



MCKENNA

Variance Review

TO: City of Grosse Pointe Woods
FROM: Laura Haw, AICP, NCI and Alicia Warren
SUBJECT: 2086 Ridgemont Avenue – Variance Review #1
DATE: August 12, 2025

BACKGROUND AND VARIANCE REQUEST

The applicant, Anderson Hughes, requests several variances for the residential lot at 2086 Ridgemont Avenue in order to construct a single-family home. The subject site is zoned the R-1E, One-Family Residential District and is a vacant corner lot, located at the northeast corner of Helen Avenue and Ridgemont Avenue.

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

Code Section(s)	Ordinance Requirements		Proposed	Requested Variance
Sec. 50-3.1.E	Minimum lot size.	5,000 square feet	4,060 square feet	940 square foot variance.
Sec. 50-3.1.E	Minimum lot width.	50 feet	35 feet	15-foot variance.
Sec. 50-3.1.E	Minimum side yard, total of two.	15 feet total	13 feet total: 8-feet on the west, side street (Helen Avenue) / 5-feet on the east, side yard	2-foot variance.
Sec. 50-3.8.A(3)	Side yard abutting a side street must not be less than the total of the two required side yards.	15 feet	8-feet	7-foot variance.
Sec. 50-3.4	Minimum size of dwellings.	Does not permit the erection of dwellings on lots / parcels with a width of less than 40 feet.	Does not meet this standard, 35-foot lot width proposed.	Approval against this provision: to build a home on a lot less than 40 feet wide.

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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 one-unit, detached homes, which is what the applicant proposes.

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....the specific intent 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 home 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 a functional home. The table on the following page identifies the specific deviations 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	4,060 square feet	<u>940 square foot variance.</u>
Min. Lot Width	50 feet	35 feet	<u>15-foot variance.</u>
Setbacks:			
Min. Front Yard	25 feet	25 feet	Complies.
Min. Side Yard (least of one)	5 feet	5 feet	Complies.
Min. Side Yard (total of two)	15 feet	13 feet	<u>2-foot variance.</u>
Min. Side Yard (corner) ¹	15 feet	8 feet	<u>7-foot variance.</u>
Min. Rear Yard	28 feet	28.25 feet	Complies.
Building Height:			
Max. Number of Stories	2-stories	2-stories	Complies.
Max. Height in Feet	30 feet	24 feet	Complies.
Unit Sizes:			
Min. Square Feet: 1-story	1,000 square feet	N/A	N/A
Min. Square Feet: 1.5- to 2-stories	1,150 square feet	2,268 square feet	Complies.
Max. Lot Coverage (structures):	35%	33%	Complies.
Max. Impervious Surface (excluding structures):	30%	+/- 27%	Complies.

Applying the current setback requirements to this lot would result in a home only 15 feet wide, which would appear out of scale with the surrounding detached homes and be inconsistent with the established character of the block. Importantly, as the table above highlights, the applicant has met all other applicable zoning requirements, including the maximum lot coverage, which is just below the 35% limit.

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 variances would allow the construction of a 2,268 square foot home – a reasonably sized, single-unit residence. Granting the requested variances would allow the property to be developed 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, particularly on corner lots. Lesser variances would likely result in a building that does not make efficient or practical use of the lot. The proposed

¹ Per Section 50-3.8(3), the side yard that borders a side street must be at least as wide as the combined minimum widths of both side yards normally required in that district (which is 15 feet).



variances appropriately balance the applicant's need to use the property with maintaining the overall character of the area, and they do not offer any unfair advantage not available to others in similar situations.

CRITERIA #3:

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

Findings:

The property is unique as it is a legally established, nonconforming corner lot that is both smaller and narrower than current zoning standards allow. These dimensional deficiencies are not typical of newly created lots but stem from the lot's creation under earlier zoning regulations. Its corner location further restricts usable width due to the requirement for increased side yard setbacks facing the side street.

CRITERIA #4:

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

Findings:

The applicant's problem is not self-created as the vacant lot is an existing, nonconforming corner lot (that is, the applicant did not split this property and created a nonconforming lot). The applicant is simply seeking to develop an existing, vacant lot in accordance with the permitted residential use.

CRITERIA #5:

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

Findings:

The requested variances support the intent of the City's Zoning Ordinance by enabling the reasonable residential use of an existing lot in a manner consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed development would not negatively affect public safety or welfare and would uphold the district's residential character. The intent of the Ordinance is also to preserve air, light, and space between homes, which this proposal maintains.

Granting these variances supports the productive use of otherwise undevelopable land.



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 variances to Sections 50-3.1.E; 50-3.8.A(3); and 50-3.4, based on the following findings of fact:

1. The subject lot is an established, nonconforming corner lot; strictly following the current R-1E zoning requirements for lot size, lot width, and side yard setbacks would prevent the applicant from building a single-unit home, an otherwise permitted, by right use in this district.
2. The proposed home is consistent with the intent of the R-1E One-Family Residential District, which encourages single-unit, detached residential development.
3. The requested variances are the minimum necessary to allow reasonable use of the property and are in character with the surrounding neighborhood, where similar dimensional conditions exist. A lesser variance would not allow for a functional or proportionate building footprint and would not provide adequate relief.
4. The need for relief is not self-created, as the lot is an existing, nonconforming corner lot.
5. All other applicable zoning requirements have been met, 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.

Respectfully,

McKENNA

Alicia Warren
Associate Planner