

MINUTES FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE CHESTER TOWNSHIP BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS HELD MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025, IN THE TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM. AUDIO RECORDING ON FILE.

Chairman Barton Ziganti called the Regular, December 8, 2025 Chester Township Board of Zoning Appeals meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Roll Call

Members present: Ms. Denamen/yes, Mr. Dobrzynski/yes, Mr. Enger/yes, Ms. Fadorsen/yes, Ms. Klemm/yes, Ms. Muehling/yes; Mr. Ziganti/yes

Zoning inspector: None

Admin present: Ms. McCarthy

Mr. Ziganti led the committee in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Ziganti read the public hearing process of the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Anyone wishing to testify was sworn in.

**APPEAL ZA-2025-12
Paul Ridley and Katie Pestak
12524 Caves Road
Area Variance**

The Staff Summary was read aloud and reviewed by the board.

Ms. Muehling asked for clarity on what the variance request was for.

Mr. Ridley – There's only one variance requested and it's for a frontage variance. This proposed lot would have the 3-acre minimum, but it would not have the required 200' frontage. It would only have 45' of frontage. That one variance would enable me to build the barndominium that I would like to build. We would like the building to be very private. We would make it brown and plant lots of shrubs for lots of privacy.

We would like this building to be able to house a future pontoon boat, RV. We've got a lot of dreams of things we would like to get. We don't want to have these things in the yard. We want it to be clean and tidy and protected. I could also do projects in the barn. This would be our forever home. We were surprised when we heard there would be an issue to building this barn.

Mr. Ziganti began reviewing the appellant supplied Duncan Factors as included in the Staff Summary on page 9.

Ms. Denamen asked for clarity on the building being a barn or a barndominium and what that means.

Mr. Ridley – It's a small residence built inside the barn. From the outside all you see is a barn. Inside is a small living room, bath, kitchen and bedroom. I cannot build the size building I want without putting the small living unit inside. The barn would be too big. The barn would be about 8,000 square feet. That's too big for current zoning regulations.

Ms. Klemm – You're only asking for a variance because you want to do a lot split with a narrow driveway?

Ms. Muehling – I tend to disagree with that. You're only interested in storage? My answer is that the Geauga County Subdivision Regulations permit a no fee transfer to an adjacent owner that does not create an additional building site. He could transfer the landlocked parcel to his current parcel.

Mr. Ridley – If it's all one plot, I'm not allowed to have an 8,000 square foot accessory building according to Zoning regulations.

Ms. Fadorsen – I think Mr. Ridley's thinking is, if you build a house on the proposed new parcel, you can build the building as large as you want as long as there is living space in it. It doesn't make any difference how large the barndominium is, you need the variance for the driveway width.

Mr. Ziganti – I see more than one variance request in here, so let's get back to the Duncan Factors. So Mr. Ridley is it your stance that you need this variance so you can have beneficial use of your property?

Mr. Ridley – That is correct.

Ms. Muehling – My stance is, there is an alternate way by a land transfer without a building.

Ms. Denamen – Let's explore that. He can transfer the acreage to make them both 3-acre lots...

Ms. Muehling – If he transfers, there would be a new lot created. He could put storage on there.

Mr. Ridley – But not a building the size I would like to have. If I add onto my existing property, the barn would be tiny. I'm limited to 2,500 square feet. It would limit my possible building size.

Ms. Muehling – Just so we are clear, there are three steps a land split requires.

{Group returned to Duncan Factors review.}

Is the variance substantial?

Mr. Ridley – I do not think it is substantial because I cannot build on the 3-acre lot only because there is not 200' of frontage. The driveway will be tucked away; it will not be an eyesore. This was a very strange requirement to me.

Ms. Muehling – I disagree. The variance is quite substantial. Affording a flag lot is a 78% variance which is substantial.

Mr. Ziganti – I agree, instead of a 200' frontage, 45' is a substantial difference with a 77.5% variance.

Mr. Ziganti – Will the essential character of the neighborhood be substantially altered or will adjoining property's (neighbors) suffer a substantial detriment if the variance is granted?

Mr. Ridley – Definitely not. This building will be back in the woods and surrounded by landscaping to provide privacy.

Mr. Ziganti – reminded the board that the variance is for a 45' frontage request.

Mr. Muehling – I wanted to make sure you are building a case for a practical difficulty. Practical difficulties have to do with the lot – not with how they look. We always hope they will turn out nice, but we have no control over it. What we must make our decision on is numbers. I say, yes, the essential character of the neighborhood will change. The site plan indicates a barn with an 8,742.29 square foot area, a perimeter of 386.42 feet and a height that is less than 25' and an elevation which is approximately 1,200 dropping to an elevation of approximately 1,120 feet at Bentbrook Drive. My point in saying this is, there is a considerable drop at the back of that property.

Mr. Ridley – There is a substantial forest at the back of this property. This building will not change the flow of the water. I don't see how that will change the watershed. Before I asked for permission to build this building, I would have a study done before I asked for a permit.

Whether the variance would adversely affect the delivery of governmental services;

Mr. Ridley – Certainly not.

Ms. Muehling – Once again, I disagree. There are major thoroughfares in Chester Township. Since Sherman Rd. has been paved, people tend to travel west on Sherman and take a left on Caves Rd and cut up to Mayfield to avoid Town Center. That section of Caves is heavily trafficked. The creation of another non-compliant driveway leads to safety issues creating another driveway on the road.

Ms. Denamen – I don't necessarily agree with that. I don't think one more drive is going to significantly impact those items.

Mr. Ridley – There won't be anyone else using the property and there will be no additional traffic.

Ms. Muehling – We need to establish that EMS can deliver services to this property.

Mr. Ziganti – Did the property owner purchase the property with the knowledge of the zoning restrictions?

Mr. Ridley – I did not. I had no idea I could not build a barn the size I desired. There's a barn built just down the road that is more than twice the size of the one I am trying to build. It was quite a shock to find out this barn would not be possible without a variance.

Ms. Fadorsen – How big would you want it to be if you didn't need this variance?

Mr. Ridley – I'd still like it to be 8,000 square feet.

Mr. Ziganti - Whether the property owner's predicament feasibly can be obviated through some method other than a variance?

Mr. Ridley – I explored alternatives such as creating an easement. Easements are no longer allowed. The requested variance is the only practical way to obtain a beneficial use of the parcel.

Ms. Muehling – Yes, it can be solved feasibly. He can get storage by doing a transfer. He can't get a house that way, but he can get the storage.

Ms. Denamen – He can't get the storage he wants.

Mr. Ziganti – I don't even know what that storage request even is.

Mr. Ziganti – Will the variance preserve the spirit and intent of the zoning resolution and will substantial justice be done by granting the variance?

Mr. Ridley – The zoning intent of preventing tiny lots and preserve neighborhood character will be preserved because no reduction to the 3-acre minimum lot size is requested and is consistent with the townships residential and agricultural character.

Mr. Ziganti – Reviewing these Duncan Factors has been difficult because what we have in front of us is more than getting an easement on some frontage to allow a driveway. My understanding is that you {Mr. Ridley} are creating a flagstaff lot. Is that correct?

Mr. Ridley – That is correct.

Mr. Ziganti – That creates a piece of property that is not allowed for in Chester Township.

Mr. Ridley – Because of frontage?

Mr. Ziganti – It has to do with the fact that it is set back so far.

Mr. Ridley – It is my understanding that it is not the shape of the lot, it's the frontage that is the issue. As long as the frontage is approved, there are no other rules that have been violated.

Mr. Ziganti – My understanding for that frontage is to prevent construction of lots such as this. So, are you wanting to build this so you can sell?

Mr. Ridley – No, this is for me.

Mr. Ziganti – So you already have a house on the larger property?

Mr. Ridley – Yes. To be clear, the only reason I am making this be a residence is it is the only way I can build the barn large enough to meet zoning code.

Mr. Ziganti – So, what size barn do you wish to build?

Mr. Ridley – An 8,000 square foot barn.

Mr. Ziganti – An 8,000 square foot accessory building is not allowed in Chester Township without getting a variance.

Mr. Ziganti – So, this is a residence with an attached accessory building? It's a residence with an area that is to be used as a workshop, a barn, what?

Mr. Ridley – If I get a variance, I will build this residence which is also a barn and it will be used primarily for storage, but also I can go out and tinker. It will have snowmobiles, jet skis, all kinds of fun things we've always wanted to have. This would be a place where we can store that.

Mr. Ziganti – Why can't your existing residence not be expanded to have these kinds of areas added?

Mr. Ridley – I'm glad you asked. In order for us to expand the house, it would be substantially more expensive. It would also change the character of the house and neighborhood and look very strange.

Mr. Ziganti – So it would not be a residence you would live in?

Mr. Ridley – I would not live in it. Perhaps we may have family live in it at a future date. It's probably not going to be lived in. Whether it's lived in or not, that would be irrelevant because that residence would meet code.

Ms. Fadorsen – What happens when you decide to move? Would you sell the two lots together?

Mr. Ridley – I would like to try to sell them together. If they are sold separately, they each would have land and have value. People would want to buy either or both of them.

Ms. Muehling – I would like to have a description of what was the old parcel. I would like to know the descriptions of the new lot. If we grant that 45' frontage variance, that will make both lots buildable lots. There's no question with the old one {parcel}. We do not know specifically what the lot lines are on the new parcel. We cannot measure setbacks or any other thing in terms of what the new lot will be and yet we are saying that without knowing the dimensions of the new lots, without having a letter from the health department indicating the new lot can accept a septic tank, we are saying those are buildable lots.

Group discussion on whether a variance can be approved without knowing that septic can be placed on the new lot. Are we able to create a lot that we are not sure will conform to health department regulations?

Public Comment

Ms. Janet Stearns - I live to the south of the property and the caves. This gentleman has property above those caves. That's why those elevations. There is no way to put a septic in there too well unless you're going to pump it uphill. My great-uncle owned much of that property.

My question is, how many feet would this barn be from Ron's property {12544 Caves Road}?

Mr. Ron Schabroni My question is why was the 200' width variance put in place?

Ms. Muehling – To discourage people from making flag lots.

Mr. Schabroni – When I purchased my property, I was told this property was unbuildable. How is this going to affect the Fire Department? Will they be able to get a fire truck back there? How is this going to affect my well? How is the driveway going to affect my driveway when he takes out some trees?

Public Comments Closed

Mr. Ridley – We are going to remove as few trees as possible. As far as fire hazard, it's going to be a steel building with minimal fire risk. Additionally, we will put in a fire system to mitigate any fire hazard. As far as fire truck accessibility is concerned, it is very easy for a fire truck to get back there.

As far as size, someone just down the road built a building more than twice the size of this structure and it was done right next to the road. This is at least tucked away and much smaller. It will not be visible from the road.

Ms. Denamen – Do you know the overall frontage width of your property?

Board discussion on dimensions of proposed lot.

Mr. Ridley detailed why he could not put another accessory building on his existing lot. In the front yard, there is a septic system, in the back there is a pool, a historic fireplace and another well and further back the contour lines make any building prohibitive. I've looked at the land and the only practical place where I have room is where I have it on this diagram.

Board discussion on contours of land and alternative areas where an accessory building could be placed. Determined that an offer for a continuance could be offered to the appellant.

The continuance is offered for the appellant to obtain information on soil type and dimensions of proposed property and including proposed new lot lines.

Mr. Ridley accepted the offer for a continuance until the next BZA meeting on January 12, 2026.

Approval of Minutes

- Mr. Dobrzynski motioned to accept the November 10, 2025, minutes as modified; Ms. Fadorsen seconded the motion.
Ms. Denamen/yes, Ms. Fadorsen/yes, Ms. Muehling/yes; Mr. Dobrzynski/yes, Mr. Ziganti/yes
Motion passed.
- Ms. Klemm motioned to accept the November 18, 2025 minutes as presented, Ms. Denamen seconded the motion.
Ms. Fadorsen/yes, Ms. Klemm/yes, Ms. Muehling/yes; Mr. Dobrzynski/yes, Mr. Ziganti/yes
Motion passed.

Old Business

Continuing thoughts to determine how to move forward with an opinion/request of the Zoning Commission regarding pool covers.

DRAFT BZA Bylaws still under review.

New Business

Next meeting January 12, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Tentative meeting for January 27 at 6:30 p.m. to review Bylaws.

Meeting closed t: 9:15 p.m.

Approval Date January 12, 2026

Kathleen McCarthy, Admin. Assistant

Barton Ziganti, Chairman

Mindy Denamen, Vice-Chair

Mark Dobrzynski

Justin Enger

Christina Klemm

Margaret Muehling