CITY OF URBANA

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING **APPROVED**

URBANA ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

DATE: **September 16, 2026**

TIME: **7:00 P.M.**

PLACE: **Council Chambers, City Building, 400 South Vine Street, Urbana, Illinois**

MEMBERS ATTENDING: Zainab Calcuttawala, Joanne Chester, Ashlee McLaughlin, Adam Rusch, Nancy Uchtmann, Harvey Welch, Mark Wenneborg

STAFF PRESENT: Evan Alvarez, Principal Planner; Aimirou Sy, Planner II; Teri Andel, Administrative Assistant II

OTHERS PRESENT: None

A. CALL TO ORDER and ROLL CALL

Chair Welch called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present with all members present.

B. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

C. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

Minutes of July 15, 2026 Regular Meeting

Ms. McLaughlin moved that the Zoning Board of Appeals approve the minutes of the July 15, 2026 regular meeting as written. Mr. Rusch seconded the motion. The motion to approve the minutes as written was passed by unanimous voice vote.

D. WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

E. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

F. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

G. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

H. NEW BUSINESS

Revisions to the Rules of Procedure for the Zoning Board of Appeals

Chair Welch opened this item on the agenda. Aimirou Sy, Planner II, presented the staff report. He began by stating that some of the revisions come from a request by the members of the Zoning Board of Appeals to update regulations for member attendance. The current Rules of Procedure do not establish attendance expectations and a procedure for addressing non-attendance. He presented a comparative review of the bylaws to other cities with regards to attendance standards. He reviewed the proposed amendments to Sections 5 and 6 of the Rules of Procedure. He talked about the next steps in the process. He discussed an additional rule that staff are proposing regarding setting a 2-hour meeting limit with the ability of the Board members to extend the meeting time by 1 hour via vote.

Chair Welch asked if any members of the Zoning Board of Appeals had questions for staff.

Mr. Rusch asked what the Board's responsibility is to the citizens of Urbana for having their voices heard in terms of the meeting length. He stated that it is important to be able to hear all sides of an issue but to also maintain a judicious setting for the agenda. Mr. Sy said that staff are proposing a two (2) hour time limit. The Board will be able to extend the meeting by one (1) additional hour via vote of the board members. The Board also has the ability to continue an item to the next regularly scheduled meeting or to a special meeting.

Mr. Wenneborg asked if the Board would be allowed to extend a meeting more than once. Mr. Sy replied no. However, this is not final, and the Board is welcome to provide input.

Mr. Rusch stated that while he wants to be sensitive to staff's time, if there is an issue that staff feels it would be wise for the Board to be able to have a hard cutoff at three (3) hours, then he would likely defer on this. However, his initial thought is that he would like to have the option for the Zoning Board of Appeals to continue to have indefinite continuances during a meeting but to have a point of order every hour to decide if the Board wishes to continue business to the next scheduled meeting or to schedule a special meeting or to extend the meeting for another hour. He can see including these options for when there is a large group in the audience that wants to talk. Ms. Chester recalled a case where the meeting continued until midnight.

Chair Welch asked if all the various City boards and commissions will be operating under the same time limit rule. Mr. Sy said yes.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that as long as the expectations are set in advance and everyone understands what the expectations are, she does not have a problem with setting a meeting time limit. She thinks it protects people's time as well as staff time. People can always submit written comments as well.

Ms. Calcuttawala agreed as long as the expectations are clear. She asked if the Zoning Board of Appeals have had long meetings in the past few years. Ms. Uchtmann recalled one long meeting involving Berringer Commons that may have gone on past two hours. Mr. Rusch added that it is rare, but it does happen when people feel like they need to give a lot of input. He stated that this could be an opportunity to make sure that the Zoning Board of Appeals members follow the Rules of Procedure with regard to one comment per person or limited time to speak per person.

Evan Alvarez, Principal Planner, said that he completely agrees. In general, we definitely want to make sure that people are given the opportunity to be heard. He explained that there was recently a long meeting at a different commission, and part of it is just that by the end no one was bringing their best self past the 10:00 p.m. mark. So, he feels it is an opportunity to reassess and have the ability to push the meeting to a time that is better. Also, for more contentious meetings where normally we have a default public input of five (5) minutes per person, through the Open Meetings Act we are allowed to set that time limit at three (3) minutes per person to be more mindful of time.

Mr. Rusch agreed. He said that in the situation where a business needs to get their request potentially approved by a certain date, the Zoning Board does not have the ability to extend a meeting past three (3) hours. There should be language included in the rules that allow for extraordinary circumstances.

Ms. Chester stated that if people know ahead of time that meetings are to be two hours and that the meeting can be extended for another hour, it will help people to control themselves and not ramble on when they could stop.

Ms. McLaughlin stated that she appreciates the research and comparables. It sounds very logical, and she has no problem with it. It seems like a good idea.

Mr. Rusch offered a friendly amendment to the language in Article III, Section 6 to read as such, *"A member's failure to attend three consecutive meetings of the Board or at least 50% of the meetings held in a 12-month period may constitute cause for removal pursuant to Section XI of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance. Any removal shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures established therein and applicable law."* He thinks adding this one provision would be judicious. It is seen in one of the comparables, and he thinks it is a good idea.

Ms. Uchtmann asked if excused absences would be included in the 50%. Mr. Rusch said no, excused absences would not count towards the 50% rule.

Mr. Wenneborg expressed concern about three consecutive absences because it could occur over a relatively short period of time when a member cannot or does not have much time to respond. For example, if they are in the hospital or for some other reason.

Ms. Calcuttawala said that she was okay with it in general because even if you have three (3) consecutive misses, it is just an initiation of the possibility of removal; it is not automatic. In a scenario in which we need to have three special meetings back-to-back, that would be taken into consideration in terms of trying to remove someone from the board. Mr. Sy replied that the City Council has the authority to remove a member and it has to be for cause. So, the three consecutive meetings may constitute a cause, so it is not automatic. Ms. McLaughlin stated that she is comfortable with this. It feels like an appropriate time to at least check in with someone and make sure they are still engaged in the process and willing to participate.

Mr. Rusch understood the possibility of abuse of scheduling meetings at times when members cannot attend, which would be a bigger problem than a member being removed. When looking at the trade-offs of having an attendance policy versus how it might be unfairly enforced, we know that we need to have a better attendance policy.

Mr. Rusch moved to add language in Article III, Section 6 to read as such, "A member's failure to attend three consecutive meetings of the Board or at least 50% of the meetings held in a 12-month period may constitute cause for removal …".

Chair Welch said that he did not have a problem with the motion. He asked if the attendance requirements were going to be consistent across all the City boards and commissions. Mr. Sy replied that the attendance is going to be for the Zoning Board of Appeals only for now; however, he believes the Plan Commission has a similar rule. Mr. Alvarez confirmed that the Plan Commission has the three (3) consecutive absences requirement as well. However, the Plan Commission does not have the 50% rule within a 12-month period rule. Chair Welch stated that he believes the 50% rule is a sound policy proposal, and he urged that it be presented to the City Council to have consistency with all the City's governing bodies.

Ms. Uchtmann seconded the motion. Roll call on the motion was as follows:

Ms. Chester	-	Yes	Ms. McLaughlin	-	Yes
Mr. Rusch	-	Yes	Ms. Uchtmann	-	Yes
Mr. Welch	-	Yes	Mr. Wenneborg	-	Yes
Ms. Calcuttawala	-	Yes			

The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

Mr. Alvarez pointed out that the Zoning Board of Appeals are not able to introduce and approve the Rules of Procedure at the same meeting. Staff will make the changes and present them to the Legal staff to ensure that they meet legal requirements. Then, staff will bring the Rules of Procedure back to the Zoning Board of Appeals on October 21st for approval.

I. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

J. STAFF REPORT

There was none.

K. STUDY SESSION

There was none.

L. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Aimirou Sy

Aimirou Sy, Secretary
Zoning Board of Appeals