



Variance Review



TO: City of Grosse Pointe Woods
FROM: Laura Mangan (Haw), AICP, NCI
 Paige Smith, NCI
SUBJECT: 1050 N. Oxford Road (#009-01-0059-000) – Variance Review #1
DATE: March 10, 2026

BACKGROUND AND VARIANCE REQUEST

The applicant, William Rennolds, requests a dimensional variance for the residential lot at 1050 N. Oxford Road in order to construct an addition to their existing, non-conforming, single-unit home. An unenclosed canopy structure is proposed within the backyard and encroaches into the minimum required rear yard setback.

The subject site is zoned the R-1C, One-Family Residential District and is an interior lot, located west of the intersection of Fairway Drive and N. Oxford Road.

The applicant requests the following variance, pursuant to the City's Zoning Ordinance:

Code Section	Ordinance Requirements		Proposed	Requested Variance
Sec. 50-3.1.C	Minimum rear yard.	28 feet	14 feet, 9 inches	13 feet, 3 inches



Variance Criteria and Evaluation

Per Section 50-7.15.I.1, the Zoning Board of Appeals may grant a dimensional variance only upon a finding that compliance with the restrictions governing area, setbacks, frontage, height, bulk, density, or other dimensional provisions would create a practical difficulty. A finding of practical difficulty, based on competent, material, and substantial evidence on the record, shall require the petitioner to demonstrate that all of the five criteria below are met.

Additional information brought forward by the Board, the applicant, and/or during the public hearing should be incorporated into the record prior to the Board making any determination. Our comments follow:

CRITERIA #1:

That strict compliance with the restrictions governing area, setbacks, frontage, height, bulk, density, and other similar items would unreasonably prevent the petitioner from using the property for a permitted purpose or would render conformity with said restrictions unnecessarily burdensome.

Findings:

The subject site is zoned in the R-1C, One-Family Residential District where, per Section 50-3.1.C, the intent of the district is to provide for single-unit dwellings and related community uses. The applicant does not propose changing the use of the property from a detached, single-unit dwelling.

The purpose statement of the R-1C District provides:

“The R-1C one-family residential district is established as a district in which the principal use of land is for single-family dwellings and related educational, cultural and religious uses where found appropriate and harmonious with the residential environment. For this single-family residential district, in promoting the general purpose of this chapter, the specific intent of this district is to:

- a. Encourage the construction of and the continued use of the land for single-family dwellings.*
- b. Prohibit business, commercial or industrial use of the land, and prohibit any other use which would substantially interfere with development or maintenance of single-family dwellings in the district.*
- c. Encourage the discontinuance of existing uses that would not be permitted as new uses under the provisions of this district.*
- d. Discourage any land use that would generate traffic on minor or local streets, other than normal traffic to serve the residences on those streets.*
- e. Discourage any use which, because of its character or size, would create requirements and costs for public services, such as fire and police protection, water supply and sewerage, substantially in excess of such requirements and costs if the district were developed solely for single-family dwellings.”*

The construction of the proposed addition aligns with the intent of the district, where single-unit dwellings are a permitted, by-right use.



Strict application of the R-1C District’s dimensional standards would severely limit the ability to construct an addition of substantial or functional size. The table below identifies the specific deviation requested in red, underlined font, and also notes where compliance is maintained.

Development Standards	Required	Proposed	Requested Variance
Lot Sizes:			
Min. Lot Size	7,200 square feet	7,232 square feet	Complies (and exceeds).
Min. Lot Width	60 feet	60 feet	Complies.
Setbacks:			
Min. Front Yard	30 feet	30 feet	Complies.
Min. Side Yard	6 feet	5' (west) 4' (east)	No Change Proposed*.
Min. Side Yard (total of two)	16 feet	9" (total)	No Change Proposed*.
Min. Rear Yard	28 feet	14',9"	<u>13',3"</u>
Building Height:			
Max. Number of Stories	2 stories	1-story (canopy)	Complies.
Max. Height in Feet	30 feet	10',10" (canopy)	Complies.
Unit Sizes:			
Min. Square Feet: 1-story	1,200 square feet	N/A	N/A
Min. Square Feet: 1.5- to 2-stories	1,680 square feet	1,941 square feet	Complies (and exceeds).
Max. Lot Coverage (structures):	35%	34.41%	Complies.
Max. Impervious Surface (excluding structures):	35%	<35%	Complies.

**The existing dwelling is located less than 6 feet from both side yard setbacks, consistent with the setback standards of a previous Ordinance that permitted reduced side yards in the R-1C District. As a result, the existing residence is considered legally nonconforming, however, no change to that nonconformity is proposed with this addition request.*

As shown in the table above, the addition can meet (or exceed) all other dimensional requirements of the district, besides the minimum rear yard setback.

CRITERIA #2:

That a variance would do substantial justice to the petitioner as well as to other petitioners in the zoning district; or whether a lesser relaxation of the restrictions would give substantial relief to the petitioner and be more consistent with justice to others (i.e., are there other more reasonable alternatives).

Findings:

If approved as requested, the variance would allow the construction of a 474 square foot permanent, unenclosed canopy over the existing outdoor patio and kitchen area in the rear yard. Granting the requested variance would allow the home to be expanded in a way that is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood, where other homes are built on lots of similar size or with comparable dimensional limitations.



A lesser variance would likely result in an addition that would not encompass the existing outdoor kitchen. Placement of additions in this rear yard are limited by an existing pool and the location of the attached garage, which is setback from the front plane of the home to permit a more welcoming streetscape.

The proposed variance balances the applicant's desire to use the property efficiently while minimizing visual impact on surrounding properties and maintaining the overall character of the area. The structure is proposed to be a single story, and there is existing vegetation in the rear to reduce visibility from surrounding properties. The variance is not anticipated to offer an unfair advantage not available to others.

CRITERIA #3:

That the plight of the petitioner is due to unique circumstances of the property.

Findings:

The interior lot itself is not unique compared to other residential lots in the area; however the placement of the home on the lot (constructed in 1947) functionally limits the ability of the homeowner to use the rear yard for outdoor living space.

CRITERIA #4:

That the petitioner's problem is not self-created.

Findings:

The request is not self-created as the home is an existing nonconformity and was built to comply with previous ordinance regulations. The applicant seeks to construct an addition that will make an existing canvas canopy over the rear yard more permanent with an enclosure attached to the primary dwelling unit.

CRITERIA #5:

That the spirit of this chapter will be observed, public safety and welfare secured, and substantial justice done.

Findings:

The requested variance supports the intent of the City's Zoning Ordinance by enabling the reasonable expansion of an existing residential use, in a manner that is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed addition does not negatively affect public safety or welfare.



Recommendation

Subject to any additional information presented and discussed by the applicant, Board, and/or the public during the public hearing and incorporated into the record prior to any findings being made, we recommend that the Zoning Board of Appeals approve the requested rear yard setback of 14',9" (a 13',3" variance) to Section 50-3.1.C based on the following findings of fact:

1. The proposed addition is consistent with the intent of the R-1C, One-Family Residential District, which encourages single-unit, detached residential development and is a permitted, by right use.
2. Strictly following the current R-1C zoning requirements for rear yard setbacks would prevent the applicant from functionally covering the existing outdoor living space of the single-unit home.
3. The proposed, permanent structure will replace the existing canvas canopy in the rear yard, which would result in a more aesthetically pleasing permanent structure.
4. The need for relief is not self-created.
5. All other applicable zoning requirements of the R-1C district are met (or exceeded), including lot coverage, building height, and the front yard setback.
6. Approval of the variance upholds the spirit and intent of the Zoning Ordinance, maintains neighborhood character, and maintains public health and safety.

Should you have any questions, please reach out to us. Thank you.