

**CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS MEETING
FARMINGTON HILLS CITY ALL
31555 W. ELEVEN MILE ROAD
MARCH 10, 2026**

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair Irvin called the meeting to order at 7:31 pm and made standard introductory remarks to explain the role of the ZBA and the formal procedures of the meeting.

A site visit was held on Sunday, March 8, 2026. No business had been conducted.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Banks, Irvin, Jamil, Rich, Rowland (alt.), Vergun

Members Absent: Khan, O'Connell

Others Present: Director of Planning and Community Development Kettler-Schmult, Code and Zoning Supervisor Curry, City Attorney Mendelsohn, Recording Secretary McGuire

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Jamil, supported by Rich, to approve the agenda as submitted.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

4. NEW BUSINESS:

A. ZBA CASE: 3-26-5775

LOCATION: 36336 W. 8 Mile Rd.

PARCEL I.D.: 23-32-326-057

ZONE: RA-1, One Family Residential

REQUEST:

a. A 30-foot setback variance from Section 34-5.12.1.D.i of the Zoning Ordinance to permit a fence in the exterior side yard to be installed 10-feet from the Metroview Rd. right-of-way where a minimum 40-foot setback from a yard abutting a street is required.

b. A 4-foot, 6-inch height variance from Section 34-3.1.4.E of the Zoning Ordinance to permit building with an average height of 34-feet, 6-inches where a maximum of 30-feet is allowed.

CODE SECTION: 34-5.12.1.D.i, 34-3.1.4.E

APPLICANT: Brown and Caldwell, LLC

OWNER: Great Lakes Water Authority

Background

Director of Planning and Community Development Kettler-Schmult gave the background for this variance request for a necessary utility replacement facility to replace an existing facility located across the street in the City of Livonia. The new construction would replace the single-family home currently located on the property.

The request had received conditional approval from the Planning Commission, subject to the applicant obtaining the requested variances.

Staff had been working closely with the applicant, including coordination with the Engineering Department and the Planning and Community Development Office, to minimize the number of variances while maintaining the project timeline.

Applicant presentation

Design Engineer Clayton Johnson, Brown and Caldwell, LLC, was present on behalf of this variance request. George Hicholas, Project Manager, Great Lakes Water Authority, and David Nitz, Manager and Office Lead, also from Brown and Caldwell, were also present.

Mr. Johnson made the following points:

- As mentioned, they had worked closely with the Planning Department to reduce the number of variances requested.
- Regarding the fence setback variance request, Mr. Johnson explained that the fence was proposed closer to Metroview Road in order to keep the stormwater basin and its outlet structure inside the secured fenced area. The stormwater basin was a shallow bioretention feature, approximately one foot deep, designed to collect runoff from the site, filter it through gravel and other layers, and discharge treated water to the City of Livonia storm sewer system.

Mr. Johnson noted that the stakes showing the fence location had been placed too close to the road shoulder during Sunday's site visit. The fence would be moved an additional five feet to the west to provide more room from the shoulder for snowplows and traffic. This change did not affect the request for the 30-foot setback variance.

- Regarding the height variance request, Mr. Johnson provided interior drawings and exterior renderings to explain the need for the variance. A substantial portion of the building would be below the maximum height requirement, but the pump room portion needed additional height. The taller pump room was necessary to allow for the operation of an overhead bridge crane used to remove and replace pumps and motors for maintenance and repair. The crane required sufficient vertical clearance for the hoist and hook to lift pumps over other equipment and move them north to south through the building. The design included a roll-up door so a flatbed truck could pull up to the building for removal of pumps or motors. Portions of the system, including piping and vaults, would be located below grade. Windows located high on the building were intended to provide natural light and improve energy efficiency by reducing interior lighting needs.

Mr. Johnson also identified HVAC louvers, underground piping, electrical vaults, cable tray areas, and the generator and switchyard in the cutaway views presented to the Board.

In response to questions, and referencing the drawings, Mr. Johnson explained the location of the bridge crane, hoist, hook, pumps, and the path the equipment would need to travel in order to be removed from the building. The height variance was needed to provide proper clearance for the bridge crane so pumps and other equipment could be moved in and out of the building. Personnel would stand on the crane for maintenance of any lights that might need to be replaced, as well as to access the rafters if necessary.

Public comment

Chair Irvin opened the public hearing.

Pea Gee, Farmington Hills taxpayer, asked Great Lakes Water Authority to explain what the pumping station would do, what specific area of the City it would serve, what businesses and homes it would support, and the overall community benefit of the project. She was concerned that the request involved more than one variance. In her opinion, multiple variance requests suggested insufficient planning.

Pea Gee also questioned whether the proposed facility would be adequately sized and strong enough to handle stormwater and sewage needs for the service area. She requested that the Board postpone or table the matter to allow for additional information and clarification before a decision was made.

When asked by Chair Irvin whether she supported or opposed the request, Pea Gee responded that she was asking the Board to table the case for more information. She could support the request after receiving additional clarification.

Applicant response

In response to public comment, Mr. Johnson provided the following additional information:

- The project is a potable water pump station.
- The proposed facility would replace the existing Newburgh Pumping Station located a short distance away on the south side of West 8 Mile Road in Livonia.
- The existing station dates from approximately the 1960s or 1970s, is at the end of its useful life, and requires significant maintenance. The Great Lakes Water Authority had previously evaluated rehabilitating the existing station, but replacement with a new facility was determined to be more cost-effective and operationally efficient.
- The new pump station could be constructed while the existing station remained in service, after which the old station would be decommissioned and retained for storage use.
- The station is intended only for potable water and will be used to boost water pressure within the service area. The new facility would serve the same general area as the existing pump station, but with more efficient pumps, improved operations and maintenance layout, and continued ample capacity.
- The pump station is designed with N+1 redundancy, meaning that with one pump out of service, the station can still meet peak flow demand for the area.
- The service area includes Farmington Hills, Livonia, Redford, Novi, and other surrounding areas.

Board deliberation and/or motion

Chair Irvin summarized that the proposal involved replacing an existing pump station that was no longer serviceable, with no expansion of the service population, with a new facility that would upgrade the existing mechanical and electrical systems for more efficient service.

Director Kettler-Schmult identified on an aerial photograph the location of the existing utility, which was adjacent to the Whispering Willows Golf Course on the south side of 8 Mile Road.

Member Banks asked the applicant to address safety and reliability measures related to recent water main issues in the region.

Mr. Nitz explained that the project is a replacement for an aged pump station across 8 Mile Road and is also part of an ongoing reliability effort to strengthen the water system west of the site and north toward 14 Mile Road. The station is intended to provide backup to the 42-inch and 48-inch transmission lines farther north on 14 Mile Road.

The project was developed in conjunction with the 14 Mile Loop project, which was completed within the last five years and placed online approximately two years ago. The new transmission main helped maintain water service to Novi residents during the recent water main break. The project is part of a broader resilient effort to maintain water service for residents while the Great Lakes Water Authority repairs aging infrastructure throughout the system.

Secretary Rich reported that there was an affidavit of mailing. No comments were received, and there were no undeliverable notices.

Noting that the ZBA does not review site plans or building operations, Member Rich said he was satisfied that the requested height and setback variances were justified by the practical difficulties of the site and that the proposed plan was preferable for the closest residential neighbor.

MOTION by Rich, supported by Jamil, in the case of ZBA case 3-26-5775, that the petitioner's request for the following variances be granted:

- a. **A 30-foot setback variance from Section 34-5.12.1.D.i of the Zoning Ordinance to permit a fence in the exterior side yard to be installed 10-feet from the Metroview Rd. right-of-way where a minimum 40-foot setback from a yard abutting a street is required.**
- b. **A 4-foot, 6-inch height variance from Section 34-3.1.4.E of the Zoning Ordinance to permit building with an average height of 34-feet, 6-inches where a maximum of 30-feet is allowed.**

Because the petitioner did demonstrate practical difficulties in that he set forth facts which show that:

- 1. Compliance with the strict letter of the ordinance would unreasonably prevent the petitioner from using the property for a permitted purpose or would render conformity with the ordinance unnecessarily burdensome. Specifically, if the design of the building were to be different than as proposed and the detention basin were to be put outside the fence line, the result would be unnecessarily burdensome, and reducing the height of the building would render the indoor crane nonfunctional for two ends of the building.**
- 2. Granting the variance requested does substantial justice to the petitioner as well as to other property owners in the district. This provides a pumping station with an additional pump so that if one of the pumps fails, this station would still be able to handle 100% of peak requirements.**
- 3. The petitioner's plight is due to the unique circumstances of the property. The layout of the property itself and its proximity to the existing pumping station make it the appropriate location for this new station, and also enhance the ability to keep the old station in service until this new station is fully in service.**
- 4. The problem is not self-created. The mechanics of what is needed for a drinking water pumping station are just that - the mechanics. Additionally, the location is based on the location where this station really needs to be. The applicant did not create these two issues.**

With the following condition:

The pump station, site layout, and materials will be constructed as submitted to the ZBA and as approved by the Planning Commission.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

6. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

None

7. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 10, 2026

MOTION by Banks, supported by Vergun, to approve the February 10, 2026 meeting minutes as submitted.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

8. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Rowland, supported by Jamil, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.