CITY OF EAST CHICAGO
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING
Monday, July 6, 2026

BOARD MEMBERS:
Valeriano Gomez, President
Lilia Ramos, Vice-President
Lydia Lopez, Secretary
Marino Solorio, Commissioner
Stacy Winfield, Commissioner
Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner
Grayling Gordon, Commissioner
Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

STAFF:
Tracy Ailes
Eduardo Fontanez

Reported for Fissinger & Associates, Ltd.
By: Peggy S. LaLonde, court reporter

Call to Order: 4:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: Present in Chambers: Val Gomez, Lydia Lopez, Lilia Ramos, Grayling Gordon, Stacy Winfield, Hashem Alhashem, Marino Solorio

STAFF - Present in Chambers: Tracy Ailes
Eduardo Fontanez

MR. GOMEZ: Good afternoon everyone. I would like to call to order the Plan Commission meeting for Monday, July 6th, 2026. We do have a quorum.
First on the agenda is approval of the minutes from June 15th, 2026, as written. I would make a motion to approve the minutes as written.

MR. GORDON: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?
(All signify aye.)
MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.
Move on to New Business. First item on the agenda is Windy Hill Enterprises, Renovation at 405 East 151st Street. Marino?

MR. SOLORIO: This project came to Tech Review a couple of months ago. The gentlemen were suppose to come back with just some minor upkeep items per se. One of them, I think, was the swift. I think that has been --

MS. AILES: We had some environmental issues. They entered into an agreement for the site with IDEM, so we waited on that, and just some additional information, which was received.

MR. SOLORIO: So they were instructed, or at least we are instructing or informing the Board, that for the most part everything in Tech Review is being resolved through each department that is involved in that. The actual plans and the renovation we don't believe should be an issue not to move forward, in terms of the project. And then there are some items for our department, there is some signage and some fencing situations that we will be going over with them again, but it will be department based.

Other than that, I don't think there is any other issues.

MR. GOMEZ: Any questions or comments?

MS. WINFIELD: This Windy Hill, is this a different company other than Harvest Foods?

MR. SOLORIO: Yes.

MS. WINFIELD: Where is this actually at?

MR. SOLORIO: The building already exists. It's on 151st and what would be Melville, McCook -- or Melville between McCook. Melville is where the building sits, running parallel on 151st.

MS. AILES: Do you want them to explain a little about the project?

MR. SOLORIO: Can you come forward to the microphone? It's looked like an abandoned building for a long time.

MR. LAWRENCE: Robert Lawrence. So we are a food distributor. We are going to replace the front of the building to make the dock doors function-able, and then put a freezer/cooler inside the

building because it's like a box to box. We are going to put a cooler/freezer inside to store fresh and frozen products.

So, we buy boxed products and then ship out boxed products. There is no processing. There is no opening boxes. There is none of that. Box in, box out.

MS. WINFIELD: But the building is closed right now, right?

MR. LAWRENCE: Yes.

MS. WINFIELD: Is this going in front of Council?

MR. SOLORIO: No, it won't need to because it's not a rezoning.

MS. WINFIELD: Is the City aware of this this business?

MR. SOLORIO: I'm not sure I know that. You are one of the Council members.

MS. WINFIELD: That's why I'm bringing it up. I'm concerned. They passed Tech Review?

MR. SOLORIO: They have.

MS. WINFIELD: Now they need a vote to move forward?

MR. SOLORIO: To approve their expenditure for the capital improvement for this project.

MS. WINFIELD: Would they have to come back?

MR. SOLORIO: Once it's approved here, no.

MS. WINFIELD: Will you be hiring or already come with your staff?

MR. LAWRENCE: We'll have to be hiring.

MS. WINFIELD: With East Chicago

residents?

MR. LAWRENCE: We are in Illinois right now, but we also have outside stores. So we are moving everything into one building, which would be this building, as far as product goes. So that means more employees to do the work, picking orders, putting away, accounting, and stuff like that.

MS. WINFIELD: This is where I always ask about a compliance officer in the City of East Chicago. We approved another business and they are not following compliance, so that's my concern.

MR. SOLORIO: With the local hiring?

MS. WINFIELD: Yes.

MR. SOLORIO: That has been abolished. From what I understand, the attorneys have looked at that ordinance and it's non-enforceable.

MS. WINFIELD: When it comes in front of Council, that's totally different.

MR. SOLORIO: Maybe. It's 3 or 4 years at least, when I started coming back, it was -- they deemed it non-enforceable. There is nothing -- other cities that have one of those type of things, they have not been able to enforce them either by law now. They have gotten sued and they have stated that they were wrong.

MS. WINFIELD: I'll let the Council know from here on. When we did that business, actually it was told to us by our counsel we have, that's why I was asking.

MR. SOLORIO: In terms of hiring, the company is saying, hey, I am committing to hiring X, Y, and Z, blah, blah; that's a different story.

MS. WINFIELD: When you have a compliance officer, we unfortunately don't have one -- that's how we keep up. That's why I asked the question, are you looking to hire East Chicago residents.

MR. LAWRENCE: We'll see --

MS. WINFIELD: Once you get started.

MR. LAWRENCE: We don't know how many or what because we have never encountered this.

MR. SOLORIO: For full transparency, so you all know, the products that they are purchasing, it's not the simple -- I believe it is simple -- I mean it is simply taking products and then selling it. But this is product that is being sold at stores or through different manufacturers or whatever that produce, that have an expiration date that is coming close to the expiration date, and so they purchase it in bulk and resell it to whomever is going to offload it to the consumer.

So they are not, just so I am also clear, they are not selling expired food. They are selling food that's close to the expiration date that other -- just throwing a name here -- like Walmart cannot offload anymore. They sell to them. They then have other stores that can move the product quicker than what Walmart would be able to do. As an example.

And so today's meeting, in order for them to proceed with the renovation, the Planning Commission, because of the amount of money that they are spending on renovating the now vacant building, they would have to come to the Planning Commission for formal approval.

MR. GOMEZ: We are approving the structure plans?

MR. SOLORIO: The renovation plans, yes. They would have to still get a business license and other things that they would need.

MS. WINFIELD: That's why I asked if they have to come back.

MR. SOLORIO: Not in terms of the Board, no. They would have to come back to the City to get a business license and get all that taken care of. In terms of Planning Commission, this would be the only time you would hear about this project.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other questions or comments? (None)

There being no further questions or comments, I'd like to make a motion to approve the Windy

Hill Enterprises renovation for 405 East 151st Street. Is there a second?

MR. SOLORIO: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.

Next on the agenda today is the Introductory Review of the Proposed Amendment to C3 Ordinance.

MR. SOLORIO: So attached to your agenda should be a C3 ordinance revision. It's really for the Board's edification because we'll have to come back to this for the Board's approval.

Basically what it is doing, if those of you don't know, the C3 District existing on Main Street and Broadway. When the District was created, it was an overlay district on top of commercial zoning that would restrict certain uses in the Downtown. We discussed this before, that it's been analyzed through our department and we have gotten recommendations. We have recommendations that we would like to proceed with to make it less restrictive, because that's, at the moment, it's actually counter productive to what we are trying to accomplish in that Downtown row C3 overlay district. That's stifling growth because of how restrictive it is, what can and can't be done.

As a perfect example, the doctor's offices, for example, can only go on the second floor of the building and they cannot go on the first floor. Even an event center cannot exist in the C3. So there is a couple of things like that, that don't just fall within the growth. We think at the time it was very aggressive because of what was there before.

What we believe is that because it is so restrictive, it's actually not promoting growth in that Downtown area as quickly as we would like to see. So based on conversations with Administration, based on conversations with the UCREA, even some Councilmen and women that have kind of come to us about how restrictive it is; we have made some recommendations in terms of the use that can and can't go in this C3, which are outlined in the package that you have received.

So, if you focus more on the chart, we can go over that one specifically a little bit better. And so the chart starts off with a scope of use. The first one is banks. Banks with or without

drive-thru. Basically everything that you see a P is now what is being stated as permitted. If you see an S, it still would be considered a Special Use. If it's a P with an asteric, there is more clarification underneath that talks about like what other requirements. So, yes, it's permitted, but it's permitted with certain conditions. And we are putting that up front to you so you don't have to worry about figuring that out later.

So we are taking that intuitively, and like as simple as it can be, so when someone reads it, someone that doesn't understand zoning -- okay -- this is permitted and this is not.

I will go through the more controversial ones, such as membership clubs, lounges, that was not permitted in the way, it was restricted. Clinical massage parlor type of things, those were not allowed. The doctor's office that we have mentioned, commercial studios, community centers, those were not allowed. Event centers were not allowed. Grocery stores, a certain size of them were not allowed. Gymnasiums were not allowed. Health clubs were not allowed.

So as you can see, we can go down this list and go over a lot of things that weren't allowed. So basically what this does is, it takes each category. So any category that is not listed on here is not allowed. Everything that is allowed would be stated in this chart. And it is stated in terms of where in the Downtown it would be allowed.

So, just for your kind of illustration, I'm not sure if we can pull it up here, but if not, basically the C3 goes from -- it's Broadway and Main Street, where it starts and where it begins is where their chart kind of fails. And so the C3 began on 139th. We are now moving it. So the beginning of the C3 is now right behind Wendy's and right behind Subway. So that alley would be the defining line between the C3 now, when it was before a block north. So it now encompassed everything from like the Family Dollar, La Pasadita, the Dialysis Center, that type of center, and it goes all the way to Broadway. And then from Broadway on to Deodor and Alder was really kind of the main crux. C3 were overlays that kind of keep going further to Euclid, or keep going further to Guthrie.

What we have done is, again, we have relaxed the rules in terms of what can be done and where. But we have also created transitional zones or transitional, what we are calling conditional use zones. What that means is that in those, the way this is going

to work, to kind of for illustrative purposes, you have the core Downtown. That's the C3 District and then you have these overlays that go a little bit passed the District. That makes it less restrictive, so that as you are kind of coming in from the outskirts into the Downtown, you will see kind of transition between use.

So, for example, in the core Downtown, you can have up to five levels -- up to three levels actually -- sorry -- three floors. While the further out you go, you can have one floor development. And it is to maintain the character of the Downtown. So the further you go into the Downtown, the further you want to see buildings, high-rises, things like that, that type of stuff. We are at three floors.

Residential is one big example of that. Those are restricted use in the Downtown. We are making it more available because there is no healthy Downtown without having population to support the Downtown. So you want people in the Downtown so that they buy, they stop, you know, all that good stuff. So that's another thing that we have added.

One other creative thing that we have done is -- so for the most part, Downtown is suppose to have commercial use on the bottom floor. In this whole area we are making sure that commercial is in pretty much the whole corridor, with the caveat, for example, if you create an apartment complex -- just say 30-unit. Perfect example is the Senior Housing Complex that just got built, 200 units or 300, whatever they are. Normally that wouldn't be allowed in this district. What we are saying is, as long as you have commercial on the first floor, that could be privately used, depending where you are at in the formal Downtown, which is the core, you have to have commercial. So people have to actually go and buy something or pay for a service, that type of thing. The further out you are in this, you can actually have residential development with commercial use, but could be privately used.

There is an example of that. You create a 30-unit development where you have a fitness room or a laundromat for the actual tenants. That's a commercial use, being used privately for the residential development. So that's the only caveat between how you would get away with having commercial for the public, as long as there is still commercial use, which in those cases those would be commercial use. Even though it's privately used for the residents of that development, it would still count under commercial. If that makes any sense.

Other than that, I mean what this does, again it streamlines. It's a headache for us all the time having to review this clarity and why is that out and why is that in. So we simplified everything. And so if you keep reading it, that's conditions.

So, for example, banks. Banks have a lot of branches with drive-thru. So because they have drive-thru, we don't want necessarily on Main Street want a lot of cuts, with the curb cuts, as now part of coming in and out. So we mentioned, for example, banks, as I have mentioned are permissible. If you look at the chart, P with an asteric. You follow then down on what the asteric means. It says, banks without drive-thru are permitted to the C3 District. So if you don't have a drive-thru, you are automatically approved. There is no conditions. With a drive-thru they can only be corner lots. And if they are on a corner lot, they must enter on a side street, not Main Street. As an example, they would have to enter in through say 138th Street into the development, and only have one curb cut on Main Street to come out, that merges.

So, for example, if you have a multi lane, say two tellers and an ATM machine, those are three lanes. Those three lanes converge into one lane and only have one lane exit out of Main Street instead of three wide lanes to come out. So those are the kinds of creative conditions that we have come up with for use that we are not necessarily stating they should not be in the Downtown, however we are regulating how they operate in the Downtown. Other than that, they can open a bank anywhere in the City, that is commercial. And they don't have to open in the C3. If you are, we are allowing you, but with these conditions.

I think that's a perfect example of one of the bigger kind of issues. Grocery stores, community centers, civic centers, like say a city hall of sorts, a government center, things like that. In the core Downtown they can operate, but they have to be two levels. For example, they cannot be a one-story development. And what this is, again, so that we make sure -- a lot of municipal organizations and/or developments don't get taxed. If you don't pay taxes in Downtown where it makes the most sense to charge for property taxes, we want to make sure your development is upwards and not sideways. Because the more land you take, the less we can collect on property taxes. So in that sense, if a city hall was to open up in the central business district, it would have to be more than one-story tall, that way you are safe to let a

development open on the periphery.

So any questions regarding those kind of changes?

MS. AILES: As a comment, one change that we did make in the current ordinance is a portion of Broadway that's restricted to business, we have a lot of vacant property in that area. So we are opening that up to business, as well as --

MR. SOLORIO: Pretty much everything after Deodor on Broadway, leading to Euclid. Again, I didn't come up with this ordinance. I'm just fixing it. But it was very restrictive, that land is vacant because no one could build anything. So even if you wanted to build an event center, let's just say, you can't even open something like that. A doctor's office, you can't even open that there if you wanted to. So residential, you can't do that. Only the first floor for example. So there is a lot of things that were just very inconsistent.

Again, as I mentioned before, it did not help, and it's not helping the resurgence of that Downtown area, having said all that.

MR. GORDON: I live at 3718 Euclid, and there used to be a gas station on the corner, a Texaco, I believe, used to be there for many, many, many years. And now it's just a lot with old police vehicles and whatever is sitting there, something. Is that considered commercial, that particular lot?

MR. SOLORIO: So you are talking about what would be Euclid and Michigan and Broadway?

MR. GORDON: Yes.

MR. SOLORIO: That funky triangle looking thing. Based on this District, the District already goes that way. So according to our original District, our zoning, it's C3 in that area. But its overlay is again weird, but right now say, a gas station would not be permitted to open there. A mechanic shop would not be permitted to open there. And those are things that we are still saying should not open in this Downtown. You can open them up anywhere else in the City that is commercial, but the entry to your Downtown, we don't believe this use is compatible with what we are trying to do.

So, for example, on Guthrie and Michigan, that area, they are going to be building a gas station. That's fine. It's right by Cline Avenue and people need to get gas before they go into the City, etcetera, etcetera. But coming into your Downtown, this is an entryway to the Downtown. We don't feel that use, being that it could be built somewhere else, should find a place here, because it's just not appropriate. If you look at, for example, the mechanics shop that's left, which is a whole other conversation, on what would be Broadway, and I'm not sure if it is. If I remember --

MR. GORDON: It is.

MR. SOLORIO: I believe it's unsightly, right. There is cars all over the place. I mean the last remaining business it was a tire shop, mechanic shop. It still exists today. So imagine you have a development, a multi million dollar development, high rise, three stories, and then there is that right next to it. Right? That's what we are talking about. That looks clean in comparison to what you see today. These have been outlawed in this District for that very reason, for their unsightliness. A lot of time they have a lot of junk trucks or cars that they get. It's part of their business. They have to work on these cars to make them usable again. But in the process, they are being parked on the lot, making, you know, the other lots kind of -- it looks a mess, unsightly.

MS. WINFIELD: Is that his lot or is that the City's lot?

MR. SOLORIO: That was actually sold to somebody who then used it. At the time Richard was kind of handling those requests or whatever. The ordinance was pretty clear. Once this is abandoned, that's when we go back to grandfather clauses. They have a year to reopen, if not, they lose that. That sat vacant for three years, I think --

MS. WINFIELD: More like five.

MR. SOLORIO: Whatever the time was. So it would be the perfect time to not allow this to reopen, but they allowed it to reopen. Now we are kind of stuck and it's technically grandfathered. Those uses are still now agreeable to the C3.

And so your specific question, it's

still considered commercial on the other side where that site is you are talking about. So the type of, technically what they are using that little triangle for now, is not allowed in this District. So unless they vacated it, wait a year, and it lapses; then we can enforce the code to say that's not allowed anymore.

MS. WINFIELD: So vehicles are there, on that lot?

MR. SOLORIO: The person next door, across the street --

MR. GORDON: They've got an old paddy wagon and things. It's right across from my house, that lot right there.

MR. SOLORIO: Where the old Union Hall was.

MR. GORDON: Yes.

MR. SOLORIO: That currently is commercial. So again, a union hall would not be allowable based on the current C3 ordinance. The new C3 ordinance that we are discussing today, a hall like that would be permissible.

MS. RAMOS: So if they were to rebuild, they have to come before the Board of Zoning Appeals to get a variance?

MR. SOLORIO: To get a variance.

MS. RAMOS: So once they adopt this new ordinance, it's allowed?

MR. SOLORIO: It is allowed, correct. That's actually what has been happening. You're on the BZA, so we now have quadrupled the BZA requests. They have to go through the BZA because our department is finally enforcing the rules.

The only other thing that I want to mention today, that this --

MR. GORDON: The last one, this is good, right?

MR. GOMEZ: That's what we want.

MR. GORDON: If you continue down Broadway and pass Michigan, you go on probably west of Euclid, you go down a little bit, there's a tire shop or mechanical shop or whatever.

MR. SOLORIO: Yes -- yes.

MR. GORDON: What is that? How does that fit in with that?

MR. SOLORIO: If it falls before -- I mean if it's within the alley to Broadway, it falls in the C3 District. So if that use currently exists today, it will be grandfathered in. So until it is either vacated or if it burns down, whatever, they have a year to reoperate as the use. If not, they lose their grandfather standing.

MR. GORDON: It's been sold to a lot of people.

MR. SOLORIO: So the code does not allow -- So -- I can tell you, you can sell it to her. As long as the use is still being used within the year, they are okay. It falls in perpetuity.

So the only other thing that I want to mention is that this is replicated, this C3 District, which is being dubbed C3 Twin City District, is now going to be happening on this side of town. So there are a lot of things that we do love about the ordinance, the fences, the signage, all the architectural, masonry for development, dah, dah, dah. That now we are transitioning to taking what we do like out of what we are fixing out of it, and now replicating it to go down from 145th to 148th, and from White Oak all the way to Railroad.

So that now will be the new C3 District in this town. And also looking to go to the Council to approve the 80/20 facade program because everywhere in the City you can do 50/50, minus the C3 District, where you can do the 80/20. The 80/20, a lot of people took advantage of Downtown and Main and Broadway to do that here for businesses and buildings that need help with their aesthetics to get it back to something that would look pleasing to the eye. So we had to bring this up to you guys because -- girls and guys and gals -- because this is coming.

So we do have a special meeting to go over the final kind of touches on this. We are still

kind of working on it. It's a draft, but take it with you so that when we meet the next time if there is anything that you feel could be revised or you feel input you want to add, this would be the time to go over it.

MR. GORDON: Does this go before the City Council?

MR. SOLORIO: It will be going through the City Council, yes. In this case, at that time historically it goes through the Planning Commission first and has to have a public meeting --

MR. GORDON: Yes.

MR. SOLORIO: -- for anyone involved that has property in the jurisdiction or are against any of the changes, etcetera. And then once that happens, it goes to the Council for formal approval because it is legislation. Now we are putting it in the Code books where now we can enforce it.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other questions or comments?

MR. SOLORIO: I know it's a lot.

MR. GORDON: But that was good.

MS. AILES: That's the purpose for next Monday's meeting.

MS. WINFIELD: Well, it's at 3. For the City employees on the Board, the City employees can't get excused to attend a 3:00 o'clock meeting.

MR. SOLORIO: We still will have a subsequent meeting even after that.

MS. WINFIELD: I'm going to miss this portion, I can't attend this. I'm going to miss this portion.

MS. AILES: You can still do zoom.

MS. WINFIELD: I leave at 4:00 o'clock, I can't do zoom on my time.

MR. SOLORIO: Those that cannot attend, if you want to have a separate meeting just to kind of go over what we went over, that's not an issue.

MS. WINFIELD: If it comes before me in the Council, whatever that meeting is, on the 13th, I ain't going to have approval for anything. I'm going to abstain because I won't have that information.

MR. GOMEZ: I think the Fire Civil meeting is at 4:30 and that's been canceled, so now that's open.

MR. SOLORIO: Unfortunately when you sent out the notice of the meeting, the hours cannot change now because you have already stated for the record.

MS. WINFIELD: That's a two hour window.

MR. SOLORIO: We were told it needs to be ten days before that. This has been happening since -- this was before the 4th of July.

MS. AILES: It has to do with voting on something that we voted on, so we have to follow the ten-day rule.

MS. WINFIELD: I'll see if I can get on zoom some type of way.

MR. SOLORIO: So there is two meetings happening. One is the meeting that we have with you all, which is to go over the final changes. So that's the non draft version of this, which you will still get if you need to read it or whatever the case may be. And then at the public hearing, so that if the public has any questions on it.

MS. WINFIELD: The hearing is now that day?

MR. SOLORIO: The hearing is that day, the public hearing. The agenda item does not have to be voted on that day and I don't believe that we will. I believe that the goal at the next meeting after that one is to actually formally vote the ordinance through. But we do have to comply with the public hearing portion of it and that's really what is more important.

So I'm saying that we could vote it,

right? But if you are saying as a Board member I'd rather be present on that day, that you could take it under advisement and wait to vote on it at the actual meeting that we do have.

MS. WINFIELD: I'll let you know if I can get on zoom.

MR. SOLORIO: Let us know. Thank you again so much.

MR. GOMEZ: Any other comments from the Public or Commissioners? (None)

There being no further questions or comments, our next meeting will be July 13th, at 3:00 p.m., in Chambers.

That concludes all items on the agenda for tonight, I'd like to make a motion for adjournment.

MR. GORDON: Second.

MR. GOMEZ: All in favor?

(All signify aye.)

MR. GOMEZ: Motion carries.

Meeting adjourned.

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Approval of the Meeting Minutes of Monday,
July 6th, 2026

Approved and signed July 13, 2026

Valeriano Gomez, President

Lilia Ramos, Vice-President

Lydia Lopez

Lydia Lopez, Secretary

Marino Solorio, Commissioner

Stacy Winfield, Commissioner

Jaylen Johnson, Commissioner

Grayling Gordon, Commissioner

Hashem Alhashem, Commissioner

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 8th day of July 2026.

Peggy S. LaLonde

Peggy S. LaLonde

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