

Board of Adjustment Meeting Minutes – October 24, 2025

The Muscatine County Board of Adjustment met in the Board of Supervisors Office on Friday, October 24, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

Present: Tom Harper, Carol Schlueter, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies (Chair)

Absent: Emily Geertz (Vice Chair)

Staff Present: Eric Furnas, Morgan Othmer, and Jake Boucher

Others present for this meeting included: Scott Curtis, Sam Evans, Will C. (Liferaft), Brian & Kim Campbell, Mark Smith, Eric Rock

- **Approval of the September 5, 2025 meeting minutes.**
 - A motion was made by Tom Harper to approve the September 5, 2025 meeting minutes and was seconded by Michael Smock.
 - Ayes: Tom Harper, Carol Schlueter, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Case #25-10-01**
 - Scott Curtis explained the request for a variance to place an addition on an existing house. Scott stated that they had previously been granted a variance for the addition on the other side and that the property sits at the end of a dead-end road.
 - Eric described the location and that there is a county road right-of-way that ends in the front yard of the property and believes there is no plan to extend the road.
 - Eric summarized for the Board that there was a change in the standards required by the state for numerical variances. The state changed from the applicant having to prove a hardship to the applicant needing to prove that there's practical difficulty.
 - Carol confirmed that the regular setback distance would be 50' and that the request would be for 11' less.
 - Janelle summarized that a practical difficulty exists due to the lot shape and irregular front lot line and the request will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.
 - A motion was made by Tom Harper to recommend approval of the Variance to allow a residential addition to be built approximately 39' from the front lot line. Motion seconded by Carol Schlueter.
 - Ayes: Tom Harper, Carol Schlueter, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Case #25-10-02**

- Will from Liferaft described the Special Use Permit request to build a facility where they would take agricultural waste (e.g. corn stover) and municipal waste e.g. wood chips) and produce biochar with the intention of the biochar being used by local farmers and in the compost made at Cedar View Farms. The property was approved for rezoning to I-2 Heavy Industrial District. The facility would have the potential to provide up to 50 new jobs.
- Eric F. informed the board that the property was recently approved for rezoning from A-1 Agricultural to I-2 Heavy Industrial. This allows for additional special permitted uses under I-2. Although a biochar facility is not specifically listed as a special permitted use, it is materially like several other uses in the ordinance. The Board of Adjustment has the authority to grant a Special Use Permit for a use that they consider similar to other listed special uses in the I-2 district. The request is for two separate uses – a biochar facility and a composting facility. The composting facility is currently in operation under a DNR permit, however the increase in scale of operation would require additional approval.
- Carol informed the board that she had received two phone calls from Phil Wiese.
- Carol then asked for more information on the compost facility. Eric informed the board that he had received an email from the Herrold's (Cedar View Farms) authorizing Liferaft to speak on their behalf. Will then explained the compost facility uses a combination of various items including agricultural waste, chicken hatchery byproducts, and manure from their farm to make compost. If both Special Use Permits are approved, Liferaft plans to partner with Cedar View Farms to use the biochar in their compost. They intend to move the compost into an enclosed facility. The enclosed facility would help visually and help reduce the odor.
- Will continued by explaining that the new facilities would utilize Highway 6 for access to ensure that they are not increasing wear on other county/rural roads. The proximity to the quarry is also advantageous as they would not be creating a large change in traffic or noise. Will also explained that they plan to work with neighboring property owners to ensure they are comfortable with the operations and work with them to address any concerns.
- Janelle asked about required permitting to manage air quality. Will explained that they will work with the DNR to obtain any required permitting and would comply with any required admissions monitoring. The process to create biochar utilizes pyrolysis not combustion.
- Sam explained that they will have a designated entrance and exit off Highway 6. The entrance would be towards the top of the hill to allow for good visibility.
- Brian spoke about how he's been negatively impacted by the compost facility and would like to see it improved and moved inside a building. Will responded that their goal is to improve the operation and that they want to have a pleasant site for their workers and for the neighbors.

- Eric R. spoke about being hopeful that the biochar facility will help improve the current conditions.
- Mark spoke about the positive opportunity for a new business and a new product in our area.
- Several board members expressed concerns about the negative impacts of the compost facility on the neighboring properties and discussed requiring that the facility be placed in an enclosed building to help reduce the smells and sights.

- A motion was made by Carol Schlueter to close the Public Hearing at 11:22 a.m. and was seconded by Tom Harper.
 - Ayes: Tom Harper, Carol Schlueter, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- A motion was made by Tom Harper to grant the Special Use Permit to allow the operation of a biochar production facility and compost facility with a stipulation that the compost facility must operate within an enclosed building. Motion seconded by Carol Schlueter.
 - Ayes: Tom Harper, Carol Schlueter, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: Michael Smock
 - Motion approved.

- The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

MUSCATINE COUNTY BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
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