AGENDA

WYOMING ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS Monday, October 6, 2025 – 1:30 P.M.

- 1. Call to Order
- 2. Roll Call
- 3. Approval of Minutes
- 4. Public Hearings

Application Number: PZV2025-0003

Applicant: Gene Fitzgerald Location: 4300 52nd St SW Parcel Number: 41-17-31-201-006

Previous Variances: 994-9 (Approved)

1004-9 (Approved) 1809-78 (Approved) 4584-00 (Approved)

Request: The applicant is requesting a variance for Section 90-

439A, which requires a minimum lot area of 87,120 square feet in the ER Estate Residential District.

The applicant is requesting to reduce the minimum lot

area to roughly 40,510 square feet.

- 5. Public Comment
- 6. Informational Items

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO FORMAL APPROVAL BY THE WYOMING BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS AT ITS NEXT REGULAR MEETING.

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2025 CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS CITY OF WYOMING, MICHIGAN

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bovard Strong, Burrill, Dishaw, LaPlaca, Richter, Tobian,

VanderSluis

MEMBERS ABSENT: N/A

STAFF PRESENT: Hofert, Director, Community & Economic Development

Ortlieb, Recording Secretary

CALL TO ORDER

Chair VanderSluis called the meeting to order at 1:30 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of July 7, 2025 were approved to stand as read.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved to stand as read.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1

Application Number: PZV2025-0002

Applicant: Bruce Philpott

Location: 3634 Michael Ave SW Parcel Number: 41-17-23-131-013

Secretary Burrill read the request. The applicant is requesting a variance for Section 90-312(2), which limits the maximum height of fences to 6 feet. The applicant is also requesting a variance for Section 90-312(3), which restricts the maximum height of fences to 3 feet within the first 10 feet of the secondary front yard. The applicant is requesting to exceed height restrictions for a 6 foot 7 inch fence that is located 3 feet from the secondary front yard lot line. There was one previous variance appeal that was approved for this property (V110173).

Chair VanderSluis opened the public hearing.

The homeowner Bruce Philpott (3634 Michael Ave SW, Wyoming, MI 49509) spoke on behalf of his request.

Philpott referred to the previous variance application he was granted and stated he was more aware of the code while completing the application in front of the board today. He stated that he moved the fence to the current position to create a larger fenced-in area for his dogs. He chose to locate the fence 3 feet from the sidewalk for visibility concerns regarding the stop sign. He stated that a 6 foot fence was necessary for his dogs.

Chair VanderSluis thanked Philpott for speaking.

There being no further remarks, Chair VanderSluis closed the public hearing.

Hofert spoke to the board to address the reasoning for the code section being referenced. The applicant is requesting a variance for Section 90-312(2), which limits the maximum height of fences to 6 feet. The applicant is also requesting a variance for Section 90-312(3), which restricts the maximum height of fences to 3 feet within the first 10 feet of the secondary front yard. The applicant is requesting to exceed height restrictions for a 6 foot 7 inch fence that is located 3 feet from the secondary front yard lot line.

Hofert provided an aerial view of the applicant's parcel and noted that the parcel is similar to surrounding lots. She highlighted that the parcel is a corner lot and explained the definition of a secondary front yard in relation to this specific address.

Hofert highlighted the recent code change made regarding fences in Section 90-312(3). She explained that the change was made by City Council to allow for more yard space to be fenced in for certain types of properties. She stated that the code has stayed consitent regarding the set back and height restrictions for secondary front yards for safety concerns.

Hofert provided a copy of the site plan provided by the applicant showing where the fence previously existed. The applicant was granted a variance in 2011 that allowed a fence to be erected in the secondary front yard 15 feet from the sidewalk. Hofert explained that the code now allows for a fence to be erected 10 feet from the sidewalk at 6 feet high or adjacent to the sidwalk at 3 feet high; this height difference is for safety concerns, specifically to accommodate clear vision areas.

Hofert presented the City staff's Findings of Fact.

1. That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property or to the intended use that do not apply generally to other property or class of use in the same vicinity and district because:

This property is not exceptional in its size, location, or shape. The subject parcel is larger than the typical parcel in the immediate vicinity but is comparable in size to at least a dozen other parcels in the surrounding neighborhood. Further, there are dozens of corner-lots along Oakcrest Street which are corner lots, including another three similar sized corner lots within 1000 feet, all of which share a similar shape in terms of width and depth.

This parcel, similar to its neighbors, is bordered by a sidewalk that runs parallel to the street right-of-way on both the primary front yard (along Michael Avenue) and the secondary front yard (Oakcrest Street). This parcel has just as much frontage along Oakcrest Street as every adjacent parcel, and while the house is set back further from the sidewalk than all adjacent parcels, this provides more room for a fence than the adjacent properties. To reiterate, this property is not unique in location, size, or shape.

Hofert added that the previous fence located 15 feet from the sidewalk could have been moved 5 feet to the south to stay in compliance with the current code. The applicant instead chose to move the fence up against the sidewalk in violation of the code. The fence is also 7 inches taller than what is allowed by the code.

2. That such variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of substantial property rights because:

This variance is not necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of substantial property rights. The applicant is currently allowed to fence in their yard along the sidewalk, so long as they remain below 3 feet in height. Additionally, the applicant is also allowed to have a 6ft privacy fence, so long as they place it 10 feet from the edge of the sidewalk. Both options were available to the applicant prior to the construction of their fence. Neither of the options would have required a variance and the terms of the ordinance are not so overly restrictive as to remove the applicant's ability to have a fenced-in yard.

Further, allowing fences to abut the right-of-way creates a burden on vehicular traffic, which will need to come to a legal stop at the back of the sidewalk and then inch forward to gain visibility around the fence; and also creates a threat to pedestrian traffic, which will not be visible to or have visibility of vehicles using the neighboring driveway to the east. As noted above, the applicant does not need a variance to enclose a significant portion of their backyard with a 6-foot fence, so they have not been denied substantial enjoyment of their property rights.

3. That the granting of such variance will not diminish the marketable value of adjacent land and improvements, or unduly increase congestion in the public streets because:

Granting this variance would diminish the marketable value of adjacent land. All properties along Oakcrest Street that do not front on Oakcrest Street are held to the same standard as noted above; 3ft in height adjacent to the sidewalk, or 6ft in height 10ft from the sidewalk. With this variance, the property at 3634 Michael Avenue would be allowed to create a larger fenced-in yard than their neighbors are allowed, thereby increasing the value of their property and decreasing the value of adjacent land.

The applicant has also noted that this fence is required for the safety of his dogs. The zoning code for the City of Wyoming requires all fences in secondary front yards that exceed 3 feet in height to be pulled back from the sidewalk at least 10 feet in order to provide both drivers and pedestrians with the ability to see one another. This includes pedestrians, cyclists, and especially children being given the ability to see a car that is backing out of a driveway and into the sidewalk/road right-of-way. This also would allow for the drivers of said vehicles to identify whether or not someone is currently using the sidewalk behind them, or if there is cross traffic. Should this variance be granted, both of these opportunities would be removed/restricted, and would make the neighborhood surrounding this property less safe for both pedestrians and drivers alike.

Further, the property to the east of the applicant is directly affected by this request. The driveway to their detached garage lies along the applicant's eastern property line. The proposed variance would make this driveway unsafe. In a previous board of zoning appeals hearing in 2011, the Board's findings of fact call out the need to "retain visibility for traffic and pedestrians" and effectively outlines the intent to require that the applicant maintain proper sight lines around the fence proposed at that time. While the City's zoning ordinance has reduced the required setback to 10ft, a new variance to allow the fence to move any closer to the sidewalk would overrule a prior Board of Zoning Appeals finding and also would likely impact the marketable value of the neighboring property in a future sale.

Hofert added additional context regarding stopping distances on the sidewalk in relation to the neighbor's garage and driveway. She explained that the average stopping distance for a bicycle at 15 mph is 15 feet. She showed a photo demonstrating how the current location of the fence impedes a biker's ability to see a car backing out of the neighbor's driveway, which could create an unsafe situation. She also showed a photo demonstrating the driver's visible impediment of the sidewalk if they were backing out of the driveway.

4. That the condition or situation of a specific piece of property, or the intended use of said property, for which the variance is sought is not of so general or recurrent a nature as to make reasonably practicable the formulation of a general regulation for such condition or situation because:

The condition for which this variance is sought is general and recurrent in nature, and relief should be sought through an ordinance amendment. As mentioned above, it is commonplace for homes in residential districts to have sidewalks running adjacent to their homes. In a text amendment that was approved by City Council on July 7, 2025, the zoning ordinance was

revised to remove the requirement for fences to adhere to the building setbacks in residential zoning districts. The intention was to allow 6-foot fences to be placed in line with the front face of houses in front yards, and 10 feet from the sidewalk in all secondary front yards. These changes were prompted by repeated requests from residents and previous variance applications, such as the one sought in 2011 for this property.

As this is a general and recurring issue for any property owner wishing to install a 6-foot fence close than 10 feet from the secondary front yard property line, the granting of a variance to this single property is not the proper procedure. The conditions affecting this property are so commonplace that the requested relief is actually a policy decision, rather than a quasi-judicial decision. If the intention is to exempt all properties from adhering to the 10-foot minimum setback for fences over 36 inches in height in secondary front yards, then that is a policy decision best addressed through a text amendment approved by Planning Commission and City Council.

In summary, Hofert revisited each of the four criteria and noted that each recommended denial, and therefore the City recommended denial of the variance request.

Chair VanderSluis stated that the two variance requests would be combined for the purpose of discussion and motion.

The property owner Philpott commented that even if he were to move his fence, the shrubbery located by the neighbor's driveway is already impeding the sightline from the sidewalk to the garage.

A motion was made by Richter, supported by Tobian to deny the variance request based on the City staff's Findings of Fact.

The Chair invited the discussion of the variance request.

Burrill had multiple questions for staff. He asked who the owner of the property at the time the previous variance was granted in 2011. Hofert stated that the current owner was owner at that time. Burrill also questioned if a berm could be built to allow for the additional height of the fence to go unchanged. Hofert explained that the code is specific about how the measurement is made and takes into consideration the surrounding grade. She advised that the board could allow for a variation of that process but cautioned that it would not fall in line with the code and could create an unintended precedent.

Richter commented that, when completing his site visit of the property, he was very concerned about the neighbor's driveway on Oakcrest. In addition to the visibility issues highlighted by staff of bicyclists traveling down the sidewalk, he also spoke about the potential visibility issues a car might experience driving down Oakcrest if someone were backing out of the driveway located next to the fence. Richter added that the applicant can still move the fence to be in compliance with the code and keep his backyard fenced in. He stated that his comments support a denial of the variance.

Dishaw agreed with the staff Findings of Facts and reiterated that this is a policy question as opposed to an appeals process. He asked if the board members could have access to any studies conducted by the City that supported the policy decision to modify the side yead set back rule. He stated his personal opinion that the 10-foot set back requirement was onerous. Dishaw questioned how the City handles non-conforming properties, specifically those that do not meet the code fence standards.

A vote on the motion carried unanimously. The variance was denied for the reasons stated in the Findings of Fact.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair VanderSluis opened and closed the public comment.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

VanderSluis opened the floor for the election of officers to the position of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

Burrill nominated VanderSluis for the position of Chair. Richter supported. VanderSluis commented that he would accept the position if elected. No other nominations were made. A vote on the motion carried unanimously.

VanderSluis nominated Burrill for the position of Vice Chair due to his experience. Tobian supported. No other nominations were made. A vote on the motion carried unanimously.

Dishaw nominated Richter for the position of Secretary. Burrill supported. A vote on the motion carried unanimously.

Chair VanderSluis welcomed the new members Bovard Strong and Dishaw to the board.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

There were no informational items.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 1:53 PM.

Russel Richter, Secretary Board of Zoning Appeals

Kathleen Ortlieb, Recording Secretary Board of Zoning Appeals

WYOMING ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

AGENDA ITEM

NO. 1

BZA MEETING DATE: October 6, 2025

APPLICATION NUMBER: PZV2025-0003

APPLICANT: Gene Fitzgerald

LOCATION: 4300 52nd ST SW, Parcel Number 41-17-31-201-006

- I. Application Materials
 - a. Application
 - b. Narrative
 - c. Boundary Survey
- II. Findings of Fact



1155 28th Street SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 616 530.7285 | wyomingmi.gov

BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS - APPLICATION FOR REVIEW

Please contact the City Planner at 616-530-7285 or email <u>plan_info@wyomingmi.gov</u> if you have any questions. Applicants are encouraged to discuss the proposal with the City Planner prior to submitting to facilitate the review process. Please note that applications will not proceed for review until all required information and fees are provided.

Type of Variance Requested: Use	e Variance Mon-Use Variance					
Zoning Ordinance Section(s) Appealed: 96-	BIT ANTAL IDE					
Request for variance to reduce lot size of 4300 52nd Street to approximately 0.93 acres as the surrounding properties have maximum of 1.001026 acres with 10 of Twelve Parcels on the south side of 52nd under 1 acre, see attachment for lot sizes.						
Address of Variance: 4300 52nd SW Wyoming	MI 49418					
Parcel Number: 41-17-31-201-006						
Authorization for City staff and BZA members to 6	enter the property for evaluation: Yes No					
Applicant: Gene Fitzgerald	Property Owner: Eugene Lynn Fitzgerald					
Address: 5010 Wilson Ave SW	Address: 4280 52nd SW					
Wyoming MI 49418	Wyoming MI 49418					
Phone: 616-291-3480	Phone: 616-204-3481					
Email: refitz4u@gmail.com	Email:					
Date: 09/02/2025	Date: <u>09/02/2025</u>					
Signature: gene-Fitzgorald gene-Fitzg	Signature:					
No	n-Use Variance: 1 & 2 Family Uses \$275.00 n-Use Variance: All Other Uses \$525.00 e Variance: All Uses \$525.00					
	Total \$275.00					

Lot sizes between Canal and Wilson Ave SW Wyoming MI South side of 52nd

Estate Residential Zoning 200 ft frontage and 2 acres

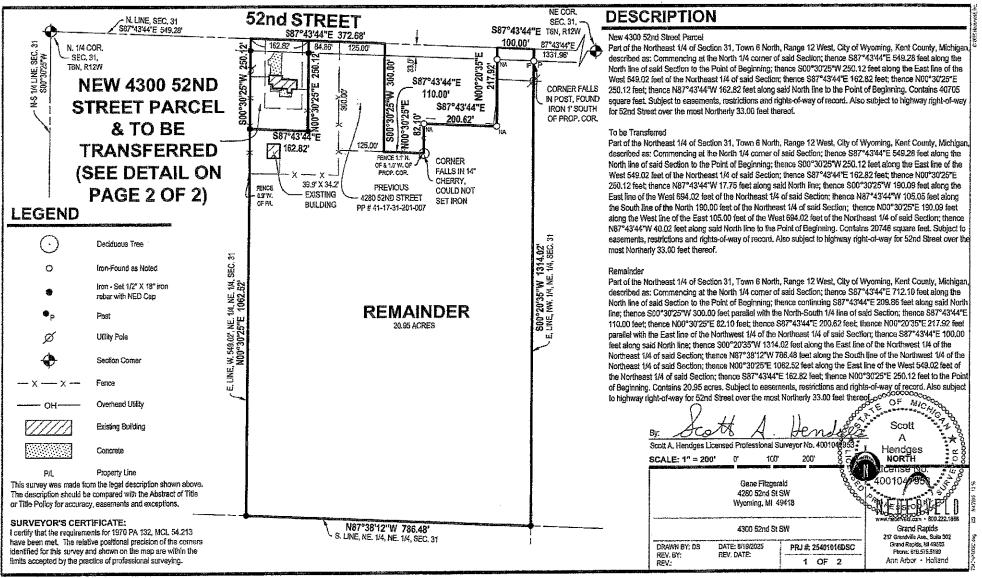
Address	Lot size	Road Frontage
4336	0.768598	100
4340	0.82499	110
4280	0.766583	124
4260	0.674565	110
4224	0.84656	200
4190	1.0000692	210
4150	1.001026	210
4130	0.546214	113
4120	0.74797	156
4080	0.719206	15/

- a. NONE of these meet the Estate Residential requirements but one (4300 52nd) We are only requesting a variance for similar like kind lot size at 4300 52nd. None above meet the 2 acre requirement and only 2 have the required frontage for estate residential
- b. To be like kind property in the neighborhood and have similar yard and space as existing homes surrounding $4300\,52^{\rm nd}$ SW Wyoming
- c. The proposed lot size will remain larger then all but two properties on the south side of the street between canal and Wilson and will also have more frontage then almost all on the street, so this would be in keeping the home sites in a like kind fashion.
- d. This is a very specific variance adjusting lot lines for a smaller like kind lot and has nothing at all to do with creating a general or recurrent nature to do the same

Lot sizes between Canal and Wilsom Ave SW Wyoming MI North side of $52^{\rm nd}$

None of these are zoned Estate Residential but are directly across street and are all considerably smaller lot sizes then the requested zoning variance for 4300 52nd.

4341	0.415642	roal Frontage
4321	0.275601	80
4305	0.310019	90
4283	0.320019	90
4277	0,292796	85
4265	0.275567	90
4253	0.275594	81
4241	0.306584	90
4221	0.28748	83
4211	0.297482	83



Application No.:	PZV2025-0003	STAFF RECOMMENDATION		
Applicant:	Gene Fitzgerald	Approve:	X	
Address:	4300 52 nd Steet SW	Deny:		

FINDINGS OF FACT SHEET

1. That there are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property or to the intended use that do not apply generally to other property or class of use in the same vicinity and district because:

This property is not exceptional in its size, location, or shape. The subject parcel is 10 times larger than the minimum parcel size in the Estate Residential zone district. The parcel is not significantly impacted by areas of high slope or wetlands and it has sufficient access to the public road and utilities.

The applicant seeks this variance based on an accepted purchase agreement for a substandard parcel. It is common for Estate Residential property owners to request permission to split their lots to create substandard parcels, especially in the current real estate market where demand for housing is high. The applicant's decision to market a substandard parcel without completing a lot split nor the applicant's financial interest in that sale are not exceptional or extraordinary.

The majority of the parcels in this section of 52nd Street were created as R-1 parcels (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage) and there are only three conforming Estate Residential parcels (i.e., 2 acres minimum lot size and 150 feet of frontage) in this area: a public school, a house of worship, and the applicant's parcel. As the final under-developed Estate Residential parcel in the area, the applicant's parcel is exceptional.

2. That such variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of substantial property rights because:

The zoning code provides two methods of splitting these parcels. If they are of sufficient size, as the applicants is, they can be split into multiple conforming Estate Residential parcels (i.e., 2 acres minimum lot size and 150 feet of frontage). They may also be platted to R-1 standards (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage). The fact that the applicant already accepted a purchase agreement for a portion of the property that would create a substandard parcel does not create an expectation that a variance be granted. The applicant was already aware of the dimensional standards for Estate Residential, as evidenced by his prior applications for variances, and chose to market a substandard parcel for sale.

The applicant points to a history of variances in this area for Estate Residential parcels and correctly identifies that a number of nearby Estate Residential parcels are substandard. However, of the Estate Residential parcels along 52nd Street between Canal Avenue and Quest Drive, all but three substandard parcels were created as R-1 parcels (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage). Two of the three substandard parcels were created in a single lot split via a variance, which was granted because they were surrounded by parcels created at R-1 standards. The third substandard parcel was created via a variance at the applicant's request and the understanding was that the remainder of the parcel would be developed in the future—most likely platted to R-1 standards—thereby creating the same conditions as the other variance.

The majority of the parcels in this section of 52nd Street were created as R-1 parcels (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage). There are three conforming Estate Residential parcels (i.e., 2 acres minimum lot size and 150 feet of frontage) in this area: a public school, a house of worship, and the applicant's parcel. The applicant's parcel has two frontages along 52nd Street, both of which meet the Estate Residential standard. There is an existing home at the western frontage that can comfortably be split into a parcel of approximately 0.93 acres. At various times, the applicant has proposed platting this large Estate Residential parcel, which would result in a neighborhood of R-1 parcels (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage). The proposed 0.93 acre parcel is similar to the other parcels fronting 52nd Street, but would be much larger than the parcels in a platted neighborhood. Splitting the parcel allows for the value of this proposed parcel to be preserved and for the most efficient creation of a platted neighborhood.

3. That the granting of such variance will not diminish the marketable value of adjacent land and improvements, or unduly increase congestion in the public streets because:

The proposed variance will not diminish the marketable value of adjacent land and improvements, and its impact on traffic congestion will be minimal. The proposed parcel is similar to the other parcels fronting 52nd Street and splitting the parcel will not create additional vehicle trips or on-street parking at this time.

4. That the condition or situation of a specific piece of property, or the intended use of said property, for which the variance is sought is not of so general or recurrent a nature as to make reasonably practicable the formulation of a general regulation for such condition or situation because:

As mentioned above, it is commonplace for owners of Estate Residential parcels to seek permission to create substandard lots. The sale of these lots can be lucrative. The zoning code provides two methods of splitting these parcels. If they are of sufficient size, as the applicant's is, they can be split into multiple conforming Estate Residential parcels (i.e., 2 acres minimum lot size and 150 feet of frontage). They may also be platted to R-1 standards (i.e., 10,000 square foot minimum lot size and 75 feet of frontage).

While this type of request may be commonplace, the applicant's situation is not. In the section of 52nd Street that is west of Wilson Avenue, the majority of the parcels fronting 52nd Street were created as R-1 parcels and rezoned to Estate Residential in the late 1980s. Plats on either side of 52nd Street further increased the prevalence of R-1 parcels in this area. There are three conforming Estate Residential parcels in this area: a public school, a house of worship, and the applicant's parcel. The applicant's parcel is the last parcel in this area that could be split, the applicant's parcel is large enough to be platted to a significant number of family homes, and the applicant's parcel could not be split again without impacting its ability to be platted efficiently. This combination of factors is unlikely to recur and could not be generalized for the remaining Estate Residential parcels in the City of Wyoming.