

ST. JAMES PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission Members
FROM: Amanda Knoll, City Manager
DATE: September 28, 2026
RE: Variance – 609 3rd Avenue S

Applicant

ALEX ROYCE

ADDRESS – 609 3RD AVENUE S

Request

The applicant is requesting a variance to grant a 7' rear yard setback from the north property line and a 4' side yard setback from the west property line located in a One-and Two-Family Residential District (R-1).

Proposal

The Applicant desires to replace a garage consistent with existing setbacks in the northwest corner of the property. The proposed 30' X 24' garage would be 7' feet from the north property line and 4' from the west property line. The existing estimated property size is 7,500 square feet with a building lot coverage of 14%. The proposed building lot coverage will be 23% with the addition of the proposed garage.

Location

The property is located at 609 3rd Avenue S legally described as Lot 9, Block 26, Original Plat, City of St. James, Watonwan County, Minnesota, and all that part of Block 26 which lies between Lot 9 and 10 being the vacated alley between said Lots, all in Block 26, City of St. James, Watonwan County, Minnesota.

The parcel is zoned as R-1 “One-and Two-Family Residential” District. The surrounding zoning designations include B-2 (north) and R-1 (west and east).

Existing Land Use

The parcel is being used for residential purposes.

City Code

The following city code shows the criteria for granting variance:

§ 156.055 VARIANCE.

(A) *Criteria for granting variances.*

(1) A variance to the provisions of this chapter may be issued to provide relief to the land owner in those zones where this chapter imposes undue hardship or practical difficulties to the property owner in the use of the land. No use variances may be issued.

(2) A variance may be granted only in the event that the following circumstances exist:

- (a) Exceptional, or extraordinary, circumstances apply to the property that do not apply generally to other properties in the same zone, or vicinity, and result from lot size or shape, topography, or other circumstances over which the owners of property have had no control;
- (b) The literal interpretation of this chapter would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same district under the terms of this chapter;
- (c) The special conditions, or circumstances, do not result from the actions of the applicant;
- (d) The variance requested will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied by this chapter to owners of other lands, structures, or buildings in the same district;
- (e) The variance requested is the minimum change needed to alleviate the hardship;
- (f) The variance would not be materially detrimental to the purposes of this chapter, or to property in the same zone; and
- (g) A proposed home, or building, improvement may be allowed without a variance; provided, it meets the following additional criteria:
 - 1. It does not intrude on any setback to a degree greater than the building line of the existing principal structure; and
 - 2. It is not located within a floodplain area.

The following city code shows the setback standards for a R-1 zoned district:

§ 156.074 LOT AREA, WIDTH, AND MINIMUM SETBACK STANDARDS.

<i>Setback, Lot Size</i>	<i>Size Standard</i>
Front yard	25 feet
Height regulations	30 feet
Minimum lot area	9,000 feet
Minimum lot width	75 feet
Rear yard	20 feet*
Side yard	8 feet**
<i>Notes to Table:</i> Rear yard setback for a garage accessed from an alley is five feet Side yard setback for a garage accessed from an alley is five feet	

Recommendations

Staff recommends approval.

Exhibits

Exhibit A – Zoning Request Application
 Exhibit B – Notice of Public Hearing
 Exhibit C - Property Map



CITY OF ST. JAMES PLANNING COMMISSION REQUEST

City of St. James

AUG 27 2026

PAID

Application for: ☒ Variance \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Rezoning \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Ordinance Change \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Special Use Permit \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Annexation Petition \$5.00/acre (min \$150 – max \$600)
☐ Lot Division/Property Split \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Plat Subdivision – Prelim \$75 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Plat Subdivision – Final \$75 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Vacation initiated by citizen petitioner \$175.00 plus 3.00 per notice
☐ Notification billing \$3.00 for each required notice

Applicant: Name: Alex Royce
Mailing Address: 609 3rd Ave S
Phone Number: 612-720-1902
Email: Royce.Alex.L@gmail.com

Property Address (if different from Applicant's address):

Parcel ID: 201002590

Description of area affected: Existing garage setback

Present Zone _____

Present Set-back Garage is currently setback 7ft in the rear and 4ft on the sides

Present Use Setback spacing for garage

Proposed Zone (if different) _____

Proposed Set-back (if different) Maintain existing setback

Proposed Use (if different) _____

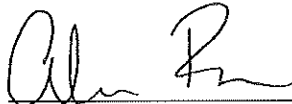
Request

Maintain the existing garage setback when replacing the existing garage.

☒ Attached drawing of request

The above information and attached drawing of request are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

8-27-26
Date


Signature of Person Filing Application

HEARING: The Commission will not render a decision unless applicant or a designated representative is present at the hearing. Commission meetings are scheduled on the last Monday of each month. A completed application must be submitted by the second Tuesday of each month to be considered at that month's meeting.

DRAWING: A drawing of the affected area must be attached showing present lot lines and existing buildings and the requested change. Applications will not be accepted without all information. The Zoning Administrator will notify the applicant within 10 business days if the application is incomplete.

FEE: SEE ABOVE. The fee for request is due at the time of this application submittal. The notice fee will be due on or before the public hearing. If the notice fee is not submitted, the public hearing will be cancelled at the applicants cost.

**Alex Royce
609 3rd Ave S.
St. James, MN 56081**

August 27th, 2026

**Variance Request to Maintain Existing Rear and Side Setback for Garage Replacement
— 609 3rd Ave S**

Members of the Planning Commission,

Please accept this letter as a formal application for a setback variance for my property located at 609 3rd Ave S, St. James, MN 56081. I am requesting a variance from the new standard 20-foot rear yard setback, and 8-foot side yard setback requirement to construct a new detached garage in place of the current structure.

PROPOSED PROJECT & VARIANCE REQUEST

The existing garage on the property is in poor condition and urgently needs to be torn down and replaced. My project plan includes the following:

- Tearing down the old garage and shed that are in disrepair
- Replacing with a new 24' x 30' two stall garage
- Using the existing side and rear yard setbacks

JUSTIFICATION & PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES (Minn. Stat. § 462.357)

Strict application of the 20-foot rear setback presents clear practical difficulties due to the physical layout and dimensions of the lot:

1. Inaccessibility & Unusable Yard: Shifting the garage 20 feet forward and 8 feet into the lot renders the new garage virtually inaccessible by vehicles entering the site and severely restricts the remaining usable yard space.
2. Reasonable Use & Property Conditions: Replacing a deteriorating garage with a safe, modern structure is a standard and reasonable residential update. Maintaining the

established rear footprint preserves vehicle maneuverability while significantly improving property conditions.

3. Neighborhood Character & Adjacent Land: The rear property line borders commercial property (Casey's) and is screened by an existing privacy fence. Maintaining the existing rear setback will have no impact on light, air, privacy, or sightlines for adjacent residential properties or surrounding traffic. The new garage would also be in line with the other garages within the block.

Enclosed with this application are the required site plan sketches illustrating the property boundaries, existing structures, and proposed placement.

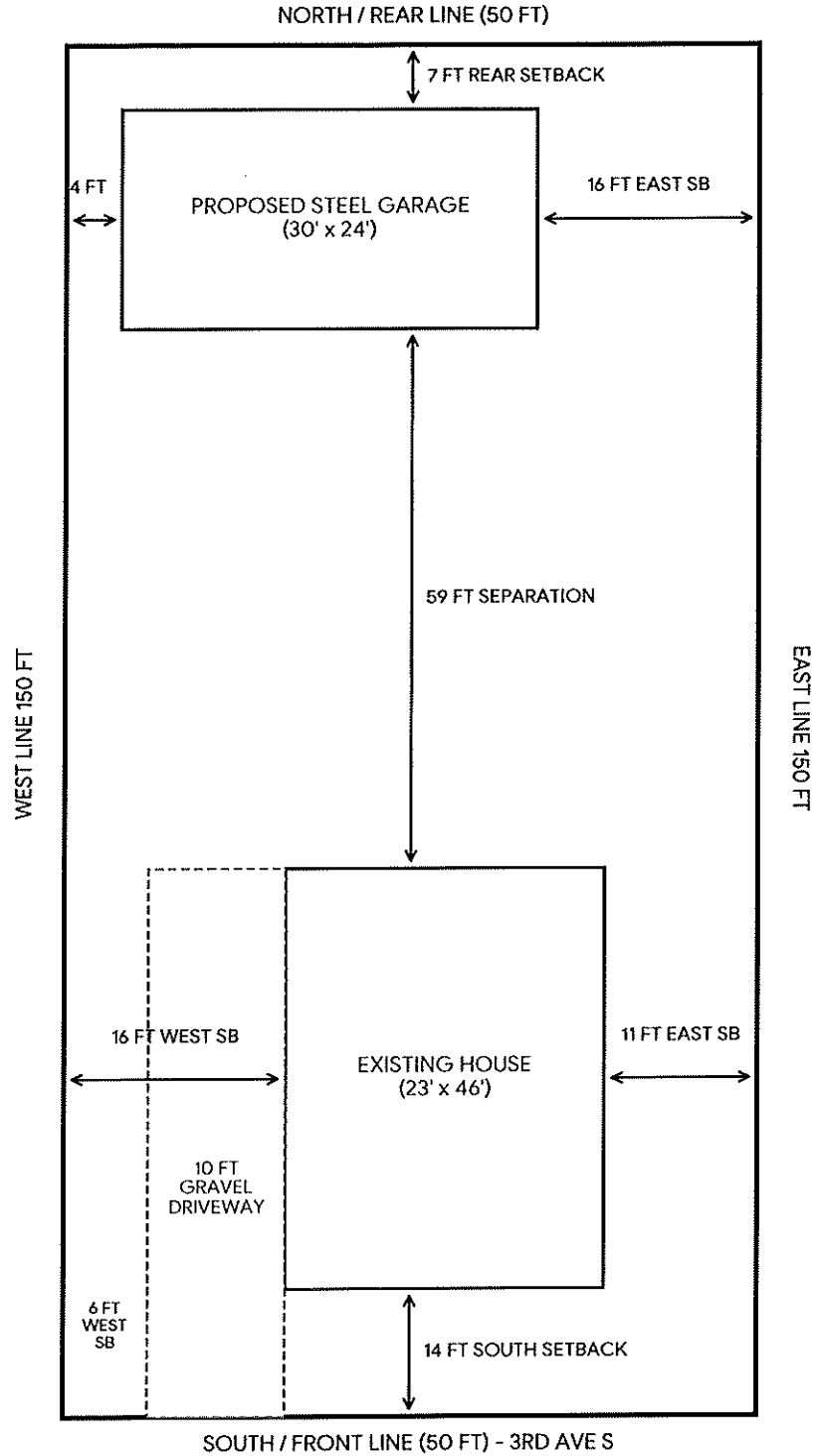
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Royce

OFFICIAL SITE PLAN

Address: 609 3rd Ave S, St. James, MN 56081 | Parcel ID: 201002590



Parameter	Dimension / Measurement	Zoning Compliance Context
Total Lot Dimensions	50 ft Wide x 150 ft Deep (7,500 sq. ft.)	Standard Residential Plot Grid
Existing House Footprint	23 ft Wide x 46 ft Deep (1,058 sq. ft.)	Setback: 16' West / 11' East / 14' South
Proposed Steel Garage	30 ft Wide x 24 ft Deep (720 sq. ft.)	Setback: 4' West / 16' East / 7' North/Rear

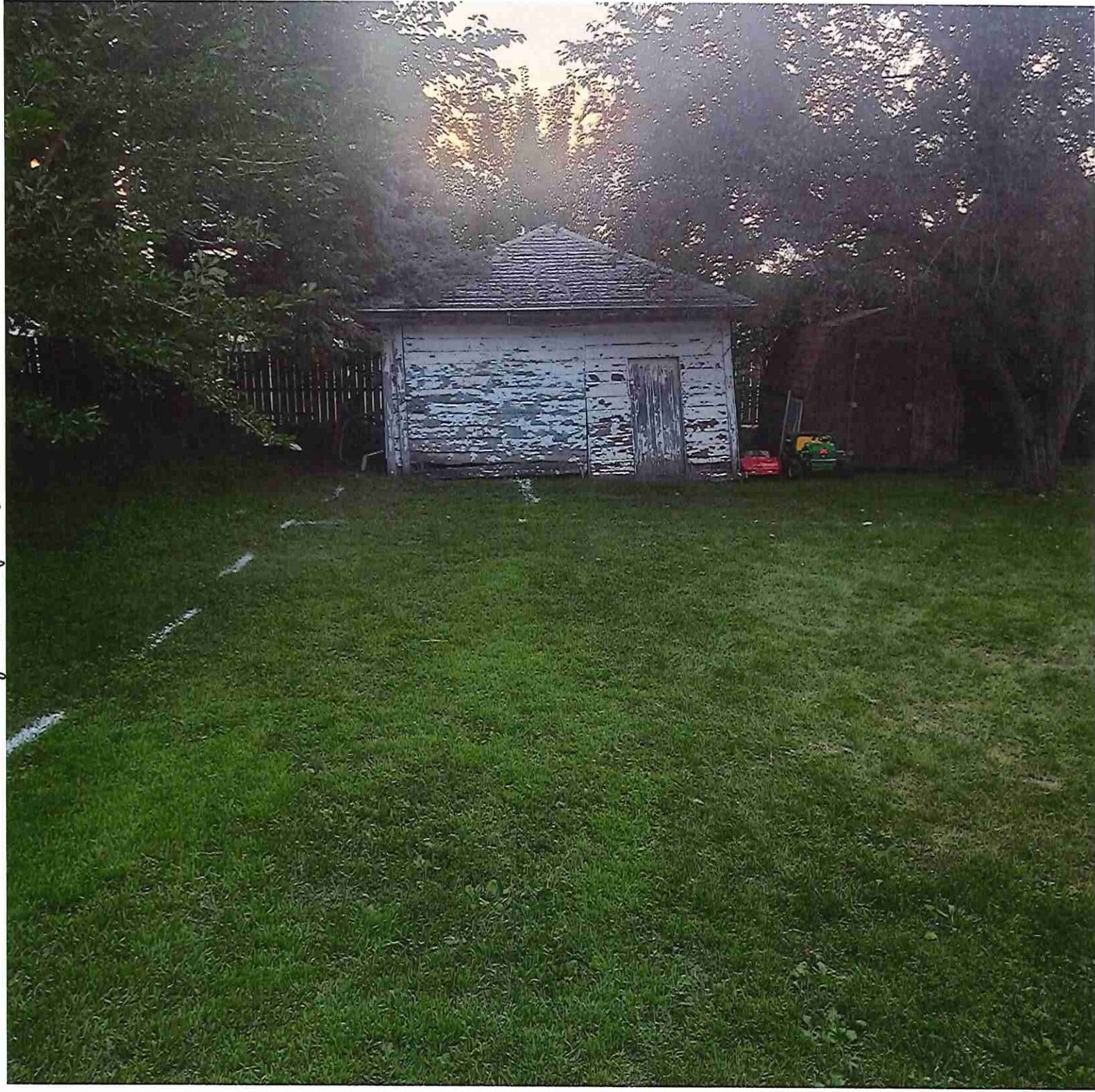
Structural Separation	59 feet (North-to-South)	Exceeds standard 10' fire buffer minimum
Driveway Access Track	10 ft Wide x 50 ft Long (Gravel Surface)	Permeable access track along House West wall
Total Combined Coverage	1,778 sq. ft. Total Built Footprint	23.7% Total Lot Coverage (Under standard 30% cap)

Proposed garage 24'x 30'



The new garage would remain inline with all other existing garages within the block.

Existing Garage and Shed





City of St. James
1205 6th Ave S. | PO Box 70 | St. James, MN 56081
P. 507-375-3241 | F. 507-375-4376 | www.ci.stjames.mn.us

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ST. JAMES PLANNING COMMISSION

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the St. James Planning Commission will meet on Monday, September 28, 2026, at 5:15 p.m. at City Hall located at 1205 6th Ave S, St. James, Minnesota, for the following purpose:

To consider a request for variance for the property located at 609 3rd Ave S owned by Alex and Sarah Royce. The property is legally described as Lot 9, Block 26, Original Plat, City of St. James, Watonwan County, Minnesota, and all that part of Block 26 which lies between Lot 9 and 10 being the vacated alley between said Lots, all in Block 26, City of St. James, Watonwan County, Minnesota. The variance request is to grant a 7 ft rear yard setback from the north property line and a 4 ft side yard setback from the west property line in a One- and Two-Family Residential District (R-1).

All persons are invited to attend the September 28, 2026 Public Hearing and to present their views relating to this request either orally or in writing.

Dated this 17th Day of September 2026.

Brianna Sanders
Zoning Administrator

Publish September 17, 2026: St. James Plaindealer

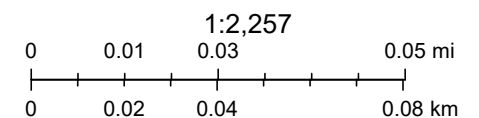
"Exhibit C"

609 3rd Ave S



9/1/2026, 9:57:19 AM

Parcels



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Microsoft, Vantor

City of St. James
Watsonwan County, St. James, ESRI