CITY OF EAST CHICAGO BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
Public Hearing Minutes
May 7, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

MR. PEREZ: I would call to order the meeting of the Board of Zoning Appeals Commission for May 7, 2026. It's 5:00 p.m.
Motion for approval of the regular meeting minutes of April 2nd, 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: Thank you.

We'll now move on to New Business. 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: So this is a petition for a Special Use variance within an M2 Zoning District (Heavy industry), on the property commonly known as 5148 Railroad Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana 46312. The variance is to permit a truck parking facility on the property.

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: The next section of the hearing is for testimony and exhibits. The order of the hearing shall be as follows: The Petitioner's presentation, acceptance of written comments or petitions, and comments from those present in the audience. If you would come forward and state your name, spell your name and sign on the sign-in sheet.

Has there been anything submitted in writing for or against?

MS. AILES: I did not receive comments or communication for or against this petition.

MR. PEREZ: Do we have somebody present for this location? Please come to the podium, state your name and your address.

MS. AILES: State your name for the record.

MR. JONES: Good evening. My name is Steve Jones. I'm the owner of Paul's Warehousing located at 5148 Railroad Avenue. I am requesting approval for accessory truck parking. The pictures show an outline of what I have outlined on the property. So this is not for trucks for salvage. It's not a junk yard. I own a warehouse and distribution center. I am a truck driver myself.

Presently there is flatbeds, guys hauling steel from places here in East Chicago. So we keep it clean. There are no major repairs. These are truckers that operate every day hauling steel and they go home. Apparently they are local because they take their cars, I don't know. But there is other guys that

have carriers that are local. Sometimes their wives pick them up. They don't idle in the truck or stay in the trucks overnight for sleeping. They come in, do their work -- like I do -- and then they park their trucks at night -- like I do -- and then in the morning they get up and go.

MR. PEREZ: What's the hours of operation?

MR. JONES: Well, my hours are eight till five. But if you are the owner, it's family run, we stick around longer. We have our own carriers that come in and we tell everybody that we close at five. We like to go home too. But there are days I am there to like 8 or 9:00 o'clock at night doing paperwork when I'm done driving. The boss's work, you know, is never done. But overall, we are eight to five.

MR. PEREZ: Monday through Friday.

MR. JONES: Monday through Friday. I won't say how many times I work on the weekends, but you've got to do that in the warehousing.

MS. RAMOS: And you are stating that -- at least in the packet -- that you have parking for up to 40 trucks?

MR. JONES: That's what we allocate up to and still have it feasible and still be open.

Apparently when I bought this building, the back fence-line I believe backs up to the management company. They tore the fence down before I was there, so it's to the west of the property, backs up to the property. I bought it and they use it, I guess, to cut through to Railroad. I'm sure back in the day everybody has been using it that way. I don't say anything. So I just leave it down and they removed the fence before I got there. They cut through to Indianapolis Boulevard and then cut through, UPS, parcel post carriers, cut through there.

That's the maximum amount of trucks. We don't have that on hand, but we allocate up to 40, not that we would ever have 40 on there.

MS. RAMOS: Is there another -- is there a neighbor that is next to that?

MS. AILES: Right to the west and the property owner is leasing another property and possibly two more properties to the west side. But like he said, he owns half of it.

MR. PEREZ: So you are not loading or unloading there, are you?o

MR. JONES: Yeah, we are a warehouse. We are a warehouse.

MR. PEREZ: So the loading is inside the buildings?

MR. JONES: Yes. Those are my docks facing to the east, that's facing Railroad Avenue, and that is the type of building that you use. The docks are right there, so all of our customers go to the dock, like a regular warehouse.

MS. RAMOS: So you park inside that warehouse?

MR. JONES: No. Those containers won't fit inside.

MS. RAMOS: The reason I am asking -- Tracy, have we done a study or do we know if a study was done? It seems like a small spot for 40 trailers.

MS. AILES: There is quite a few issues that the City has in regards to this location, as well as to be expected, before it's approved. It definitely will need a site plan. We would probably request a traffic in depth study based on the number of spaces available, just because that is a traffic corridor.

Unfortunately, Mr. Jones started operating this without a business license or didn't go through the process. So there is no improvements to the property. If there's truck parking, we normally require that to be paved. So there is no barriers. There is no landscaping. There is no improvements to the property. There is knowing to mitigate the noise to the residents. We also need drainage for water.

So there is multiple things and we have to assess the truck traffic in regard to the area that we have issued in the past. So there is quite a few things.

MR. PEREZ: How long have you been operating?

MR. JONES: I've been operating my warehouse or the truck parking?

MR. PEREZ: The business right there.

MR. JONES: The truck parking, we started that, I think, last year. When I first moved in here I had a business license and with the extra property it comes out like to two acres. The property is wide if I recall. So being ignorant to the ordinances, I didn't realize that I had to get another business license to operate something that I thought was part of my old warehousing distribution.

This is like a third party that allows the trucks to park there and they pay you through a third party.

MR. PEREZ: That's what I'm asking you, you said 40 trucks.

MR. JONES: That's our maximum. We are not saying that's what we are putting there.

MR. PEREZ: Is that 40 trucks operating for you or you renting the spots?

MR. JONES: Yes. The truck parking property is --

MR. PEREZ: So you are renting the spots?

MR. JONES: They find guys for daily overnight parking.

MR. PEREZ: You're renting the spots, that's what I'm asking.

MR. JONES: Oh, yeah, yeah.

MR. PEREZ: Any other questions? (None) You can sit down.

Anybody here for or against it? (No response).

Counsel?

MR. FONTANEZ: Well, just like Tracy

said, there's a lot of other things that need to be examined because the City could be liable with any issues that arise out there. A prior traffic impact study would need to be done and that's going to be a huge one, considering we have had petitions before for Special Use variance for parking trucks in East Chicago before and those concerns are the same as they were before.

I think they should apply the same standards to be consistent to everyone who wishes to have a similar business here and treat everybody the same. That would be generally my opinion.

MR. PEREZ: So, Mr. Jones, I am going to make a motion to table this till we get more information and once the Planning Department can come back to us with more information, then we could revisit this. Right now there is too many unanswered questions and I'd like to get some answers.

MR. JONES: Sure, I can answer some and later on down the road get something done.

MR. PEREZ: Exactly. When we call you back, we'll get you back in here and do that. So I make a motion to table this variance.

MS. RAMOS: I second that motion.

Questions/Comments: None

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

MR. PEREZ: Motion carries. So it's tabled. They will contact you once we have more questions that are answered and we will bring you back up.

MR. JONES: Okay, that sounds good. Thank you.

MR. PEREZ: Second petition on the agenda for Special Use variance within an R1a Zoning District (Single family semi-detached dwelling) on the property commonly known as 4917 Wegg Avenue, East Chicago, Indiana 46312. The variance is to permit a parking lot. 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: The next section of the hearing is for testimony and exhibits. The order of the hearing shall be as follows: The Petitioner's presentation, acceptance of written comments or petitions, and comments from those present in the audience. If you would come forward and state your name, spell your name and sign on the sign-in sheet. Has anything come back for or against the petition?

MS. AILES: I did not receive any written comments for the petition for or against.

MR. PEREZ: We have a lot of people here. Is everybody together? Who's the main person that wants to come up and give us your name and let us know what we are looking at here.

MR. GALINDO: Juan Galindo, I'm the contractor and also a member of the church. I stand before you with this petition we want. We are seeing the necessity of having extra spaces for parking for the church because -- one of the reasons is because we want it to help the neighbors and not use their parking spaces. We decided, because the church decided they wanted this property, so we won't have to use the neighborhood parking and can use our own spaces and have space for it. This is a decision of the church. We all decided, like we decided before, to make plans to fix those houses, but now we have this parking problem because the church is growing and we need more space to park.

MR. PEREZ: Let me ask a question. This is the same property that you have come here before on?

MR. GALINDO: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: That's the house to the north or to the south?

MR. GALINDO: To the north.

MR. PEREZ: And you own the parking lot too?

MR. GALINDO: Yes, it's the church's parking lot.

MR. PEREZ: Okay. Are we expanding the parking lot and knocking the house down?

MR. GALINDO: Knocking the house down and using that space for parking.

MR. PEREZ: That's the same house that you were going to fix, right?

MR. GALINDO: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: All right. Anybody else want to speak on this? You can sit down.

A RESIDENT: Commissioners, I just want to say I think the Light of Life Church is being proactive. I am agreeing they have been good neighbors to most all of the communities there, the residents, and this takes initiative for them to take down those two houses so they are not blocking residential property. I would please ask the Commissioners to vote in favor of the variance. Thank you.

MR. PEREZ: Anybody else want to speak?

MS. SOSA: Arnetta Sosa, I live on the back side of the church and I think that the parking lot would be great, an additional parking lot, because they take all the parking of all the residents on that street who are constantly angry about it. So that would really relieve the parking for us.

MR. PEREZ: Thank you. Any other questions?

Well, it's their property, so anybody could park there. It's their lot, so basically you are removing the parking issue for people that live there. So you are knocking down two houses, because I thought it was just one.

MR. LOPEZ: Gabriel Lopez, and I am a

member of the Board of the church. So we purchased the property and there is two houses on the property, same lot. So that's why we called and said that we are going to knock down two houses, but there is only one house.

MR. PEREZ: Your property is the house, the parking lot, and the other house?

MR. LOPEZ: No. The parking lot and then to the north there is a lot with two houses on it. It's front and back.

MR. PEREZ: It's all on the same property?

MR. LOPEZ: Two houses on the same lot.

MR. PEREZ: Okay, thank you.
Tracy, what is the City's position on this?

MS. AILES: So they came in last year requesting permission to keep the two homes on the property. They are requesting to knock the two homes down on the single lot, which is a 50-foot lot, to create more parking.
The City is not objecting to that, but we did have some concerns and some conditions as the ordinance states there should be no parking permitted between the front yard and the front lot line. They would like to mimic what they have currently, but that does not meet code.
It also states that you must adhere to the side yards that would be required for a single family home, which is five feet on each side. The current property that has the parking lot to the south does not meet the ordinance. So we would ask that this parcel, it's best for them to put them together, to combine the property, so they have five feet on each side. But we'd ask that they maintain the five feet between the other home to the north. And then they would definitely have to rework the parking for both the current lot and the one that they are proposing.

MR. LOPEZ: Could I ask a question? What do you mean by rework it?

MS. AILES: So if you are going to keep that current parking lot, the ordinance requires five

feet on each side, so you are going to lose ten feet. You are eliminating --

MR. LOPEZ: So to the north on the south side?

MS. AILES: You only have 40 feet. You are not going to meet the requirements for angle parking, which is nine by 18 and you have 15 feet of clearance to back out.

MR. LOPEZ: But they already have a parking lot there.

MS. AILES: That's correct.

MR. LOPEZ: It's grandfathered in.

MS. AILES: That's correct. You can either keep the one or it would be to your benefit to combine those parcels. Otherwise you are going to be required to have five feet, five feet, and only have 40 feet for parking.

MR. FONTANEZ: So their best bet is to go to Lake County and combine it together.

MR. LOPEZ: So we own all the lots on the street and we don't have -- so it's not --

MS. AILES: I understand.

MR. LOPEZ: Each lot has it's own ID.

MS. AILES: I understand that. So originally for this parking lot to work, you need as much of the 50 feet as possible. So if you don't combo it, then you are going to need five feet and you are going to be minus ten feet for the parking lot.

MR. LOPEZ: So if we don't combine -- the first one is grandfathered in, right? They already are grandfathered in. So if we do the parking lot, we can do that according to code and we need five feet in code with the new parking lot?

MS. AILES: You will be able to have 18 feet for parking in that lot and parking that requires nine feet width, eight feet long, with five

feet between on both sides. So that gives you the 18 feet or the 18 parking spaces that you currently have.

MR. PEREZ: It's to your benefit to combine it.

MS. AILES: So you get at least 45 feet.

MR. LOPEZ: So say we combine it, you are saying, go to Lake County and make this one single lot?

MR. PEREZ: Yes.

MR. LOPEZ: Once we do that, come back to you guys or no?

MR. PEREZ: We'll put that condition in. That's to your best interest to do that.

I have a question. The house on the north is your house?

MR. LOPEZ: The north.

MR. PEREZ: The south house is not. So you've got plenty of room. You've got a lot of room, make it one parcel. Once it's one parcel you are not going to have any issues. I'll put that one condition on there and change that to one parcel and you will have room.

MS. AILES: You have 45 feet to work with. If you don't, then you will only have 40 feet and you are not going to be making any more parking spaces.

MR. LOPEZ: Combine the properties and once we do that, then we get approval.

MR. PEREZ: Then you can proceed with it, at least after we vote.

MR. LOPEZ: Of course.

MR. FONTANEZ: Before that you have to address the issue of the original contract for the demolition of the properties, the demolition order that was entered into.

MS. AILES: Originally, for the first

variance they did enter into a Rehab Agreement with the Building Department, so they have to void that contract.

MR. FONTANEZ: That's an issue that still needs to be looked into prior to voting and putting anything else subsequent to it.

MR. PEREZ: That house was going to be demolished anyway.

MS. AILES: That would still be the same. They are going to demo the property and basically just default on the Rehab Agreement.

MR. PEREZ: All right.

MR. FONTANEZ: I am just letting the Board know that was there, if you are going to move forward. If they agree to rescind the previous contract and move forward, that's a new set of circumstances today.

MR. PEREZ: So your recommendation is what?

MR. FONTANEZ: I'm just indicating what you have to do. I didn't know if the City had put out any money for this yet.

MR. PEREZ: So we are going to --

MR. FONTANEZ: I just wanted to make sure that was said before you guys vote on rescinding that. I just wanted to make sure the Board knew that before they vote, one. And then the other thing, they can do it together with the same vote.

MS. AILES: So is it necessary?

MR. FONTANEZ: They default on the original contract.

MS. AILES: Default on the original contract of demolition with the Building Department. But for us, for the variance, it's not going to matter, they will have this variance and then the other one drops off after one year.

MR. PEREZ: We are going to default with

the condition -- we are going to vote with the condition if it passes, that you combine the two lots together.

Roll call on the vote.

MS. AILES: Cesar Perez.

MR. PEREZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lilia Ramos.

MS. RAMOS: Yes.

MS. AILES: Lydia Lopez.

MS. LOPEZ: Yes.

MS. AILES: Ralph Peterson.

MR. PETERSON: Yes.

MR. PEREZ: Motion passes. Thanks. Get that done and you should be fine.

That concludes our agenda. Our next scheduled meeting is Thursday, May 21st, 2026, at 5:00 p.m..

I just need a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MS. RAMOS: So move.

MR. PETERSON: Second.

MR. PEREZ: Roll call.

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

MR. PEREZ: Meeting is adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of
May 7, 2026

Approved and signed May 21, 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 18th day of May 2026.



Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde, Court Reporter