



**Variance Board Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers, 2660 Civic Center Drive
Minutes – Wednesday, March 4, 2026 – 5:30 p.m.**

1. Call to Order

Chair Aspnes called to order the regular meeting of the Variance Board meeting at approximately 5:30 p.m. and reviewed the role and purpose of the Variance Board.

2. Roll Call & Introductions

At the request of Chair Aspnes, City Planner Thomas Paschke called the Roll.

Members Present: Chair Aspnes, Vice Chair Barstad, and Member Campbell Jensen (Remote)

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Planner Thomas Paschke, Community Development Director, and Janice Gundlach

3. Approval of Agenda

MOTION

Member Barstad moved, seconded by Member Campbell Jensen, to approve the agenda as presented.

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

4. Review of Minutes: January 7, 2026

MOTION

Chair Aspnes noted she previously communicated a minor change to staff regarding the minutes. She indicated the change was on page 2, line 87, and the changes have been made.

Member Barstad moved, seconded by Member Campbell Jensen, to approve the January 7, 2026, meeting minutes.

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

Chair Aspnes noted that the meeting was the final one for member Barsted and expressed the board's appreciation for his service. She commended his conscientious work and the

detailed attention he brought to reviewing matters before the variance board during his tenure.

Member Barstad thanked Chair Aspnes for the kind words.

Chair Aspnes also mentioned that Commissioner McGehee had been serving as the board's alternate, and the board would be losing member McGehee as well, since her term had expired. She said the board would need to find both a member and an alternate.

Chair Aspnes appreciated McGehee's institutional knowledge and thoughtful questions during meetings, noting that her contributions would be greatly missed.

5. Public Hearing

Chair Aspnes reviewed the protocol for Public Hearings and public comment and opened the Public Hearing at approximately 5:34 p.m.

Member Barstad stated that before the discussion began, he wanted to disclose a prior professional relationship with Ben Kirschnuck at Hempel Real Estate. He explained that during this evaluation of the development proposal, they had previously worked together, but said the relationship would not impact his vote or responsibilities while serving in his role for the City of Roseville.

a. PLANNING FILE 25-016

Consider a Request by Hempel Real Estate to Allow a Proposed Building to Occupy Less of the Required Street Frontage Required by Section 1006.01.E3 (Frontage Requirement) of the City Code at 2700 Snelling Avenue (PF25-016)

City Planner Thomas Paschke reviewed the variance request for this property, as detailed in the staff report dated March 4, 2026.

City Planner Paschke presented a request from Hempel Real Estate for a variance to the city's frontage requirements for a property located at 2700 Snelling Avenue in the employment district. He explained that the site previously contained a building and parking structure that had since been demolished, leaving the parcel vacant. Hempel Real Estate is now working with a client to plan the construction of a medical office and research facility on the property.

Mr. Paschke noted that the proposal had been pulled from a previous agenda so the applicant could revise the project, and the updated plan now includes a larger, two-story building that increases the overall square footage compared to the earlier concept.

Mr. Paschke described the proposed building location as generally centered between the two existing access points on the east and west sides of the property to minimize major access changes and maintain sufficient space for parking and circulation. He explained that the variance request concerns the city's frontage requirements, which typically require a building to occupy a certain percentage of the lot's street frontage based on the setback distance. For the largest setback of 85 feet, the ordinance

requires a building to occupy 70 percent of the frontage along the street. The applicant's proposal would instead occupy about 40 percent of the frontage along the Snelling Avenue frontage road.

Mr. Paschke said staff reviewed the request using the five required variance criteria and determined that practical difficulties and unique circumstances associated with the redevelopment of the vacant site supported granting the variance. Based on that analysis, staff recommended that the variance board approve the request to allow the building to occupy approximately 40 percent of the frontage rather than the required 70 percent. He concluded the presentation and opened the floor for questions.

Member Barstad asked City Planner Paschke about the purpose of the code requirement that buildings occupy 70 percent of the frontage when using the largest setback. He said he was curious about the reasoning behind that limitation and about the original intent of the ordinance provision.

Mr. Paschke explained that the 70 percent frontage requirement intended to encourage buildings to be located closer to the street to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment and maintain a human-scale streetscape, with parking typically located to the sides or rear. He said the requirement was part of broader code updates adopted around 2010 that aimed to bring buildings forward along street frontages.

Mr. Paschke noted that variance requests for this requirement have occurred before, particularly in redevelopment projects where the specific design, operational needs, or site layout make full compliance difficult. He explained that staff must evaluate these situations within the ordinance standards while recognizing that developers and future users often have functional design needs that influence building placement.

Member Barstad asked whether the frontage requirement was related to life safety considerations, such as access for emergency vehicles or similar operational needs.

Mr. Paschke confirmed that the frontage requirement was not related to life safety or emergency vehicle access. He explained that the site has adequate access, with two existing entrances and circulation around the property, ensuring sufficient access to the building and site regardless of the variance.

Chair Aspnes stated that while the proposal did not initially appear unreasonable, she had questions regarding whether the variance met the required criteria, particularly the requirement to demonstrate unique circumstances for the property. She said she was uncertain which specific site conditions prevented the building from being positioned to comply with the frontage requirement, noting that the building orientation might be changed and that the existing shared driveway did not seem insurmountable.

Chair Aspnes invited the applicant to come forward and address the question regarding what unique circumstances justified the variance request.

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Mr. Josh McKinney of Measure Group, a civil and landscape architecture firm assisting Hempel Real Estate, explained that several site constraints necessitated the variance. He noted that the eastern access point is a shared driveway with an adjacent medical office building and is governed by an access easement that provides the only full access to that neighboring property. He also said the site's irregular shape near the frontage and engineering considerations limited flexibility in building placement.

Mr. McKinney explained that the project team aimed to align the site's access with the access point across the street, which further restricted how far east or west the building and driveway could be moved. Additionally, he described a topographical challenge near the eastern access where the adjacent parking lot sits about five feet higher than the access point, making relocation more difficult from an engineering standpoint.

Mr. McKinney said the design team explored numerous site plan configurations, including rotating the building and placing it deeper on the lot. Still, that option would have required an even larger setback variance than the one currently requested. He concluded by noting that the team had evaluated many layout options and was willing to answer additional questions. He also stated that he was open to discussing the project further with residents after the meeting and welcomed feedback as the plans continued to evolve.

Chair Aspnes thanked the applicant for the explanation and noted that residents attending the meeting would have an opportunity to speak later. She then asked a follow-up question regarding the site access, stating that she was familiar with the neighboring building that shares the easement. Aspnes said she did not fully understand why the access drive curved as shown on the plan and asked why it could not instead run straight into the site.

Mr. McKinney explained that the curved access drive was influenced by topography and grading needs, noting that a longer approach was necessary to reach the proper elevation for the building and to avoid retaining walls along the north side near the lake. He added that the existing access configuration was more complicated than the proposed plan and that the new plan would improve circulation compared to the current layout.

Mr. McKinney said the design also aimed to better separate the parking areas for the new facility and the neighboring property while still accommodating shared access and existing parking rights, and to make the entrance safer and clearer for vehicles entering the site.

Chair Aspnes noted that the shared access point currently functions as an exit-only driveway for the adjacent medical building and sought confirmation of that understanding.

Mr. McKinney responded that the access easement does not specifically designate the driveway as exit-only and instead establishes access rights for the property.

Chair Aspnes noted that the current driveway configuration appears steep and serves as exit-only access to the adjacent medical building. She said that if the proposed plan changes how access is used, it would likely require modifications to the existing configuration.

Mr. McKinney clarified that the driveway currently allows right-in access at the lower entrance, while the adjacent medical building typically uses the eastbound entrance as an exit. However, he explained that the easement language itself does not formally designate the driveway as exit-only, meaning the current use is more of a practical arrangement rather than a restriction required by the legal access agreement.

Chair Aspnes asked whether the proposed building would be farther from the pond to the north than the previous NCR building on the site.

Mr. McKinney confirmed that the proposed building would be set back significantly farther from the pond than the previous NCR building that had occupied the site. He explained that portions of the former structure and its parking facility had been relocated closer to the pond than the new building would be.

Mr. McKinney also noted that the project design includes enhanced landscaping along the property frontage, replacement of the existing sidewalk, and additional pedestrian walkway and landscape treatments near the access point. He added that landscaping and site features, including a pond between the project and nearby residential areas, were intended to help reduce visual and use impacts compared with the former development on the site.

Member Campbell Jensen asked about the mention of retaining walls between the proposed building and the lake. She questioned whether the retaining walls were primarily for aesthetic purposes or necessary for structural or engineering reasons, such as stabilizing the slope and preventing the building area from shifting toward the lake.

Mr. McKinney clarified that the project was designed specifically to avoid retaining walls between the parking lot and the lake. He explained that the building placement helped eliminate the need for those structures. Instead, the plan proposes using native grasses and landscaping along the lake edge to help control soil erosion while also creating a natural landscape feature.

Mr. McKinney added that retaining walls were avoided because they increase project costs, require long-term maintenance, and are generally not aesthetically desirable.

Member Barstad noted that the proposed landscaping and selective ground covers would serve as an alternative to retaining walls while still allowing the site to achieve the necessary grading and drainage.

Chair Aspnes asked if anyone from the public would like to speak on this matter.

Ms. Sue Garrett, 1480 Applewood Court, Unit 401

Ms. Garrett thanked the city for notifying residents of the nearby senior building about the proposal. She explained that the pond north of their building is an important amenity for residents because it offers a scenic place to walk and observe wildlife, particularly in the warmer months. She noted that the developer had also referenced the pond as a potential amenity for employees who would work in the proposed building, as it was used when the previous office building occupied the site. Speaking on behalf of the Marketing Committee for Applewood Pointe of Roseville, she encouraged the board to support the variance request as the project moves forward to the Planning Commission and City Council for further consideration.

Mr. Dale Peterson, a resident of Applewood Pointe in Roseville

Mr. Peterson asked about environmental safeguards related to the proposed medical office and research facility. He said he supports responsible management of pesticides and other potentially harmful substances and wanted to know whether city regulations or other oversight mechanisms exist to ensure that chemicals and toxic materials associated with laboratory activities are carefully monitored and managed to protect the surrounding land, water, and environment.

Mr. Vernon Cardwell, 1480 Applewood Court, Unit 118

Mr. Cardwell stated that his residence faces the pond near the proposed development and that residents are concerned about potential impacts to the pond and the surrounding area. He asked about stormwater management plans, particularly how runoff from the expanded parking and other hard surface areas would be handled before reaching the pond, noting that the pond was originally designed to manage runoff from the surrounding area.

Mr. Cardwell also asked about landscaping plans along the north side of the proposed building near the pond, since most of the landscaping described appeared to focus on the street frontage. In addition, he inquired about whether employees of the proposed building would have access to the existing walking path around the pond, which had previously been used by workers at the former office building on the site.

Mr. Craig Allen, a resident of Applewood Pointe in Roseville

Mr. Allen raised additional questions regarding the proposed development's potential impact on the nearby pond and the surrounding area. He asked whether appropriate stormwater drainage and runoff management systems would be included in the project design to ensure that increased hard surfaces do not negatively affect the pond. He also noted that the pond's water level had appeared low after the previous building was demolished and wondered whether water flow controls or drainage valves might be affecting it.

Mr. Allen asked whether a shoreline impact study would be conducted to evaluate potential environmental effects. In addition, he questioned whether the development could affect overall tax revenue for the area and whether the project would limit the possibility of additional parcels or future development on the site.

Chair Aspnes asked if anyone else wished to speak. No one else wished to address the Board. She asked Mr. Paschke to help answer the residents' questions.

City Planner Paschke explained that if the variance were granted, the project would proceed through additional technical review processes before construction could begin. He said the project's engineers already have preliminary plans and would need to submit final plans to both the city and the watershed district for approval. The watershed district reviews stormwater management to ensure runoff is properly treated, slowed, and managed so it does not negatively impact surrounding areas or the nearby pond. He added that the project must also meet city stormwater requirements and receive permits before construction could proceed.

Mr. Paschke noted that the previous development on the site had a greater impervious surface area than the proposed project, and that the new design would include slightly more green or permeable space. He also explained that city staff would review additional elements during the permitting process, including building code compliance, landscaping, screening of parking areas from nearby residential properties, and architectural design standards. He emphasized that the current board's decision only concerned the requested frontage variance, since the project itself is permitted use under the zoning ordinance and does not require Planning Commission or City Council approval for the building design.

In response to questions about chemicals or laboratory materials, Mr. Paschke said state agencies regulate those matters. He explained that any handling of chemicals or hazardous materials by the future tenant would be subject to state regulations and oversight rather than city or county regulations.

Member Barstad asked for clarification about the broader review process for the development, noting that multiple city departments are typically involved. He said his understanding was that Community Development reviews zoning and building-related matters, while Public Works and engineering staff handle infrastructure and water management issues in coordination with the watershed district. He asked whether there would be another hearing involving Public Works or if those reviews would occur administratively as part of the project's approval process.

Mr. Paschke explained that the variance board hearing is the only formal public review required for this project because the variance concerns the building's placement. He said all other aspects of the development are reviewed administratively by city staff once the complete set of plans is submitted. Different departments evaluate their respective areas, including fire safety, building inspections and permitting, engineering and environmental review for stormwater and site access, and planning staff review for zoning and design standards. After those reviews and any required revisions are completed, permits may be issued allowing construction to begin.

Member Barstad asked whether the proposed development would include an evaluation of how the site connects to or affects the nearby trail, noting that the project appears to be located directly adjacent to the path and questioning how access and usage might be incorporated into the plans.

Mr. Paschke stated that access from the development site to the existing trail would likely be reviewed as part of the project's overall plan review process. He indicated that the evaluation would probably be handled by the city's engineering department or possibly the parks department, noting that those departments often coordinate on such matters to ensure proper trail access and connections are incorporated into the project.

Member Barstad noted that previous development in the area had included a shoreline evaluation addressing potential impacts, which involved review by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). He suggested that a similar shoreline review might also apply to the current project.

Mr. Paschke clarified that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources would not be involved in reviewing this project. He explained that shoreline and stormwater-related requirements are addressed through the city's environmental review process and local ordinance standards. City staff will review the project to ensure it meets required setbacks, stormwater management standards, and other applicable city code provisions.

Chair Aspnes stated that if the building could be positioned to meet the required frontage and setback standards, the project would not require a variance, and the board would not review the proposal.

Mr. Paschke explained that the board's discussion was limited to the variance request being considered that evening. He noted that while other project details can provide helpful context about the redevelopment and the reasons for the variance, the board's role is only to evaluate the specific variance request and not the broader aspects of the development.

Chair Aspnes noted that the applicant would still be required to go through the city's normal review and permitting processes for the project, including addressing stormwater management, pond impacts, and other development requirements through the standard administrative procedures.

Mr. Paschke confirmed that the applicant would likely meet with city staff several times to review project details before submitting formal plans. He noted that these pre-submittal discussions are part of the standard development review process.

Chair Aspnes thanked residents for attending and providing input, noting that concerns about maintaining the pond's quality were important not only for nearby residents but also for future building employees and the broader community. She said the board appreciated hearing those perspectives and indicated that the questions

raised had largely been addressed, then asked whether there were any additional questions or comments from those present.

Mr. Allen asked whether the remaining portion of the property could be sold or developed as a separate parcel in the future, and whether that possibility could affect tax revenue or the site's future development.

Mr. Paschke asked which parcel Mr. Allen was referring to.

Mr. Allen asked whether the developer was purchasing less than half of the overall parcel. He questioned whether the remaining portion of the property would remain available for future sale or development.

Mr. Paschke clarified that the developer owns the entire parcel and that the full property will be used as part of the proposed development.

Chair Aspnes closed the public hearing at 6:14 p.m.

MOTION

Member Barstad moved, seconded by Member Campbell Jensen, Adoption of Resolution No. 177 (Attachment 5), entitled “A Resolution Approving a Variance to the Frontage Requirement in §1006.04.E.3 for 2700 Snelling Avenue (PF25-016).

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

6. Adjourn

MOTION

Member Campbell Jensen, seconded by Member Barstad, to adjourn the meeting at 6:17 p.m.

Ayes: 3

Nays: 0

Motion carried.