



Variance Review



TO: City of Grosse Pointe Woods
FROM: Laura Mangan (Haw), AICP, NCI
 Paige Smith, NCI
SUBJECT: 1960 Lennon Street (#007-02-1818-000) – Variance Review #1
DATE: May 4, 2026

BACKGROUND AND VARIANCE REQUEST

The applicant, Charlotte Bennett, requests a dimensional variance for the residential lot at 1960 Lennon Street in order to construct an addition to an existing non-conforming single-unit residence. The proposed addition, however, would encroach into the minimum required side yard setback.

The subject site is zoned the R-1E, One-Family Residential District and is an interior lot, located west of the intersection of Jackson Avenue and Lennon Street.

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

Code Section	Ordinance Requirements		Proposed	Requested Variance
Sec. 50-3.1.E	Minimum side yard	Least one: 5 feet Total of two: 15 feet	11',2" on the west side yard; 4',5" on the east side yard 15',7" in total of two sides	Only the east side yard: <i>A 7-inch variance is requested</i>



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-1E, One-Family Residential District where, per Section 50-3.1.E, 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-1E District provides:

“The R-1E 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-1E 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	5,000 square feet	5,336 square feet	Complies (and exceeds).
Min. Lot Width	50 feet	40 feet	Existing nonconforming lot.
Setbacks:			
Min. Front Yard	25 feet	30.8'	Complies (and exceeds).
Min. Side Yard	5 feet	11',2" (west) 4',5" (east)	<u>7" (east)</u>
Min. Side Yard (total of two)	15 feet	15',7" (total)	Complies (and exceeds).
Min. Rear Yard	28 feet	48',1" feet	Complies (and exceeds).
Building Height:			
Max. Number of Stories	2 stories	1-story	Complies.
Max. Height in Feet	30 feet	<30 feet	Complies.
Unit Sizes:			
Min. Square Feet: 1-story	1,000 square feet	~1,326 square feet	Complies (and exceeds).
Min. Square Feet: 1.5- to 2-stories	1,150 square feet	N/A	N/A
Max. Lot Coverage (structures):	35%	32.5%	Complies.
Max. Impervious Surface (excluding structures):	35%	<35%	Complies.

The subject lot is 40 feet wide, which is consistent with the minimum lot width of a previous Zoning Ordinance that permitted a reduced width in the R-1E District. The proposed addition will not impact the existing nonconforming lot width status.

The existing dwelling is located approximately four (4) feet from the eastern side property line, also consistent with the setback standards of a previous Zoning Ordinance that permitted a reduced side yard in the R-1E District. As a result, the structure is considered legally nonconforming. The proposed addition is slightly recessed from the building line, creating a 4',5" side setback and thereby maintaining the current degree of nonconformity.

Further, the existing home is 990 square feet, whereas the minimum square footage for a single-story home in the district is 1,000 square feet. The proposed 336 square foot addition would eliminate an existing nonconformity, resulting in an overall square footage of 1,326 square feet for the home.

As shown in the table above, the site meets (or exceeds) all other dimensional requirements of the district.



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 roughly 336 square foot (24' by 14') addition that would not extend past the existing eastern wall of the home. 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 does not make efficient or practical use of the lot. The proposed variance appropriately balances the applicant's desire to use the property efficiently with maintenance of overall character of the area. 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 property is not unique compared to other residential lots in the area.

CRITERIA #4:

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

Findings:

The applicant's problem is not self-created as the home is an existing nonconformity and was built to comply with previous ordinance regulations. The applicant is seeking to construct an addition that is slightly recessed from the existing nonconforming side yard on the east side of the home.

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 would 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 east yard setback of 4',5" (a 7" variance) to Section 50-3.1.E based on the following findings of fact:

1. The subject property is an established, nonconforming lot; with the primary dwelling unit located approximately 4 feet from the eastern property line, on a 40-foot-wide lot. Strictly following the current R-1E zoning requirements for side yard setbacks would prevent the applicant from functionally expanding the single-unit home.
2. The proposed addition is consistent with the intent of the R-1E One-Family Residential District, which encourages single-unit, detached residential development and is a permitted, by right use.
3. The proposed addition will be slightly recessed from the existing eastern building line of the home, which will not increase the existing nonconformity.
4. The need for relief is not self-created, as the home was constructed to comply with a previous Zoning Ordinance.
5. All other applicable zoning requirements of the R-1E district are met (or exceeded), including lot coverage, building height, and front and rear setbacks.
6. Approval of the variances 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.