

Overview

The Lakes Area Food Shelf – LAFS (LLC) is a nonprofit organization located in Pequot Lakes, MN. We provide healthy nutritious foods to households throughout the greater Brainerd Lakes region. We are an agency of Second Harvest Northland, certified by TEFAP, the federally funded emergency food assistance program. Our services are supported through local donations, foundation and government grants, and donations of excess food from area grocery stores.

Due to a significant rise in visits to our Pequot Lakes food shelf by households from the Brainerd/Baxter area, we are seeking to open a 2nd location to better serve them. The Baxter location, like our location in Pequot Lakes, will operate using the "SuperShelf" model. It is a collaborative approach focused on increasing access to nutritious foods while creating a dignified, client-centered experience. The core ideas behind SuperShelf include:

Choice: Guests can browse and select the foods that best suit their preferences and dietary needs.

Health: SuperShelves prioritize fresh produce, whole grains, lean proteins, and other nutritious options.

Dignity: The space is bright, clean, and welcoming, designed to reduce stigma and support the well-being of everyone who visits. We anticipate having the Baxter location open on average 3 days per week (20 hours total) with both morning and afternoon shopping times available.

Food Insecurity in Baxter/Brainerd

The Brainerd-Baxter area is experiencing significant growth in people facing food insecurity. Each week, some of these individuals are driving 25 miles from Brainerd-Baxter to get groceries from LAFS. LAFS figures show nearly 200 Brainerd-Baxter households rely on its Pequot Lakes facility, making Brainerd-Baxter the number one area of need. Pequot Lakes accounts for 119 households

The issue has become so acute, Brainerd/Baxter area nonprofits asked Lakes Area Food Shelf to take the lead in response. The decision to expand was made after careful consideration by LAFS' Board of Directors and by unanimous vote at its July, 2025 board meeting.

City of Baxter – Variance Application Requirements
Lakes Area Food Shelf Baxter/Brainerd Expansion Proposal
October 13, 2025

Nature of Request

Variance for parking requirements.

a: Practical Difficulties: The built environment for this site precludes compliance with sections 10-5-02 G and 8-5-6. The building, constructed in 2001, leaves no space for compliant parking or storm water retention based on current standards.

b: Unique Conditions: The parcel was improved in 2001 in this neighborhood of intense commercial development. However, the developer never completed the parking and interior lane layouts as indicated on the original site plan and drawings submitted to the city for approval. The need for the variance has not been created by the applicant.

c: Essential Character: The subject site is located in the C2 Regional Commercial District. The proposed use as a Food Shelf is consistent with surrounding retail uses and would not alter the character of the neighborhood and is similar to the methods adjacent businesses manage parking.

d: Compliance With Intent of Ordinance: The required variances for this developed parcel would not be in conflict with the intended purpose of the ordinance (public health, safety and welfare) nor would they diminish the surrounding property values.

e: Consistency with Comp Plan: The variances requested for this site do not diverge from Baxter's long-term vision and goals as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. The parcel in question is smaller than many of the surrounding parcels in this built out commercial neighborhood and the intended use (three days per week and 20 hours total) is minimal when compared to the adjacent businesses and land uses. The requested variances are aligned with the values and priorities of the community.