

Altoona Board of Adjustment Hearing – March 1, 2016 – 6:30 PM

Altoona City Hall

Members Present – Dale Sikes, John Rullman, Mary Simon, Robert Hall

Members absent – Leah Morris

Staff Present – John Shaw, Chad Quick, Susi Hoots

Others Present – Eric Cannon, Seth Sunderman

Chairman Rullman called hearing to order at 6:33 p.m.

#1 Consider a request for variance from Edge Business Continuity Center, LLC for property at 1401 Northridge Circle Ne, Altoona, Iowa. The request is to place a screen wall and mechanical equipment in the front yard setback. Chapter 165.02 Definitions says that front yards shall be unoccupied and unobstructed from the ground upward except as may be permitted elsewhere in the Zoning Code. The property is zoned M-1 (Limited Industrial).

#2. Consider a request for variance from Edge business Continuity Center, LLC for property at 1401 Northridge circle NE, Altoona, Iowa. The request is to reduce the front yard setback from 50 feet to 24 feet, a variance of 26 feet, to allow the screen wall and mechanical equipment. The property is zoned M-1 (Limited Industrial).

Eric Cannon, Snyder & Associates, 2727 SW Snyder Boulevard, Ankeny, Iowa, presented the requests for variances by explaining they worked with staff on the proposed site plan for this disaster recovery disaster-proof building. One building referred to as Phase 1 Building 2 is to be built now and another referred to as Phase 2 Building 2 is to be built in the future. There is a parking lot on the north side of the building for trailers in the event of a natural disaster and for electrical equipment. On the south side of the building will be mechanical equipment, chillers, etc. The site plan was vetted for alternatives and none was found.

Rullman asked how many of these facilities exist across the country. Cannon responded that there are many across the nation but that Edge is a local company.

Quick commented that the first Edge building was originally designed to house servers in one-half of the building and seating/office in the other half. It was subsequently changed to house only servers and the seating/office was moved to trailers in the parking lot.

Simon noted businesses of this type become more important as technology moves forward.

Rullman commented on the large amount of equipment necessary for a business of this type.

Cannon stated there were setback issues at the site. Two lots were re-platted into one lot to address rear setbacks. The disaster ratings for an E-4 tornado-proof building dictate: the proximity of one building to another, no mechanicals on the roof as they would be lost in such a storm, mechanicals and electrical equipment cannot be next to each other. No other area is available and the south side of the building is the best place for the mechanical equipment. The proposed wall will look the same as the building. There are roads on three sides, meaning “front yards” on three sides of the lot. The building will be 50 feet from the street, meeting the spirit and intent of the zoning code. There will be landscape screening, it lies in an industrial area, and there are no residential neighbors.

Sikes asked Cannon to state the hardship that would allow the granting of a variance.

Cannon said the request is not above and beyond what is normally done and the hardship is as he has explained. Sikes explained that nothing has changed since the property was purchased; that wanting a larger building or wanting a wall do not meet the definition of a hardship.

Shaw reminded the Board that there are two variance issues to be addressed. Sikes said he did not think item 1 would be problem if the proper setback were achieved.

Cannon said nothing can be changed from a building standpoint as they are forced to use this equipment, but can't place it on top due to the use of the building and the size of the building is based upon the use.

Board Members mentioned that the proposed building must be bigger than the owners thought they needed when the land was purchased almost ten years ago. If the building were reduced in size by 10 percent, it could meet all zoning and all the property could be used. It was acknowledged this is a growing industry. The lot is in an industrial area location but Adventureland Drive is proposed to be a future five-lane traffic corridor. Most houses have setbacks of 30 – 35 feet, businesses have 50 foot setbacks.

Cannon said the variances were brought to the Board of Adjustment at Staff's recommendation before the project has been submitted to Planning and Zoning. Cannon mentioned that the nine-foot-tall wall will be poured concrete. The wall will screen the mechanical equipment. Cannon asked if a different type of screening would be preferable.

Shaw said that the concrete wall is tall in order to screen the large equipment and also to buffer noise. Sikes pointed out the wall is 260 feet long.

Hall mentioned that the site elevation dips. Cannon said the proposed building will be at the same elevation as the existing building and that the grade falls off from there.

Board Members mentioned several ways to re-configure the site plan and/or size of building to comply with front yard setbacks. Cannon said his understanding is that no re-configuration of any kind can be done; he is not the mechanical engineer and does not know all the particulars. Cannon noted some mentioned changes would still require a variance of the rear setback.

Discussion ensued on the process to table and hear at the next monthly meeting. The site plan could possibly go before Planning and Zoning March 29th, come back to Board of Adjustment April 5th, and to City Council April 18th.

Cannon said the site has been looked at round and round and he does not know why the electric equipment and mechanical equipment has to be where it is, but believes it does. Cannon noted the matter has been talked through with Staff and left with Staff that this is the best option and that is the reason for the variance requests. Members asked that more information be provided as to the possibility of relocating proposed equipment to the east side of the building and other re-configurations, size changes, etc., discussed earlier.

Sikes moved to table the variance requests pending more information. Seconded by Hall. Votes: Yes – Sikes, Hall, Simon, Rullman. No – None.

#3 Simon moved to approve the minutes of the January 5, 2016 meeting as presented. Seconded by Sikes. Vote: Yes – Simon, Sikes, Rullman. Pass – Hall. No – None.

#4. Next meeting/hearing will be Tuesday, April 5, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. if needed.

Hearing Adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susi Hoots
Community Development Administrative Coordinator