

Board of Adjustment Meeting Minutes – September 11, 2026

The Muscatine County Board of Adjustment met at the Environmental Learning Center on Friday, September 11, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

Present: Emily Geertz, Tom Harper, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies

Absent: Ashley Spitler

Staff Present: Eric Furnas and Morgan Robbins

- **Approval of August 7, 2026 meeting minutes.**

- A motion was made by Tom Harper to approve the August 7, 2026 meeting minutes and was seconded by Michael Smock.
 - Ayes: Emily Geertz, Tom Harper, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Case #26-09-01**

- Toby Griffin explained the variance request. There is currently a cement front porch that will be removed and a new addition will be placed there. The addition would extend one foot closer to the road than the current porch does.
- Tom asked what the standard setback requirement is. Eric explained that it is 50 ft, however an open front porch is allowed to extend an additional 10 ft.
- Eric explained that there would be minimal to no change to the essential character of the surrounding neighborhood and there are no site distance or traffic concerns. The county engineer has reviewed the request and has not expressed any concerns.
- A motion was made by Emily Geertz to grant a variance to allow a residential addition to be built approximately 28' from the front lot line. Second by Michael Smock.
 - Ayes: Emily Geertz, Tom Harper, Michael Smock, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Case #26-09-02**

- JohnPaul Baric, with AUR Northland, provided an overview of the project.
 - The team currently operates data centers at 11 sites across the state.
 - The current facility was approved in July 2024 and has been running for 15 months.
 - The request is to allow the removal of the four rows of modular container pods and place computers in two enclosed buildings. The changes would have fewer noise sources, no evaporative water cooling, and would add eight additional jobs.

- With the current power bill, the company is paying approximately \$2,150 per month in Muscatine County Local Option Sales Tax.
 - AUR Northland's contract for electricity allows the cooperative to shut power off to the data center when there is a grid emergency. The terms of the contract will change with the new buildings and how often the data center curtails, but they will still carry the obligation as a load modifying resource.
 - The current access route to the site is off Highway 61, to Solomon Avenue, then onto approximately 1,000 ft of a private gravel easement road. AUR Northland will rebuild the easement road before construction begins. It will be built to standards that will allow for emergency access. For the use of Solomon Avenue, AUR Northland proposed a haul route agreement and will pay for the rock and blading as well as dust control. They will also honor the County's spring weight embargo by scheduling any heavy loads before the ground freezes.
 - Power for the site will be provided by Eastern Iowa Light & Power. They are working with the utility engineers to provide up to 14.5 Megawatts for the new buildings.
 - The two new steel buildings will be 60' by 130' each with insulated walls.
 - AUR Northland estimates \$6.67 million in new taxable property improvements that will increase the property tax to \$216,000 per year at the current rate.
- Next, Board of Adjustment members asked questions.
 - Janelle asked for more details on the emergency generators.
 - JohnPaul explained there would be generators installed on site and they would be tested annually. They estimate that the generators could run up to 200 hours per year with the current electric agreement.
 - Tom asked what the fuel source would be and JohnPaul explained that they would be using diesel with plans to switch to natural gas-powered generators after a few years.
 - Janelle asked for additional information on the closed-loop system that the data center will be using.
 - JohnPaul explained that the cooling system would be filled with 4,000 gallons of water initially using water from off site. The system is a closed loop system, so there is no evaporation. Small top-offs would be needed over time, but there would be no continuous water usage. The system will need to be drained every few years and the water will be brought off site and disposed of properly.
 - Michael asked if any additional exhaust fans would be used.

- JohnPaul explained that they will not. They will be removing the current fans and the fans on the chillers will be facing upwards.
- Next, public attendees provided comments. The following attendees spoke:
 1. Jeremy Lane
 2. Cody Franklin
 3. Jody Besick
 4. Michael Carreon
 5. Matt Elam
 6. Dwight Brockhouse
 - In Summary, 5 attendees stated they were in favor of the project.
 - Concerns about the project included:
 - The noise that would come from the diesel generators and the storage of diesel on site.
 - Future expansion.
 - An increase in light pollution.
 - In response to the concerns, AUR Northland representatives explained the following:
 - The likelihood of any future expansion is minimal. There is no additional power available at the site and improvements to expand the power generation do not typically provide a return on investment.
 - There will be 2-3 tanks for diesel storage on site. They will comply with all regulations for storage.
 - The generators will be placed in a shed which will reduce the noise level.
 - Battery storage will be used during a brief power outage or to transition to the generators.
- Janelle asked if there would be an employee that would oversee environmental compliance.
 - AUR Northland representatives explained that they will hire a third-party consultant to manage compliance and they will utilize service contracts with the equipment manufacturers.
- Lastly, Eric provided the staff opinion. He explained that the biggest concern is the access road and recommended that the board require a Road Use Agreement to protect county infrastructure.

- A motion was made by Emily Geertz to approve the improvements to the legally established non-conforming use (construction of two new buildings and installation of redundant electrical infrastructure, including battery energy storage and standby backup power generation) with a stipulation that a Road Use Agreement be approved by the County Engineer prior to construction. Second by Tom Harper.
 - Ayes: Emily Geertz, Tom Harper, and Janelle Spies
 - Opposed: None
 - Abstained: Michael Smock
 - Motion approved.
- The meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

MUSCATINE COUNTY BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
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