

Alma Zoning Board of Appeals

March 3, 2026

Meeting Minutes

A special meeting of the Alma Zoning Board of Appeals was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Chairperson David Justin in the Alma Municipal Building, 525 E. Superior Street, Alma, Michigan. A quorum of the Board was present.

Present: Tadd Godfrey, Nina Guerrero, and David Justin.

Absent: Russ Wight.

Motion by Guerrero, seconded by Godfrey, to approve minutes of February 12, 2026, as presented. Motion carried.

Yes: Godfrey, Guerrero, and Justin.

No: none.

Absent: Wight.

Variance Request – 520 Orchard Street

Chairperson Justin provided the following information: a request for a variance has been received for the property located at 520 Orchard Street, Alma, MI, parcel #29-51-333-321-00. The applicant, BTR Management Company, LLC, is requesting a three-foot (3') variance from the front yard setback requirement of thirty feet (30'), for a new front yard setback of twenty-seven feet (27'), matching the setback of the existing home. The variance will allow space for the proposed additional living space, and a one-car attached garage. The request is in the R1, Single Family Residential Zoning District; the proposed home addition and attached garage are permitted uses in the R1, Single Family Residential Zoning District.

City Manager Aeric Ripley explained that he had received the building permit for the project, and all requirements have been met except the front yard setback. A response to the six standards for a variance was provided by the applicant. Ripley said notice of the request had been mailed, as required, to neighbors and no concerns were submitted, with the exception of one neighbor present for the discussion. Thad Shaffer, on behalf of the applicant, was also present to answer questions. Shaffer provided drawings of the proposed addition for ZBA members.

Members Godfrey and Justin briefly discussed plans for the addition with Shaffer. Ripley explained there were no issues with any other setbacks, but the front yard setback issue was determined after a survey had been completed.

Cynthia Broman, 516 Orchard, addressed the group saying she had been told the home would be a rental, and voiced concerns about issues that could be caused by renters, construction vehicles, and possible encroachments on her property. She also asked about parking for whomever may be renting the home.

Member Godfrey asked if the applicant could facilitate a discussion between Broman and the property owner.

Ripley provided information regarding ordinance restrictions for residential parking. Member Godfrey added that Code Enforcement could be contacted if there are parking issues.

Thad Shaffer agreed to assist with a meeting between Ms. Broman and the property owner.

No other comments were offered.

Motion by Godfrey, seconded by Guerrero, to approve BRT Management Company, LLC's request for a front-yard setback variance from thirty feet (30') to twenty-seven feet (27') at 520 Orchard Street, Alma, MI, parcel #29-51-333-321-00, provided the new addition does not exceed the existing structure's current front-yard setback, and based on the following points which satisfy the six basic standards listed in the related ordinance:

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1. Will not be contrary to the public interest and will not be contrary to the spirit and intent of this Chapter. The requested variance will match the front edge of the existing home.
2. Shall not permit the establishment within a zoning district of any use that is not permitted by right within the district. The proposed home addition and the attached garage are a permitted use within the R1, Single Family District.
3. Will not cause any adverse effect to property in the vicinity or in the zoning district of the City. The variance will allow for the addition to match the current setback of the existing home, which is a 27' front yard setback.
4. Is not where the specific conditions pertaining to the property are so general or recurrent in nature as to make the formulation of a general regulation for such conditions practicable. The front yard setbacks in this neighborhood are less than 30', the neighboring garage to the east is closer to the front property line than the homes in this neighborhood.
5. Affects only property subject to exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions that do not generally apply to other property or uses in the vicinity and have not resulted from any act of the applicant. The request matches the current front façade of the home and will not extend into the front yard setback any further than the home.
6. Must be granted in order to avoid practical difficulties or unnecessary hardship that would result from enforcement of the strict letter of this Chapter. Matching the addition with the existing home will provide the optimal floor area.

Motion to approve the request for variance carried.

Yes: Godfrey, Guerrero, and Justin.

No: none.

Absent: Wight.

Variance Request – 218 Purdy Drive

Chairperson Justin provided the following information: a request has been received to consider a variance at the property located at 218 Purdy Drive, Alma, MI, parcel #29-51-041-285-00. The applicant, Kyle Mapes, is requesting a four-foot (4') variance from the front yard setback requirement of thirty-feet (30'), for a new front yard setback of twenty-six feet (26'), to provide space for an addition to the attached garage. The request is in the R1, Single Family Residential Zoning District; the home and attached garage are permitted uses in the R1, Single Family Residential Zoning District. This request was tabled at the February 12, 2026, meeting.

Motion by Godfrey, seconded Guerrero, to pick the variance request for 218 Purdy Drive up off the table for reconsideration. Motion carried.

Yes: Godfrey, Guerrero, and Justin.

No: none.

Absent: Wight.

Ripley told about discussions with the City Commission and Planning Commission regarding rezoning certain areas from R1 to R1a, which would change the front-yard setback from thirty feet (30') to twenty-five feet (25') and accommodate the proposed addition at 218 Purdy. He said the City Commission had generally been in favor of the rezoning effort. A discussion with the Planning Commission had also been favorable, but the discussion included the idea of an ordinance text amendment rather than rezoning. Ripley explained there are some differences between Zoning Districts R1 and R1a in relation to lot sizes and home sizes, and a simple ordinance text amendment relating to changing the front yard setback in Zoning R1 would be an easier process than rezoning. Ripley noted the applicant was present and had asked that the request that was tabled at the previous meeting be reconsidered.

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Godfrey asked about the timeline for a text amendment and Ripley said it would take a few months.

Godfrey said he was concerned that if the text amendment was not approved, and the variance was granted, it would set precedent for future variance requests. Guerrero suggested if the text amendment was not approved, it would provide a basis to deny future variance requests.

Godfrey said he didn't want to grant the variance and set precedent for future variance requests where there is no special circumstance.

Ripley told the Board that if the text amendment did pass, it still wouldn't preclude future variance requests, but consistent variance requests would indicate a need to reconsider zoning to meet resident needs.

Mapes asked the group for an answer so he could make arrangements with his contractors, as the project is set to begin June 1st.

The group discussed the timeline for an ordinance text amendment, beginning with a public hearing at the Planning Commission level and moving to ordinance introduction and subsequent adoption by the City Commission. Discussion also followed regarding possible reasons the ordinance text amendment could be denied, such as neighborhood sightlines.

Guerrero said there had been no complaints about sightlines in response to the notice regarding Mapes' request and Mapes said the proposed text amendment would affect him differently if it's district-wide rather than just his neighborhood.

Motion by Godfrey, seconded by Guerrero, to deny the request from Kyle Mapes for a front-yard setback variance of four feet (4') at 218 Purdy Drive, parcel #29-51-041-285-00, due to the lack of special circumstance specific to his needs to grant the variance. Motion to deny the request carried.

Yes: Godfrey, Guerrero, and Justin.215

No: none.

Absent: Wight.

Other Business

No other business was presented. No additional public comment was offered.

Motion by Godfrey, seconded by Guerrero, to adjourn the meeting at 5:54 p.m. Motion carried.

Yes: Godfrey, Guerrero, and Justin.

No: none.

Absent: Wight.

Sara Anderson, Alma City Clerk

Date of Approval