

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
RICE COUNTY BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT**
*Commissioner's Room / Government Services Building
Thursday, January 8, 2026 at 6:00 PM*

I. Call to Order

A. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order both in-person and electronically by Chair Julia Hogan at 6:00 p.m.

Members present were: Julia Hogan, Matt Purfeerst, Garrett Johnson, Kenneth Engen, Jim Cihak

Staff present were: Zoning Administrator Trent McCorkell, Senior Planner Jeremy Edwards,
Administrative Coordinator Anna Aguilar.

Others present: see Sign-in Sheet and Registrant List.

B. Motion by Ken Engen, seconded by Matt Purfeerst, Reading of the Notice

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

C. Motion by Garrett Johnson, seconded by Ken Engen, Approval of the Agenda

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

D. Motion by Matt Purfeerst, seconded by Garrett Johnson, to approve the minutes of December 4, 2025

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

II. House Keeping Items

1. Election of 2026 Board of Adjustment Chair

Motion by Matt Purfeerst, seconded by Ken Engen, to approve the election of Julie Hogan as the Chair of the Board of Adjustment for 2026.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

MP - I make a motion for JH as Chair.

KE - I second.

2. Election of 2026 Board of Adjustment Vice Chair

Motion by Garrett Johnson, seconded by Jim Cihak, to approve the election of Matt Purfeerst as the Vice Chair of the Board of Adjustment for 2026.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

GJ - I motion to continue with MP as Vice Chair for the Board of Adjustment.

JC - I'll second that.

3. Appointment of 2026 Board of Adjustment Secretary

Motion by Garrett Johnson, seconded by Ken Engen, to delegate the Board of Adjustment secretarial duties to Environmental Services Staff for 2026.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

GJ - I'll motion to continue with Staff as secretary for the Board of Adjustment.

KE - I'll second.

4. 2026 Meeting Schedule

Motion by Garrett Johnson, seconded by Matt Purfeerst, to approve the 2026 Meeting Schedule as drafted by Environmental Services Staff.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

GJ - I move to approve the meeting dates as drafted by Staff.

MP - I will second that.

5. **Public Comment Time Limit**

Motion by Jim Cihak, seconded by Garrett Johnson, to approve a 3 minute time limit per person for individual public comment at the 2026 Rice County Board of Adjustment meetings.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

JC - I motion to stay with the 3-minute time limit for public comment.

GJ - I second.

III.

New Business

1. **Variance/Blake (Gunderson) - Section 36, Northfield Township**

Beau and Maren Blake, on behalf of landowners Lyle and Nancy Gunderson, have applied for the following variance:

- A 5% variance from the 18% slope limitation to allow for grading of a driveway on an existing slope of 23%.

The property is described as: Part of the SE1/4, Section 36, T112N, R19W, Northfield Township, Rice County, Minnesota. PID# 04.36.4.75.001. The property is Zoned A, Agricultural.

Motion by Matt Purfeerst, seconded by Ken Engen, to approve the Variance request with the following conditions and findings for Beau and Maren Blake, on behalf of landowners Lyle and Nancy Gunderson. The property is located in Section 36 of Northfield Township.

RESULT: Approved, AYES: Julia Hogan, Garrett Johnson, Matt Purfeerst, Ken Engen, Jim Cihak,
NAYS: None

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL – Blake (Gunderson)

1. The variance is to allow for driveway to be graded in an area with a natural slope exceeding 18%, subject to compliance with all other Ordinance regulations.
2. The updated driveway plan shall be generally followed.
3. A design for driveway construction including soil stabilization, stormwater control and revegetation signed by a licensed engineer shall be submitted to Rice County prior to any onsite grading work.
4. Variance will be void if the property split is not approved by Rice County.
5. Variance shall be considered void if permits are not obtained and construction of the driveway commenced within one year of the variance approval.
6. Failure to comply with the terms of this variance may result in termination of the Variance.

Hearing Minutes:

Zoning Administrator Trent McCorkell (TM) presented the request to the Board of Adjustment (BOA).

The BOA asked the applicant, Beau and Maren Blake (BB & MB), to come forward to add comments or answer questions regarding the request.

MB - We feel like this is a reasonable request given the location of the proposed driveway and taking into consideration the slope of the project. CP is handing you an alternate option for the driveway. With this, our proposed ending slope after grading will be roughly 10% or less which would provide a safe and accessible location for us to get to the top of the hill.

JH - This is 7 acres in total?

MB - In Rice County, yes. I should add that for the 3 acres in Goodhue County, this is also the only really accessible way to get up to those 3 acres as well.

JH - Are you aware of the 6 conditions?

MB - Yes.

Chris Peterson (ChP - *contractor & father of applicant*) - The updated plan I handed out is revised from the original plan we submitted. We shifted the driveway a little bit further up the hill to the west. By moving it to the west and using the hill more, it does make the driveway longer, but we are able to use the natural slope and get the grade down. The original proposed driveway location had about a 12% grade, but after driving around and looking at existing slopes of about 12%, in the winter that is a little steep. By moving the driveway up the hill a little and using the natural slope, I think we can get the grade down to more like 10% which would be more friendly in the winter time.

Chair Hogan opened the public testimony portion of the item to the public and no one spoke.

Chair Hogan closed the public testimony portion of the item to the public.

Discussion:

JH - I think the first condition is vague enough that the specific percentage is not needed.

KE - I think moving it actually makes sense so they can use more of the natural slope to get the grade as low as possible.

JH - I can understand the want for a home on the top of the hill.

MP - Looking at the topography on the map, it doesn't really look like there's any way to get up there. The property is completely surrounded by contours. Great spot for a house with a great view.

TM - If you do go forward with the conditions, condition #2 should probably be amended to say the updated driveway plan.

MP - I motion to approve with the update to condition #2.

KE - I'll second.

The Board of Adjustment reviewed the variance application and found that the applicant has established that all of the following criteria from Section 503 of the Zoning Ordinance are met by this proposal:

- *The variance request in harmony with the general purpose and intent of the Zoning Ordinance and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan? YES*
- *The proposed use is an allowed use in the zoning district in which the property is located? YES*
- *The proposed sewage treatment system is or can be made compliant with the Rice County Sewage and Wastewater Treatment Ordinance? YES*
- *The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance? YES*
- *The plight of the landowner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner? YES, the steep hill makes the proposed home location tough to get to.*
- *The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the locality? YES, there are houses on both sides of the proposed location.*
- *The applicant has established that there are practical difficulties in complying with the Zoning Ordinance, not constituting economic considerations alone? YES*

The findings were read by Purfeerst with the conditions as stated above and with the following additions by staff:

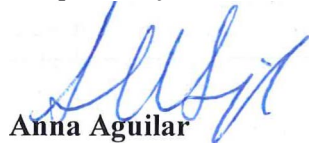
TM: The site does qualify as a home site under the Ag zoning density and there really does not appear to be any flatter options to get to the top flat area of the hill.

Motion made, seconded, and approved unanimously.

IV. Adjournment

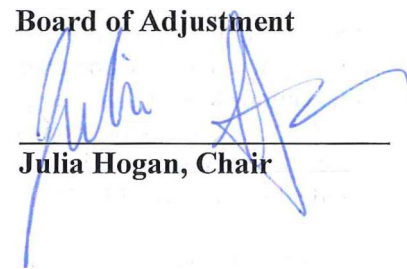
Hearing no other items before the BOA, a motion was made by GJ, second by KE, to adjourn the meeting at 6:17 pm. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted



Anna Aguilar
Administrative Coordinator

Board of Adjustment



Julia Hogan, Chair