

MINUTES  
CITY OF DEKALB  
**PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**  
June 2, 2025

The Planning and Zoning Commission held a meeting on June 2, 2025, in the Yusunas Meeting Room at the DeKalb Public Library, 309 Oak Street, DeKalb, Illinois. Vice Chair McMahon called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

A. ROLL CALL

Recording Secretary, Olivia Doss, called the roll. Planning and Zoning Commission members present were: Vice Chair Bill McMahon, Trixy O'Flaherty, Maria Pena-Graham and Jerry Wright. Commission member Chair Max Maxwell and Commissioner Steve Becker were absent. Planning Director Dan Olson was present representing the City.

B. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (Additions/Deletions)

Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to approve the June 2, 2025, agenda as presented. Ms. O'Flaherty motioned to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Wright seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. May 19, 2025 – Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to approve the May 19, 2025, minutes as presented. Mr. Wright motioned to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Pena-Graham seconded the motion, and the motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

D. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Open Floor to Anyone Wishing to Speak on Record)

None.

E. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Public Hearing** – A petition by the DeKalb CUSD #428 to amend the Special Use Permit approved by Ordinance #2023-021 to extend the time frame for a modular classroom to remain at Littlejohn Elementary School located at 1133 N. 13<sup>th</sup> St. for three (3) more years.

Tammy Carson, Director of Facilities and Safety Operations, spoke on behalf of DeKalb CUSD #428. Ms. Carson explained a modular classroom is currently present at Littlejohn Elementary. It is a two-unit classroom that does not have a bathroom or vestibule. When the unit was first obtained, a unit with a bathroom and/or vestibule was not available. Originally approved in 2017, the modular classroom has been extended until 2025. She added they hoped to have it removed once Mitchell Elementary School was built. However, Ms. Carson noted due to special programs they are planning to keep at Littlejohn Elementary, they will continue to need the modular classroom. She stated the elementary school accommodated 291 students last year and will have 263 in the upcoming school year. The goal for the District is to reduce class sizes. Ms. Carson pointed out that while they have been able to accomplish that, they still need the space provided by the modular classroom. The modular space provides additional room for a music classroom, support services and the STEAM program. She explained it is not utilized as a regular K-5 classroom, so students are only out there

for partial days, a day or two per week. She confirmed they have been able to reduce class sizes from 28 students to 25 students.

Ms. Carson stated the primary need for the modular classroom is the two-way dual language program they will be keeping at Littlejohn. Expanding on this, Ms. Carson stated there are only three schools in the district that have this program: Cortland Elementary, Founders Elementary and Littlejohn Elementary. Ms. Carson explained that to maintain this program, the elementary school must maintain three (3) classes in each grade.

Ms. Carson indicated a three (3) year lease term is typical for modular classrooms and they plan to revisit the matter in three (3) years to see if changes are needed throughout the District. She said the ultimate goal is to have modular classrooms removed from their school sites. She explained they will be removing the current unit and will be replacing it with a brand-new unit with bathrooms and a vestibule. In 2017, the unit purchased was a used unit, which was normal at the time.

Planning Director Dan Olson thanked Ms. Carson for her presentation and provided his background in the staff report dated May 29, 2025. He clarified the modular classroom was first approved and placed in 2001 and stayed until 2011. It was then approved again in 2017 with a three (3) year time limit approved to 2020. Mr. Olson said a three (3) year extension was approved in 2020 to 2023, and finally a two (2) year extension was approved to August 15, 2025. He affirmed the current unit will be replaced but will have the same dimensions, and include a bathroom and vestibule, as Ms. Carson stated. He added parking is adequate and will not change. Mr. Olson explained the modular classroom is subject to annual inspections by the Regional Office of Education.

Mr. Olson felt the request met the criteria in the UDO and the modular classroom has not been detrimental to the surrounding area. He mentioned although the hope is that it will be removed, the need is still there. Mr. Olson recommended approval of the amendment to the special use permit request per the sample motion in the staff report.

Mr. Olson stated a written comment was received from Jason Leverton, 1221 N. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, who was not in support of the extension. Mr. Leverton expressed concern regarding the length of time the temporary unit has been present, the lack of safety in extreme weather, and the inconvenience of staff and students going to and from the modular classroom. Mr. Leverton noted it was stated in the past that the new elementary school (Dr. Leroy Mitchell) will relieve overcrowding and make the modular classroom unnecessary. Mr. Olson pointed out an additional Public Response Form was received from Frederick and Lois Lathrop, 210 Oak Street, in support of the request.

Vice Chair McMahon opened the public hearing. No public comments were made, and the public hearing was closed.

Commission member O'Flaherty stated one of her questions was already addressed regarding whether the unit would be a new unit. She mentioned she had heard there were potential mold issues in the old unit and was hoping the unit would be replaced. Ms. O'Flaherty stated she had spoken with Mr. Leverton (1221 N. 13<sup>th</sup> Street) earlier that day. She is a little bit of the same mindset and is hoping to see a more permanent solution instead of using modular classrooms. Ms. O'Flaherty asked Ms. Carson if that was still planned. She added she does not have a problem with modular classrooms when they are temporary, but would hope if the need is still there, an addition to the building would be considered. Ms. Carson responded that while she could not get into all of the specifics, a resolution could come to fruition in the next three (3) years. She explained they will need to educate the new school board members on the options the administration has been discussing that would give them the opportunity to reduce class size within the building and/or potentially add space to Littlejohn or

another building. Ms. O'Flaherty added this school seems to need a flex space or multipurpose room whether it is always used or every 8-10 years, it seems like there is a need. Ms. Carson agreed it is definitely still part of the District's conversations.

Commission member Becker inquired how they will hook up to the sanitary district. Ms. Carson explained there is already a hook up on site that they will hook back into. It was used in 2011 when the unit at that time had a bathroom.

Commission member Wright questioned if this would be the first time the units have been swapped out. Ms. Carson admitted that in the 16 years she has been there, yes. She described how they have been swapped for different locations, but they have not purchased a new one to replace one of them. Mr. Wright inquired if the original thought was that Mitchell Elementary school would alleviate the need for the modular classroom. Ms. Carson detailed that it was part of the original discussion when Mithcell Elementary was first designed, and while it does reduce classroom count, the proposed modular classroom allows the two-way dual language program to remain at the school. She mentioned Littlejohn is in a neighborhood with mostly students walking to school and keeping the dual language program close to home helps eliminate the need for students to be bussed to other schools. Further, she reiterated that in order to keep the two-way dual language program, the school must maintain three (3) classrooms per grade, which would not be possible without the modular unit. Mr. Olson added there is a modular classroom at Brooks Elementary School that is being removed this summer.

Vice Chair McMahon asked for a motion to approve for the special use permit. Mr. Wright moved that based upon the submitted petition and testimony presented, I move that the Planning and Zoning Commission forward its findings of fact and recommend to the City Council approval of an amendment to Ordinance 2023-021 to extend the time frame for a modular classroom to be located at 1133 N. 13<sup>th</sup> St. (Littlejohn Elementary School) as shown on Exhibit A in the staff report, subject to the following condition:

1. The modular classroom may remain on the subject site in the location as shown on Exhibit A up to August 15, 2028 and shall, on or before said date, be removed from the property. At such time, the surface beneath the modular classroom shall be restored to a pre-installation, grassed condition.

A roll call vote was taken: O'Flaherty – yes, Wright – yes, McMahon – yes, Pena-Graham - yes. Commission member Chair Maxwell and Commissioner Becker were absent. The motion passed 4-0-2.

- b. **Public Hearing** – A petition by Michelle Erckfritz for approval of variances to the Unified Development Ordinance to allow a 6-foot-high privacy fence in a portion of the front yard along S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street for the property located at 626 Spring Avenue.

The applicant, Michelle Erckfritz explained the main reason for wanting a fence. She noted the fence would go up to the end of her driveway, and the fence was needed due to S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street being very busy with speeding drivers. She stated some drivers slow down to a crawling pace or circle around to see what she is doing.

Ms. Erckfritz stated while safety is her priority, she also knows her lot is narrower than other corner lots in the surrounding area. There is additional space between the house and the street, which is approximately 25ft, and she is only asking to go 14ft into the yard along S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. She explained

that her house does not have a back door, only a front door and side door. Therefore, if she installed the fence according to the ordinance, it would be a lot harder for her to get her elderly dog into the backyard. She stated installing the fence according to the ordinance would not allow her to enjoy her full yard, as she does not feel comfortable being out there due to people watching her. Her big concerns are safety and privacy. Ms. Erckfritz stated the fence will not disrupt the view from the corner (Spring Ave. and S. 7<sup>th</sup> St.) any more than having her car parked in the driveway. She added the fence will not be in the sight distance triangle and will not cause safety or traffic issues at the corner.

Planning Director Dan Olson thanked Ms. Erckfritz for her very good explanation. Mr. Olson went through his staff report dated May 29, 2025. He noted the petitioner, Ms. Erckfritz, is requesting a variance to Articles 7.06.3, 7.06.4.b and 7.06.6 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to allow a six (6) foot-high cedar privacy fence in a portion of the front yard along S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. He noted the UDO states that privacy fences cannot be over three (3) feet tall if they are in front of the front building line (home).

Mr. Olson described the fence will start on the south side of the asphalt driveway and stretch 14 feet into the front yard along S.7th St. The fence will then extend south to the south lot line and then to the southwest corner of the lot. The fence is not proposed to extend along the west property line because there is an existing chain link fence on the adjacent property to the west. He added the final portion of the fence will connect the southwest corner of the home with the west lot line.

He noted the applicant states they are making the request for the six (6) foot high privacy for safety and privacy reasons. The home is 25 feet from the right-of-way line along S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. and the proposed fence will go 14 feet into that yard. This leaves 11 feet of open space along S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. between the sidewalk and proposed fence. The lot is 57.19 feet wide and 140.92 feet in depth (8,059 sq. ft.), which results in a small area for a usable back yard and greatly limits the area where a six (6) foot high privacy fence could be placed. He continued, pointing out that the subject parcel has the narrowest width of any corner lot that abuts the west side of S. 7th St. between Taylor St. and Fairview Dr. The location where the petitioner can place a six (6) foot high privacy fence, under current City regulations, hinders their ability to enjoy the privacy and safety of their full yard.

Mr. Olson concluded, confirming the proposed fence will not impair the public health and safety, will not have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood and will not impede traffic or cause any safety issues. The fence will not be in the sight-distance triangle (25' from the intersection in both directions). He mentioned a plat of survey was provided in the background materials showing the proposed fence and the sight-distance triangle.

Three written public comments were received.

Katie Poole, 630 Karen Avenue, was in support of the variance. She inquired if the fence would impede the sight distance triangle. Mr. Olson talked to Ms. Poole about the sight triangle and assured her it would not be obstructed. Ms. Poole was agreeable to the variance.

James Hovis, CEO of Luxis International, Inc, and Lease Manager for DeKalb i88 Business Park, 1292 S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street, wrote in support of the variance. He feels the privacy fence is deserved and will not impact traffic safety.

James Duck, 1307 S. 7<sup>th</sup> Street, was in support of the variance, but expressed concerns about the fence being built correctly, since Ms. Erckfritz will be doing the work herself. Mr. Olson discussed the permit process with Mr. Duck, explaining Ms. Erckfritz will still need to follow City codes and have the fence inspected by City Building Inspectors. Mr. Duck's concerns were addressed.

Vice Chair McMahon opened the public hearing. No public comments were made, and the public hearing was closed.

The Commission praised Ms. Erckfritz for her very nice job presenting and agreed there is a hardship.

Mr. McMahon inquired if Ms. Erckfritz does plan to install the fence herself. Ms. Erckfritz explained she has co-workers who volunteered to come to help her.

Vice Chair McMahon asked for a motion to approve the variance. Ms. O'Flaherty moved that based on the submitted petition, testimony presented and findings of fact, I move the Planning and Zoning Commission approve a variance to Articles 7.06.3, 7.06.4.b and 7.06.6 of the Unified Development Ordinance to allow a 6-foot-high privacy fence in a portion of the front yard along S. 7<sup>th</sup> St. for the property located at 626 Spring Ave. as shown on Exhibit A of the staff report dated May 29, 2025.

A roll call vote was taken: O'Flaherty – yes, Wright – yes, McMahon – yes, Pena-Graham - yes. Commission member Chair Maxwell and Commissioner Becker were absent. The motion passed 4-0-2.

#### F. REPORTS

Mr. Olson stated the next meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup> will have a hearing on a corner lot fence variance at 2324 Monticello Drive. He added the fence is currently on the property but was put up prior to ordinance changes, and is now legal non-conforming.

He let the Commission know the City Council approved the Special Use Permit for Hopkins Pool at their last meeting. He also apprised them of an upcoming item that was discussed for consideration at the last Council regarding consumption of cannabis on dispensary property. This was brought to City Council's attention by Excelleaf (305 E. Locust St.), and the Council was generally in favor of the proposal. Mr. Olson said this item will be presented to the Commission as it will require a text amendment to the Unified Development Ordinance. He noted the City Council is looking to move it forward, and informed the Commission they should expect to see that item in July.

#### G. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair McMahon requested a motion to adjourn. Ms. Pena-Graham motioned to adjourn, and Mr. Wright seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Olivia K. Doss, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission on June 16, 2025.

Click [here](#) to view the agenda packet for the June 2, 2025 Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting.

Click [here](#) to view the video recording of the June 2, 2025, Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting.