Wabash County Plan Commission

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Wabash County Board of Zoning Appeals

Board Members: Dan Dale, Patty Lengel, Mark Milam, Joe Vogel, Jerry Younce

Staff: Larry Thrush, Board Attorney; Brian Campbell, Plan Director; Amanda Lyons, Administrative Assistant

Meeting Minutes of Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Roll call was taken with the following present:

Board Members: Dan Dale, Patty Lengel, Joe Vogel, Jerry Younce

Staff: Larry Thrush, Board Attorney; Brian Campbell, Plan Director; Amanda Lyons, Administrative Assistant

Absent: Mark Milam

Others present: David Blocher, Emily Blocher, Jesse Singh, Ranvir Singh, Nicky Burnsworth, Bill Burnsworth, Ralph Ranck, Mike Tomson, Brenda Tomson, Andrea Urschel, Bill Urschel, Chris Tomson, Bryan Burcroff, Jennie Terrell

The Wabash County Board of Zoning Appeals met on Tuesday, October 10, 2023, in the Commissioners Meeting Room of the Wabash County Courthouse. Board Chairman, Joe Vogel called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Mr. Vogel asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes of the July 25, 2023 meeting. There being none, Mr. Vogel asked for a motion to approve minutes as written. Motion by Ms. Lengel, second by Mr. Younce. Board proceeded to roll call vote; motion carried 3-0-1, with Mr. Dale abstaining since he was not present for the July meeting.

Mr. Vogel stated first on the agenda would be Special Exception #4, Thirteenth Street Properties / Mr. Singh, for a change of use from a sandwich shop to a carry-out liquor store at 202 S. State Road 15, LaFontaine in Liberty Township. Mr. Campbell shared the property is zoned General Business; however, according to the zoning ordinance no zone includes a liquor store as a permitted use. He stated that Mr. Singh has received a favorable recommendation from the Town Board in LaFontaine and from the Plan Commission at their September meeting. Mr. Vogel asked if the business would be only carry-out, with no open beverages to be sold. Mr. Singh answered yes, with his license he cannot sell open beverages. Mr. Vogel asked if there were any other questions or comments from board members or those in attendance. There being none, he asked for a motion to approve Special Exception #4 to change the use of the property from a sandwich shop to a liquor store as presented. Motion to approve made by Ms. Lengel; second by Mr. Dale. Board proceeded to roll call vote; motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Vogel indicated next is Special Exception #7, Bryan Burcroff, for a pond. Mr. Campbell stated Mr. Burcroff would like to build a pond at his residence at 2485 N. 500 E, Urbana in Lagro Township. Mr. Burcroff received a favorable recommendation from the drainage board on August 7, 2023. He also received a favorable recommendation from the Plan Commission on September 7, 2023. Mr. Campbell informed board members Mr. Burcroff is not seeking any variances with the pond, just approval of the special exception for the pond. Mr. Vogel asked if there were any questions or concerns from board members or others present. There being none, he asked for a motion to approve Special Exception #7 for the pond as presented. Motion to approve made by Ms. Lengel; second by Mr. Dale. Board proceeded to roll call vote; motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Vogel stated the third item on the agenda is Special Exception #6, DKB Farms LLC / David Blocher, for an earthen structure in Lagro Township with a variance from property setbacks.

Mr. Campbell: Mr. Blocher applied for a special exception for an earthen structure. At the last Plan Commission meeting he was given a favorable recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeals. He has received approval from the Drainage Board. IDEM has no issues with the project because it was seeded quickly after completed. There have been some questions about the setbacks. I received an email from Mr. Blocher on September 20th that stated he was informed the dirt is on the property line based on a survey Mr. Boyd had completed, so he is asking for a full exemption on the setback. The toe of slope of the earthen structure is on Mr. Blocher's north property line and south property line of Mr. Boyd's. I contacted everyone I could think of to research issues relating to the bald eagles and the way this was constructed. So far no one has given me anything to show it was not correctly constructed, other than obviously not getting the proper approvals before construction. He is asking for a special exception, so we will have a vote to approve the special exception along with a variance for the setback for the north property line, and a variance of use. We have completed the Ag 1 test on the parcel because the property is in Ag 1 zone. That test came back with 1 point, you need 15 points to get approval. If anyone would like to review that test, I have the paperwork. Does the Ag 1 test come into play because the ordinance says any parcel located in an A1 district selected as a potential site for construction of a residential structure or a non-agriculture related business structure? I wanted to go ahead and review it since it is in Ag 1 zone, it is in a field that was being farmed and is taking up farmland, we are being told it is not a business structure. With the size of the parcel that was being evaluated it was going to be pretty much impossible for him to get 15 points. Any evaluations we have run that are that large of a parcel normally do not get the points because of the amount of ag around it that you have to take into account. Hard to tell if the evaluation would need to be taken into consideration as it is not a non-ag related business or a home. I have called everyone else I could think of to check on the eagles, and everything has come back okay. At this point it will be up to the Board to decide what we need to do moving forward with this.

Mr. Campbell then reviewed pictures of the structure from July 2023 with the Board.

Mr. Campbell: I know there were some questions about the size and whether it needed to go through IDEM to be approved. I talked to Mr. Blocher's contractor. (Mr. Campbell shared a document with the Board regarding IDEM requirements.) I have followed up with IDEM, since it has been seeded, it is considered in compliance with IDEM.

Mr. Vogel: Any questions from the Board? Do you want to tell the Board and those here tonight what your plans are with this, why you did it?

Mr. Blocher: It is dirt. I plan on shooting and all kinds of things. It is my property. I plan on teaching my girls how to shoot safely on my own property. I plan on doing all kinds of other things with it. It is dirt. If you have questions, I can answer those.

Mr. Vogel: You are not turning this into a commercial or a pay to shoot or anything like this? The only people would be your family?

Mr. Blocher: Correct. It would have to be zoned as a shooting range to do that; we are not doing that. Again, if the hill was big enough already, we would not be having this conversation, but I did not add any dirt.

Ms. Lengel: Are you planning on farming around it?

Mr. Blocher: Yes, and possibly on it.

Ms. Lengel: I thought that Mr. Boyd wanted enough room between it and his line to ride a 4-wheeler through there.

Mr. Blocher: There is. There is probably 20' along edge of the woods.

Ms. Lengel: Mr. Boyd is okay with this?

Mr. Blocher: Yes.

Mr. Campbell: I personally talked with Mr. Boyd and he has no issue with it.

Mr. Blocher: I talked to him ahead of time about the whole thing since it was along his property line and he is okay with it.

Mr. Vogel: Any questions or comments from the public?

Mr. Tomson: Leaving opinions and beliefs out of all this, it comes down to right and wrong, what is allowed and not allowed. This earthen structure, as it is being called, was built without permits or board approval. We are here because the builder was caught and we are playing catch up now. They are asking for forgiveness. Every property owner knows they need permits to build anything in the county. Like laws, ordinances are written for a reason, and spell out what you can and cannot do. Like breaking the law, there are punishments and fines when caught. As it was stated in the first meeting, it is not allowed, it needs torn down. Today we are here because it is being called an earthen structure, but he is saying he is going to shoot into it; therefore, it meets your definition of a shooting range. Public or private use, it does not matter, if you allow anybody else to shoot on it. Your ordinance states public or private is forbidden on Ag 1 ground. Your ordinance stipulates that. The only reason we are here is because they asked for the exception and you have no definition for it. Read the ordinance, there is no definition for this. It falls under pond, this is not a pond, it does not have four sides, it is not going to retain water. So, we are here for this, a loop hole in the ordinance, because you do not have a definition for earthen structure. If you google earthen structure, you find mud houses, mud structures, earth embankments, that is an earthen structure. It is not a three-sided structure. If you google design of a shooting range, this is what pops up, a three-sided structure of this size and magnitude to shoot into. Therefore, if he says he is going to shoot into it, it meets your very definition of a shooting range. The owner stated in the Plan Commission meeting he plans to use it to sled down, ride his jeep on it, ride 4 wheelers up and down it, and shoot into it. It meets the definition of a shooting range as stated in the county ordinance on page 1-33 and shooting ranges are forbidden on ag 1 ground, just like the solar farm that was denied. It was denied on ag 1 ground because you have a law or ordinance against it. Speaking of Special Exceptions by ordinance page 4-4, they cannot be detrimental or endanger public health, safety. The use cannot affect the value of any adjacent property. Long story short, the board must follow their own ordinance and not let personal opinion and beliefs sway their decision. If the ordinance, stating what is and is not allowed, is not followed then the entire ordinance is worthless and unenforceable. Voting yes or no will set precedent that anyone can do whatever they want on their property, they do not need to ask for permission. So, depending on what the vote is today, and if this is allowed to stay up, I believe we are opening it up for those that had a contractual agreement with the solar farms to file an appeal and lawsuit against the county for denying the solar farm, which the ordinance states is not allowed but then allow a shooting range that the ordinance states is also not allowed. Any good attorney could win that. If you are going to shoot into it, it is a shooting range.

Ms. Urschel: Is Mr. Boyd employed by you?

Mr. Blocher: Yes.

Ms. Christina Tomson: I agree with a lot of what my husband has said previously. But you keep saying is Boyd okay with this? Boyd is only one neighbor out of how many others that were not asked. It is what is in black and white. It is not a matter of what we think is right or wrong, it is a matter of it is against what is in writing today. If we do not like the way the zoning is written, then that is meant to be addressed at a different date. But the way it is written at this point in time, and what was done, it was against what is in writing. And again, if you are not going enforce what is put in writing, what is the point. And no offense, you are a well-educated business man. To stand in front of all of these people and say you did not know you needed permits, I find that hard to believe personally. It is not a matter of how I personally feel, I could name millions of reasons that I do not want it personally, but

that is beside the point, it is what is in black and white, what is allowed and what is not allowed. And are we going to actually enforce it or are we going to say it is okay, you're forgiven.

Mr. Ranck: I reside at 5714 N 300 E. If you look over the top of the back of this, you will see my house is almost directly in line with it. First question, I understand you're making a 50-caliber gun at your business?

Mr. Blocher: This is for personal use. Am I making one, no.

Mr. Ranck: Even then, some of these guns have a range of over 1.5 miles.

Mr. Blocher: A 22 long rifle does sir.

Mr. Ranck: My house is right in line, Mike Hill family just to the north of us, Wilcox family just to the south of us, has anybody went out and talked to them about any of this? This is not taking nerf guns, these are actual guns that are used to kill. I'm not saying it would ever be on purpose that my property or anyone on it would be affected, but there is an element of danger with this. I'm against it. I know the contractor, he's a good guy, a good family, but going back to what Christina said, when you've built ponds and structures, he knows with something of this size, someone should have at least come in and talked to someone. I know it is going to big expense if someone has to tear it down. I know it was a big expense to put it up. In my mind that cannot be a part of this decision. Can you tell me that there won't be a party back there, larger groups, larger guns. It just doesn't make sense to me at all.

Mr. Bill Urschel: If approved is the county liable if a stray bullet hits a person or something?

Mr. Thrush: I wouldn't think so. If it was a case of negligence, Mr. Blocher would be liable.

Mr. Blocher: Yes.

Ms. Lengel: Didn't we just approve Bryan Burcroff for a Special Exception that goes kind of against our rules, that's why we gave him that because it went against our ordinance?

Mr. Campbell: Ponds are required to apply and be approved as a Special Exception. Our ordinance is very specific, as Mr. Tomson said, to the use of a shooting range. Shooting ranges are not allowed in an Ag 1 zone without a variance. Mr. Blocher decided to go with the Special Exception, but again when I first started, I said if he's using it for a use that is not part of our ordinance, he should be required to get a variance for it. That is why I have three different vote sheets here tonight. One for a special exception, one for a variance for the setbacks, and one for the use not allowed per the ordinance in an Ag 1 zone. Those are the three findings of fact sheets that I have ready for tonight and have included in the ad for this tonight because as soon as you shoot into it, it's a shooting range. At that point our ordinance says you can't do it. As Mr. Thrush explained it very gracefully in our Plan Commission meeting, if you're shooting into it, it's a shooting range no matter what. You can call it an earthen structure, which is the way Mr. Blocher decided to go, and that's fine. I understand it is not a pond, it doesn't hold water. We would approve the special exception, but if he didn't we would have still required the variances for the setbacks and use. We're doing the same thing. To go back to Mr. Tomson, the Board never disapproved solar, the Board disapproved changing the ordinance for solar. They never came in and gave us anything; we never had the opportunity....

Mr. Tomson: But solar is forbidden on Ag 1 ground, correct?

Mr. Campbell: Correct, but they had the same opportunity to come in for a variance also.

Mr. Tomson: It would be denied?

Mr. Campbell: We never got the opportunity. They never brought it in for a variance. The difference is they did not build prior to coming in.

Mr. Tomson: Right, they did it legally by coming in to talk first, not by coming in three or four months after they built it.

Ms. Christina Tomson: Also, according to the ordinance charts, where it has a S for Special Exception and such, if I'm not mistaken it quite clearly shows under shooting range an X. End of discussion, not allowed in Ag 1 ground, so I don't understand. It's in black and white. You stated you are going to shoot into this dirt. It is a shooting range in Ag 1 ground with 1 of 15 points. It's not allowed.

Mr. Thrush: He can get a variance to do anything.

Ms. Christina Tomson: So, what does the X mean?

Mr. Thrush: It means you have to get a variance. It's prohibited but if you get a use variance, you can do it.

Ms. Christina Tomson: Ok. I misunderstood the chart then. I thought the X meant no.

Mr. Campbell: That would have been the same thing with the solar. They would have had to go through the same process because it's not allowed in the Ag 1. They would have had the opportunity to come in for a variance if they had requested it. For solar, they wouldn't have had a choice, there would have been no reason for them to apply for a special exception because they didn't build anything ahead of time.

Ms. Christina Tomson: And a variance by definition is saying it's against the codes as it's written, but I would like to do it anyway. Am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, and anyone can come in for a variance if it's not part of our ordinance that is acceptable, you always have the option to come in and request a variance before this Board.

Ms. Christina Tomson: Ok, and then the decision is up to the Board, correct?

Mr. Tomson: This should have all been in proper procedure, before he decided to build. He needs your permission and the county's permission, and should have before he did it. If you do it without permission there should be a punishment. If someone comes and breaks in your house without your permission and gets caught there is a punishment and a fine for it. There's no forgiveness for it. Crime committed, you're punished. No different than this. Built it, never asked for anyone's permission, got caught, now we're in here playing catch up trying to get the exception and variance.

Mr. Thrush: He has built it at his risk.

Mr. Tomson: But he went against the county ordinance. He should have gotten all these approvals before.

Mr. Thrush: That is right, he has. If he doesn't get a variance, they could say tear it down. Remove it.

Mr. Tomson: I understand that. My whole thing is if it's allowed after the fact.

Mr. Thrush: The analogy of a crime isn't good. It's not the same thing.

Mr. Tomson: I know, but what I'm saying is if this was never brought to the Board's attention would anyone ever know about it? If Brian hadn't been contacted about it and he go out there. But here we are because it got caught mid-building. I get it, he's filed for everything, but it's after the fact. The whole point of the building, if I want to build on to my house....

Mr. Thrush: It's not the first time it's happened.

Mr. Tomson: I get that, but we're allowing something that....

Mr. Ranck: It's been reversed many times because it wasn't done right. And they have been penalized.

Mr. Thrush: Yes, that happens, certainly. If he doesn't get approval, he could be made to take that down.

Mr. Ranck: On the agenda he's asking for a special exception with a variance for property setbacks? Is that what tonight's meeting is about and what has been advertised?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, the advertisement reads DKB Farms / David Blocher, Special Exception #6 to construct a pond, lake, or earthen structure with a variance from a use not allowed per the ordinance in this zone and for the setback requirements for a pond, lake, or earthen structure from the north property line. The actual paperwork and ad in the newspaper had all the wording in it that we are discussing tonight.

Mr. Blocher: So just to be clear, there is three separate votes. One for the setbacks, one for the earthen structure, and a third one saying it's a shooting range? Is that correct?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, it is. For a use not allowed in the ordinance in an Ag 1 zone.

Mr. Thrush: It depends on what motions are made. The variance of use for a shooting range should be done first. If that passes, do a variance for the setback. Last thing would the Special Exception.

Mr. Blocher: I tried to read and understand ordinance. I am a business man and I deal with contracts and all kinds of different things. I am not a lawyer. I don't know how many lawyers wrote that document, I have tried and tried to read it and understand it. If we want to go through those things, I have all of those so we can make sure we are on the same page and looking at the same thing. I understand what Mike is saying, you guys don't want it there. Calling it a shooting range, in question it's dirt. At the end of the day can you move dirt on your own property? Without permission from the Board? So how many of you move dirt on your property, how many of you farm?

Mr. Urschel: But we're not shooting into it.

Mr. Blocher: The purpose shouldn't matter.

Ms. Christina Tomson: It absolutely matters.

Mr. Blocher: Go ahead read shooting range, if that's what we're going to call it. Can you look up the definition of shooting range and read it, just so we're all on the same page?

Mr. Campbell: From the ordinance, Shooting Range means a permanently located and improved area designed and operated for the use of rifles, shotguns, pistols, silhouettes, skeet, trap, black powder, archery, and other similar sport shooting, in an indoor or outdoor environment. The area may be publicly or privately owned and operated for profit or not for profit. "Shooting range" does not include any area for the exclusive use of air guns.

Mr. Blocher: So, it is not a permanent structure, it is dirt. It's not permanent.

Ms. Christina Tomson: So, you could take it out with a shovel? It took how many days with bulldozers to build?

Mr. Blocher: Private, it's not being used as a profit or non-for-profit, it's not a business. Again, it's an individual doing this, not a business. The solar was a business. Improvement Permit 4.1, could you look that up?

Mr. Campbell: Yes, you want it read?

Mr. Blocher: Yes.

Mr. Campbell: No structure, improvement, or use of land, may be altered, changed, placed, erected, or located in Wabash County without first obtaining an Improvement Location Permit from the Director. No such Permit shall be issued until the Director is satisfied that the proposed structure, improvement, or use of land complies with the provisions of this Ordinance and Indiana law, unless a written order is received from the Board of Zoning Appeals, Plan Commission, or a court of competent jurisdiction.

Mr. Blocher: Could you read improvement definition?

Mr. Campbell: Improvement means any man-made building, structure, bridge, work of art, area, parking facility, public facility, fence, gate, wall, landscaping, or other immovable item that becomes part of, placed upon, or is affixed to real estate.

Mr. Blocher: Could you read the definition of landscaping please?

Mr. Campbell: Landscaping means the improvement of a lot with grass, shrubs, trees, ornamentals, and other vegetation which may include but not be limited to walks, flowerbeds, fountains, lighting, timbers, decorative fencing, stone, mulch, and the maintenance thereof.

Mr. Blocher: We have a bigger problem. If that's all in there, that just said, the way I interpret it, and I'm just an individual that I can't do anything on my ground without getting an improvement permit. That's what that says. There's 30,000 people that live inside our county. I don't know how many permits you have received, but I guarantee that most of us have done some type of landscaping this year without getting a permit. I moved dirt on my property for me and my family. It is eccentric, some might call it crazy. It is dirt we are talking about. I did not add anything from a structure standpoint. I took the dirt that was there and I piled it up. That is all I did. If I'm going to use it for agricultural purposes, to shoot into, it should not matter. It is private ground. If it's not private, then the county owns it. Quite frankly, they might as well come get it.

Mr. Campbell: I will say this, as far as the word improvement goes, that is different from an improvement location permit. Improvement location permit means a permit application, submitted to the Wabash County Plan Commission, stating that the proposed request referred to therein complies with the provisions of this ordinance and that approval to erect, construct, enlarge, alter, repair, move, occupy, use, improve, convert any building or structure within its jurisdiction, or change the condition of the land, may be approved.

Mr. Blocher: And we determined that there is no definition for earthen structure. Earth and structure don't go together. Structure is a building. And if you look up the definition of structure it's a combination of erected parts and materials.

Mr. Thrush: Show me the definition of a shooting range. (Mr. Campbell showed Mr. Thrush the definition in the ordinance book.)

Ms. Howard: I live at 1657 E 500 N, right across the road from this. I watched it go up. I can see who is standing in the horseshoe shooting. If he's over there shooting with his daughter, great. What would happen if I see Mr. Boyd

over there shooting in that structure, or someone else other than the family? How would that be enforced? Who would be allowed to use it?

Ms. Lengel: I would guess friends would be private. You have people to your house for private parties. If he's charging money that would be a business. My history, I worked in a gun shop for 15 years. I heard stories of projectiles going across a pond, turned a corner and hit a car. He said he's been shooting 8 years at this location already. Mr. Boyd shoots too — I'm not certain of his backstop. Some others said everybody has a shooting range at their house. I think I said it before at a different meeting, but I think you are guys are lucky that you have this huge thing to stop the bullets from coming to you. I think my question to you guys, and Mr. Tomson I can see you feeling this way, but is it just that he did it without permission? Because he's going to shoot anyway. The birds were there before and they are there now. It's going to scare the horse, and it did before. So really the structure has nothing to do with him shooting because even if it's torn down, he is still going to shoot. So is the biggest beef that he did it without permission. That's what I'm trying to understand.

Ms. Tomson: If you look at that structure, it's meant for high caliber, high power shooting. Plain and simple. He's not going to shoot it with a BB gun. He's been shooting already, and I don't have a problem with that. Go out and target practice, that's your right. It's gone beyond that. This is meant for something else. It's plain to see. It's not a personal beef, but it was called out in the first meeting. If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it's a duck. What's personal about it, is someone standing up and telling me it's something it's not.

Ms. Lengel: Ok, so if we call it a shooting range for me for a minute, and he's shooting into it using a high caliber gun to shoot into the ground or a tree of whatever he had before. And now he uses that same gun in this shooting range and it's going to stop the bullet from going to your houses, wouldn't that make you feel safer?

Ms. Christina Tomson: If the shooting range wasn't there, he would be smart enough not to shoot the high caliber gun into them.

Ms. Lengel: You would like to think that, but how many cases are there like I mentioned where people have gotten shot.

Mr. Tomson: My question, if you want a backstop, you haul or move a little dirt, but not three acres worth. I get it, but you don't need a structure of this size for your family to shoot into it. A structure that could be a horseshoe, but it doesn't need to be this monstrosity, that's 24' tall and 100' wide. I get it, he has the right to move dirt, but it doesn't need to be that big, and he should have gotten the permission before it ever got built. The size of this thing, I get to look at this thing for however long I choose to live in my house. If you approve a variance, what is this going to do to adjacent property values? If I want to sell my house in 10 years, who is going to want to buy it with this big giant shooting range behind it. What's it going to do to the value of farm ground around it? Boyd works for him, he's not going to complain. Everybody in this country has the right to shoot guns, own guns. I own guns, I shoot them, but I go the range for work, not behind the house. The size of this thing is the issue. He could have moved less than acre and created a personal use shooting range, backstop, or whatever. It didn't need to be to this magnitude. I understand he has money, build what you want is what we're down to. The whole point is it didn't need to be that big. Boyd has money, he didn't create this type of thing. He put probably a couple loads of dirt, some landscape timbers, and spent a few hundred dollars. I haven't been back there, it's not my property, not my business to know, just from looking at the maps. Not a problem with that, but this monstrosity behind my house is an issue. I get it, he's been shooting for years. Boyd has been too. It scares things, but we all get used to guns being shot. Everyone of us has heard gunshots, but not everyone of us has to look at a 24' high and 100' wide earthen structure behind our houses. That's my problem with it. Crops or no crops, I get to look at it. What is my property going to do?

Ms. Lengel: Did you happen to ask any realtor about property value?

Mr. Tomson: No, but who is going to want to buy it? I wouldn't. No one is going to want to sit on the back porch and look at that. Property values are going to drop due to the size of that thing. It does not need to be that big. If he wants to shoot, he has every right. I'm not against it. This didn't need to be done. You could've built one wall and been done. You could've put a mound in front of the woods, and been done.

Mr. Ranck: When reading the definition of shooting range, it said it was prohibited whether public or private.

Ms. Lengel: Mr. Thrush was saying that if you get a variance, you might be allowed to do it even though it says it's not allowed.

Mr. Thrush: Would you agree this falls into the definition of a shooting range?

Mr. Blocher: That's a loaded question. It's not permanently located on the ground, it's dirt. I didn't pour concrete, I didn't put up a structure as far as a building goes. It's not a shooting range. At the end of the day, it's dirt.

Mr. Thrush: So, you feel it's not permanent because it could be removed? This courthouse could be removed, is it not permanent?

Mr. Blocher: It has a foundation, doesn't it?

Mr. Thrush: A foundation can be removed.

Mr. Blocher: So, you want to call it a shooting range based on that definition? Then I'm asking the board to approve it as a shooting range. But inside of the ordinance, I could have said I'm going to farm on it, or other agricultural things that are all permitted by this ordinance. It's just dirt. If I shoot into it, if I plant beans on it, raise goats on it, it should not matter. It's for personal use.

Mr. Thrush: It does matter. Of course, it matters. If you shoot into it, it meets the definition of a shooting range.

Mr. Vogel: In Ag 1 you can't have a space to shoot with your grandchildren? You can't do that without going through this process?

Mr. Campbell: If you're going to call it a shooting range, built indoors or outdoors, according to our ordinance, then yes it needs to be approved.

Mr. Thrush: It doesn't matter so much what you call it, it's what you use it for. Is it an earthen structure that's used as a shooting range?

Mr. Vogel: I don't know your frequency of shooting; I'm not defending either side. But if I wanted to go out with my grandson and shoot, I don't think I would have to come in here as a farm owner for years, with a backstop built. I would think at least 10' high because kids can shoot high. I think 24' is extra safety, but I don't think I should have to come in here and ask for a public hearing to shoot on my land with my grandson. I think your structure is super big. Why you made it that big is your own personal thought, it is safe. But I'm not sure. Bill, you owned the farm, if you'd kept it, you would not have had this problem.

Mr. Urschel: I want to say this, when we first saw that go up it was huge. I guess to me, just thinking about myself, if I'm going to build something that big and put that much money into it, I'm going to have to use it all the time because I've got so much in it. Who would build something that big and go out there once a month to shoot? It looked like to us, as he owns a gun store, I thought is this going to be a place where he and his buddies shoot large firearms every Saturday afternoon and I'm going to listen to it? I didn't want to hear it. I don't mind it once in a while, but if it turns into something I've got to sit in my backyard and listen to – and you wouldn't like it either Joe.

Mr. Vogel: I do hear it every day. In my area, Laketon / Ijamsville and old the railroad, kids are popping every day. There is a lot of shooting that goes on. Then I look at my personal rights, I think I can go back to the railway with my grandson and we shoot into it. I'm not arguing with you, you have good valid points. As for property values, I would much rather have that than a hog house sitting back there.

Mr. Tomson: I would not want either.

Mr. Vogel: I know, but we all have those if the setbacks are met. Keep that in mind too.

Mr. Ranck: But the hog house is an agricultural use. And you guys went to great lengths because of CAFOs to make land use zones in Wabash County. And now we're going to allow variances to the zoning and setbacks for everything.

Mr. Vogel: Those setbacks being met at my personal home, I couldn't have 4th of July outside because the east wind and humid day – it stunk too bad, even at the required distance away. I'm not complaining, I'm not running down here to turn it in because it's legal. But somethings in the country are just there. If people want total protection they need to build in a subdivision with protection.

Mr. Ranck: We all have rights to do what we want with what we own as long as we don't enter that space of our neighbors. And to me, we are entering the space. I think before we got here there should have been some type of poll go out to neighbors to see who is in favor and who is against this. That should have been allowed for in the ordinance. To get an idea what the feeling was in the neighborhood. If the neighborhood is for it, I would have to accept it and go on. But I don't see any of that done. Just not going to tell me that those that built it and this gentleman didn't know ahead of time that something of this size, they didn't know they should at least be asking some questions ahead of time. Checking to see what would be required. I'm tired of the we'll just go do it and move on.

Ms. Brenda Tomson: My problem is this structure was built with blatant disregard for the county ordinances and neighbors – how it was going to affect neighbors, livestock, those kinds of things. When you talk about frequency, yes he shoots occasionally. You build a structure like this, it's going to be more and more frequent, which is going to affect neighbors more, animals more. It was the blatant disregard that really upsets me.

Ms. Emily Blocher: I'm David's wife. I want to let everyone know that I 100% back David. He didn't do anything wrong on purpose, I promise. We talked to the excavator, who has lots of experience with this type of project. He moves dirt for all types of reasons. And honestly, I promise you, he told us we don't need a permit for this. He informed us if you're digging a pond, you need a permit, but you don't need one just to move some dirt. That's what he said. We really were not trying to get away with anything, or be sneaky in any way.

Ms. Lengel: I will say the only way I knew I had to get a permit for a pergola was because I'm on this board. If I wasn't, I would have put it up and never known the difference.

Mr. Blocher: I found out about this ordinance by that guy (pointing to Mr. Campbell) coming to my house. That's how I found about it.

Ms. Christina Tomson: Guess how we found out? By watching this go up behind our house.

Mr. Blocher: That there was an ordinance?

Mr. Christina Tomson: Yes. That's when we started looking into it because we didn't agree with what was happening. Name one of your neighbors besides Boyd that you even bothered to go ask if they would be bothered by this. That is the blatant disregard that my mother-in-law is speaking of. You didn't take into consideration if

anybody but you and your own family — and I have no problem, absolutely no problem, with the idea of wanting to safely teach your children how to use a gun, I'm 1000% behind that. It's the blatant disregard for your surrounding neighbors and the people that you live beside. It might be out in the county, we might not be right on top of each other like you are in a city, but we all live in the same neighborhood. It affects all of us.

Mr. Blocher: I'm sorry that I didn't effectively communicate. Although I believe that I did communicate with both Mike and Bill. I offered to buy ground from Bill beforehand for that reason.

Ms. Christina Tomson: Did you tell him what you were going to do with it? That you were going to put this up?

Mr. Urschel: I thought you were just going to shoot back there. When you put that up, it looked like more. It looked like a gun range for contests. That's what it looks like. This was not what I thought you were doing.

Mr. Blocher: It's a lifetime investment. Some people buy sports cars and all kinds of stuff. I enjoy firearms. I enjoy being outside in God's country. And that's where I think I live in Wabash County. I want to enjoy being outside and do it safely. There's a lawyer attached to every bullet. It's my responsibility, so this is how I feel like I'm being a responsible citizen. I've also tried to take.....if you guys want me to plant trees, we can talk about that later. I'm willing to do all kinds of different stuff if I need to on that side. I have gone through and done something I didn't think I ever wanted because of noise. I was afraid you guys would have noise issues. I went out and waited a year for suppressors. I'm on the NFA black list forever now. But so that I can hopefully keep the noise level down for you guys most of the time. Everything can't be done that way, but a lot of stuff can. Again, it's a life investment. It's not something to do every day. I have a job and a family.

Mr. Vogel: Any other new comments or concerns? If not, I'll ask for a motion on the variance of use.

Mr. Blocher: Life is challenging. I cannot fix the past, none of us can. All I can do is move forward with the future and plan for the future, which is what I'm trying to do for me and my family. God's will for me, I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, but every day that we keep moving forward the best each one of us can. And it's by the grace of God that we can. What happens, happens. Each new day is from His mercy.

Mr. Campbell: We need a motion to approve a variance of use for a use that is not allowed in an Ag 1 zone.

Mr. Thrush: We need to specify that a motion could be made to approve or deny the application for the variance of use.

Mr. Vogel: Do I have a motion to approve or deny?

Ms. Lengel: I just want to say, this is really hard. I see the safety factors. I see wanting to do what I want to do on my own property. You think it's extravagant and a lot of money, but if we put it into perspective — I don't know what money any of you has — but looking at myself, I paid \$2,000 for the pergola I mentioned earlier. That was a lot of money to me. But that amount may be extravagant for someone else. And so, if he's able to do it, more power to him. But it's hard because the safety issue has really got me going. I want you guys to all be safe. What if we say tear it down, and he goes out and shoots a high-powered rifle. It could go right through your house. Whereas with this huge thing up there, it wouldn't. You all say it's okay to shoot guns, we don't care if you shoot them every now and then. And so, yet you want this to be smaller. But if it's smaller, you might not be as safe. Boyd's isn't going to be as safe as his, guaranteed. I know that the variance process is here just for this type of thing.

Mr. Dale: I would also say that your neighbors are going to keep an eye on you. You're going to get told on. You might end up back in here or with law enforcement. You guys just automatically say he'll be shooting a bigger gun, maybe, but you'll have recourse.

Mr. Tomson: What's the county going to do? What is the recourse? I can't enforce ordinances. We can report him, but sheriff's department is going to get tired of coming out and turn a blind eye to it. What is this board going to do about it? Afraid it will turn into being used by people buying guns at the gun store. Would that fall under contractual agreement? No longer private if you're allowing someone who buys a rifle from your business to come out here and shoot that. If that's allowed as part of that purchase, that's not private.

Ms. Lengel: I will say for Bass & Bucks we did restrict hours for shooting. It can be restricted for the neighbors to not hear the shooting all the time.

Mr. Vogel: But that was a business.

Mr. Ranck: Can you restrict the size of guns?

Mr. Tomson: What about Tannerite? I know people blow that up all the time. There a guy at Roann that has his YouTube channel for it.

Ms. Lengel: But Mr. Blocher was just saying he purchased suppressors so it wouldn't be as loud. There would be loud ones sometimes but he's going to try to suppress as much as he can so that you guys don't have to hear the noise.

Mr. Tomson: I get that, but you guys can set any kind ordinance. You can have it, but you can't do this. Well, who is going to be the overseer of the rules and regulations you put on it. It shouldn't be the neighbor's responsibility. Is it going to be Brian's job? He's going to get tired of running out there all the time to check it out.

Mr. Thrush: It probably would be the neighbors. It's not your duty, but your option.

Mr. Tomson: So, if we call 911, they're going to get tired of it.

Mr. Thrush: You wouldn't need to call 911. If the vote is to approve it, you can attach conditions.

Mr. Tomson: But we have to show proof. I don't want to have to have cameras out my back door to monitor it. Otherwise, it's hearsay – his word against my word. You guys can put any kind of rules and regulations on it, but who is going to oversee it?

Mr. Thrush: If the board is convinced that the conditions are being violated it can be revoked. But yes, Brian isn't going to be able to go out there everyday and check it. It would be the neighbors who would need to report it.

Ms. Lengel: It would, just like it was done in the beginning. We didn't know about it until someone reported it.

Ms. Christina Tomson: I guess what bothers me the most is we're depending on your decision tonight. If you were to ask everyone surrounding him, you would have one person out of fifteen that was for it. You have only a portion, unfortunately, here tonight that are against it. For whatever reasons we may be against it, we're against it. And so, it's like we feel unheard and there's plenty to back up why we are against it in black and white.

Ms. Lengel: I struggle with why, because you all say it's okay to shoot.

Ms. Christina Tomson: There's a difference between a backstop and that.

Ms. Lengel: I know and would think you would want that.

Ms. Christina Tomson: No because I know what gets shot into that. And I know what gets shot into a backstop. They are two different things.

Ms. Lengel: I agree.

Ms. Christina Tomson: So, if you don't have this, you're not going to shoot those things into a backstop.

Ms. Lengel: You would hope.

Ms. Christina Tomson: I'm going to bank on that because that is probably what has been done all these years he has been shooting.

Mr. Tomson: Before this was built, like he said, he moved dirt. He was shooting into a hill. There was no backstop to it. The bullets could ricochet wherever. I get talking about the safety issue. But this is probably the only structure besides Bass & Bucks that is built to this dynamic in this county. It's overkill. You have to look at it from a neighbor's perspective and the eyesore of it. You took a beautiful countryside of farm ground and you built this thing that stands taller than my house. I get it, you say safety. But why did it have to be so long. I get a 24' back wall. You could have built side walls half the distance and still had safety. The thing didn't need to be of that size. That's the whole point of it and what a lot of us here are upset about, is how big it is. It was built and done before it was even brought to the board's attention. Would we even be here had he gone through the proper chain to get this thing. If he would have come in to Brian with the plans, gone before the board. If I want to build a house I have to come in and present my plans to get a building permit. Some things are required to go in front of the board, some things aren't. If it doesn't require going before the board, then it's a moot point. He gets the permit. There are protocols that have to be followed. This thing was built and completed without any of your knowledge until Brian came out and put the stop work order on it. At that point it was essentially done, but seeding. It's not been the greatest seeding, but it's dry, it's something. Would we be here today if proper procedures and protocols were followed? Would you vote in favor of it if it was presented before it was done?

Mr. Campbell: We would have had to go through the same thing we are going through now. Everything would have been done exactly the same way; other than the structure wouldn't have been there. We could have notified him about setbacks, screenings, and such as required by the zoning ordinance. If this gets approved as a shooting range, there are specific screening requirements that will have to be met.

Mr. Tomson: My whole thing is the size of it and being built before without anyone's knowledge of it. I get the safety side of it; we all want to be safe when we shoot. It doesn't need to be the size that it is. I get it, he wanted to be safe. Bullets skip, whatever, I commend him for his build, but it's overkill in my opinion. I get it, you could have 24' on the back, but the sidewalls didn't need to be 150' long. Everybody in the neighborhood can see it, you can see it as soon as you come out Urbana. You know how many people have called, texted, or asked me about it? Everyone knew exactly what it was going to be. They asked if I wanted to look at that thing forever. No, not really, but it's not my decision. It's a board decision.

Ms. Lengel: I try to put myself in your seat every time I say whatever I say. I'm blessed with 60 acres and no one around me. Somebody came in a couple years ago and bought some land to the side and back of me and built a house. So now every time I'm in my back yard, we're both in our backyards. I hate it, but I don't have the finances to buy the land. So we have to look at what our neighbors do unless we have the ability to buy out all the neighbors in our sight. So, we are at our neighbor's mercy, that we're not able to tell them what to do on their property all the time as a neighbor. If they want to plant a tree, it doesn't matter if it blocks my view of a lake, that is their prerogative unfortunately or fortunately.

Mr. Ranck: Do you have to vote tonight? Reason being, I've been out of state for a month to month and a half. I've heard about this from multiple people. The ordinances are for the good of the community. I think when you get

into variances, especially as major as this is, somewhere it should be written in there that there has to be a public survey of everybody within so many miles of this. And to have a chance for them to fill out a paper survey including a page or two pages, where Mr. Blocher could write up his side, the safety features could be put into it, versus the other things, but send it out. I know there would be a cost to the county for postage, but this is for the community – we all ought to have some say in it. I'm not sure if we elected you or we elected the commissioners and they appoint you. But you're still appointees of the people, by the people. But even if you can't do it now, go ahead and vote. This is something that ought to be put in down the road.

Mr. Campbell: The board is appointed. The variance would be more a legal issue than procedural per the ordinance. I would have to ask Mr. Thrush when it comes to a variance if we should be able to do something like that. Everyone within 250' of the affected parcel is required by state law to receive notice. But to have to poll everyone for every variance request we get, I don't know that....

Mr. Thrush: It's not a community vote.

Mr. Ranck: This is very different than putting a little shed on the property line. It will affect everyone by sight. I can't believe this big thing was put up for just him and his kids. I'm sorry.

Mr. Thrush: You get notice of a public hearing and an opportunity to come and say your peace, but you don't get a vote on it.

Mr. Ranck: We don't want to vote on it. But the people would be able to fill out their opinions and it would come back here.

Mr. Thrush: That would need taken up with the legislature. The law isn't written that way.

Mr. Ranck: It could be written into the ordinance.

Ms. Lengel: It is, in retrospect, 250'. So, if you felt it needed to be within 10 miles that would be something for you to propose or bring to state legislature.

Mr. Ranck: There's differences. For some things the 250' may be fine. For this 2.5-4 miles.

Mr. Campbell: We do advertise these in the newspaper for the whole county. Anyone could have been here tonight. It's not just the notices sent to those within 250'. Those are just the affected persons who receive a letter in the mail. Anyone else could still come.

Mr. Urschel: Was it a gun range or an earthen structure in the paper?

Mr. Campbell: He requested an earthen structure.

Mr. Urschel: That's why they didn't come.

Mr. Vogel: In my personal opinion I would like to vote on this tonight instead of doing basically the same thing at the next meeting with a continuance. I think you would all be here again; you'll have more people. But I'm not sure we would get any more new factual information to guide us by doing that. It's been advertised. We're going to vote.

Mr. Campbell: It's been advertised twice because we had to reschedule this meeting from September to this evening because we didn't have a quorum last month. Notices were sent out twice. We sent notifications to all of the radio stations about the rescheduling when the meeting was changed. As far as I know we have done our due

diligence in what the state law requires. I know we've heard it before that it might not be what everyone likes, but it's what we are required to do.

Mr. Vogel: I've asked for a motion to vote on this variance.

Mr. Dale: I move that we deny this variance of use for a shooting range.

Mr. Vogel: Do I have second?

Mr. Younce: Second.

Mr. Thrush: If the variance of use is denied, you are done.

Board proceeded to roll call vote, with Mr. Dale & Mr. Younce voting in favor of the motion to deny the variance. Mr. Vogel and Ms. Lengel voted in opposition of the motion.

Mr. Thrush: A 2-2 vote is not official action; my recommendation would be to continue to another meeting to get a 5th member present.

Mr. Blocher: Didn't we already do this once? Isn't that why we are here? We couldn't have a meeting last month because everybody couldn't be here.

Ms. Lengel: No, there wasn't a quorum last month.

Mr. Vogel: It takes three people; Patty & I were the only members available last month.

Mr. Blocher: So it takes 3 out of 5?

Mr. Vogel: Yes, 3 out of 5 and if just three, those three would all have to agree to have a decision. But with 2-2 we don't have a valid vote.

Mr. Thrush: The issue isn't decided. No official action taken tonight.

Mr. Vogel: We can continue this until we have 5 members here. When we have 5 members present, you are going to have a vote one way or the other. We'll have another meeting October 24, 2023.

Mr. Thrush: A continued meeting would not require mailers and advertising in the newspaper. It can be announced at this meeting that it's being continued with the date.

Mr. Ranck: All you have to have is a quorum, so the next meeting you could have 3, 4, or 5 members present? And even the same 4, if one of you changed the vote it would be finished.

Mr. Vogel: Correct. Even with three people, they would just all have to vote the same way.

Mr. Blocher: Do we vote on the other two items?

Mr. Vogel: We can't until we get the first one done.

Mr. Thrush: If the variance of use isn't granted then there's no point in going forward.

Mr. Campbell: I'm not sure Mark is going to make the next meeting either, but I will follow up with him.

Mr. Vogel: That meeting would be October 24. We need a motion to continue to the October 24 meeting.

Ms. Lengel: I make a motion to continue this subject to the October 24th, 2023 meeting.

Mr. Younce: Second.

Roll call vote was taken, with all members present voting in favor.

Mr. Vogel stated next the board would hear Special Exception #8, Brian Campbell, for a pond with property line setback variances. The pond has received a favorable recommendation from the Drainage Board and the Plan Commission. Mr. Campbell shared the pond would be located at his residence at 665 S 475 W, Wabash in Noble Township. He reviewed the location with contours on the GIS map with board members. He stated a property line setback variance would be required on the south and east property lines. Setback from the east property line will be 45', the other setback will be 35' from the south property line. The pond will be lined, and may be slightly smaller than depicted due to liner. Scott Eads is the contractor for the pond, he is estimating it will be .3 - .45 of an acre when finished. Mr. Vogel asked about the amount of watershed. Mr. Campbell stated approximately six acres. He added the County Surveyor suggests 3 acres of watershed for a ½ acre pond. Mr. Dale asked about the overflow. Mr. Campbell shared it would overflow toward the woods. He added his property line is about 176' from the center of Ketner Creek and that the pond would not be visible from road. Mr. Dale asked if the 8" overflow that is indicated will be able to keep up. Mr. Campbell stated the contractor felt it could be smaller even. Mr. Burnsworth shared his personal experience with a neighbor's pond. The pond is fed by 7 acres and has gone over repeatedly, causing issues for Mr. Burnsworth's property. The neighbor finally put in 16", and they do not have as many issues. From his experiences, he would not recommend the 8". Mr. Campbell indicated he is open to making changes as requested by his contractor, adding that the ground will not hold water and requires a liner, which could be why Mr. Eads feels an 8" is adequate. Mr. Vogel asked if there were any other questions or concerns from board members or others present. There being none, he asked for a motion to approve Special Exception #8 as presented. Motion to approve was made by Ms. Lengel; second by Mr. Dale. The board proceeded to roll call vote; motion passed unanimously. Mr. Vogel then asked for a motion on the requested variances. Ms. Lengel made a motion to approve the variance from property line setbacks as presented in Special Exception #8; second by Mr. Younce. The board proceeded to roll call vote; motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Vogel then asked for a Complaints Update

Mr. Campbell shared with the board:

- 9 Complaints were rolled over from 2022, 61 new complaints have been received in 2023. Total worked year to date is 70. 26 complaints have been resolved.
- Unsafe Premise Order was filed on Linda Trent property located at 1106 E. 800 S., Lafontaine.
 Property has since gone through tax sale. Mr. Campbell has checked the property since the tax sale and stated it has been cleaned up considerably, but he is not sure who is doing it.
- o Myron Dill, property located at 231 E Wall St, Liberty Mills, was to appear in court in September, but did not show up. Contempt charges will be handled by Mr. Thrush.
- The Curt Arnett property located at 23 W. Branson St., Lafontaine has had an Unsafe Premise Order issued. A contractor has been hired and work has started on the building.
- An Unsafe Premise Order has been issued to 320 Washington Street Land Trust for the property located at 320 Washington St., Lagro. The certified mailers have been delivered, but no contact has been made by the property owner as of today.
- An Unsafe Premise Order has been issued to Ada Ebert for property located at 11465 S State Road 15, LaFontaine in Liberty Township. The home burnt in 2022. Currently there are holes in the roof, windows missing, and considerable foundation damage on one side. Certified mailers have been sent;

however, Ms. Ebert's was sent to a post office box in Marion and she has not picked the notice up as of today. Notices were also via regular mail to her post office box in Marion and to the property address in LaFontaine. As of today's meeting, there has been no communication from the property owner regarding remedying the property per the Unsafe Premise Order. Notice can also be delivered in person to her home in Marion if needed.

Mr. Vogel asked if there was any other business to be brought before the Board.

- Mr. Campbell shared he had been advised of a potential issue with the Leo and Rosalie Elshire property, located at 10643 S 500 W, Amboy in Waltz Township. A variance was granted in 2010 for a mobile home to be placed on the property for the Elshire's son. At that time, the board placed restrictions that the mobile home would have to be removed before the property could be sold. They have since split one acre off the parcel and included the mobile home in the split. It should not have been allowed because the mobile home is still on the property and because it is less than required by the Zoning Ordinance. The split did not get caught by the auditor's office and was accepted. Mr. Vogel asked how it got overlooked and accepted, and if there was different wording or processes that need to be in place to avoid it in the future. Mr. Campbell shared the Auditor's office now has a checklist to review and check for any restrictions placed by the Board of Zoning Appeals is a part of that checklist. Mr. Campbell has received a letter from the Elshire's that they did this as they were getting their will updated. They wanted their son to get the one acre with the mobile home on it upon their death to be sure he has a home. John Stephens did the survey for the split. Records have been found that a new mound system was approved by the health department. It is unclear if both residences are connected to that new system or if it is just for the mobile home. Currently, Mr. Campbell believes the two residences share one well. Mr. Vogel believes this may be a different mobile home than what was originally approved, as the original mobile home did not have a gabled roof, and this one does. If that is the case, a different mobile home should not have been set without board approval. Isaiah Vanderpool is the attorney who wrote the quit claim deeds, against the restrictions that had been placed by the board. Mr. Thrush indicated that recording the restrictions placed by the board would stop this from happening, as the board should not rely on the auditor's office to catch these things. Mr. Vogel asked if the board could force the owners to put the two parcels back together. Mr. Thrush stated a suit could be filed, but without the restrictions being recorded, he is not sure how it would hold up in court. Ms. Lengel asked if they could be required to have their own septic and well for each parcel. Mr. Campbell indicated he will continue to try to contact the Elshire's and update the Board.
- There has been a complaint on Traci DuBois property located at 2123 E 1050 S, Lafontaine in Liberty Township. The property is also the site of Daughtery's Small Engine Repair. In researching, there had previously been a complaint handled by the Board of Zoning Appeals. At that time the meeting minutes indicated there was to be nothing forward of the front of the house. In the notice letter that Mr. Howard sent the property owner, it states nothing forward of the barn. Currently there is nothing in front of the house, but there is in front of the barn. Mr. Campbell wanted to verify that the Board felt the property was compliant with the board restrictions by not having anything in front of the house. Neighbors have screened their property well.

Mr. Vogel asked if there was any other business from Board Members or the public. There being no further business, Mr. Vogel asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion made by Ms. Lengel, second by Mr. Younce. Motion passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Amanda Lyons

Secretary, Wabash Co. Board of Zoning Appeals

(bac)