

Mr. Kehr explained concern about future approvals for retaining walls. Mr. Trent stated that all plans are approved and signed off by the City Engineer and the Building Commissioner. Mr. Kehr has never seen one that stepped down like the one presented this evening; a retaining wall is usually sloped. He

believes this wall is an eyesore. Further discussion ensued; no definite solution found. The property owner had to level out the entire site with fill. Future retaining walls should be scrutinized more closely.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Mr. Gutierrez, seconded by Ms. Grotzke, that this meeting be ADJOURNED; motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye: 9 Schwarz, Geraghty, Gertsmeier, Benton, Edenfield, Grotzke,
Gutierrez, Ward, Kehr**

Nay: 0

Chairman Schwarz declared the meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

APPROVED:

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert J. Schwarz', is written over a horizontal line.

ROBERT SCHWARZ, CHAIRMAN

/fp