

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals

MINUTES October 30, 2025

A regular meeting of the Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals was held on Thursday, October 30, 2025 at 6:00 p.m., at the Menard County Courthouse, Petersburg, Illinois. The meeting was called to order at 6 p.m. by Dan Robertson, Chair.

A. THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

B. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dan Robertson, Karen Stott, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

MEMBERS ABSENT (note if excused): Steve Ozella absent.

OTHERS PRESENT: Zoning Administrator Joseph Crowe.

C. MINUTES

Minutes from the Thursday, September 25, 2025 meeting were presented for approval.

MOTION: To approve the minutes as presented. ZBA Member Becker motion, ZBA Member Wilken second.

ROLL CALL

 3 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed:

MOTION CARRIED

D. ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Zoning Administrator Crowe introduced the case by stating:

- William & Sarah Halsey of 11292 Fitschen Road, Cantrall Illinois, are requesting a 'Special Use Permitting' for operations of an "Agri-business" as is outlined by the Menard County Zoning Ordinance in section 6.03 A-Agricultural District Regulations, specifically contained in subsection (C) Principal uses are authorized by special use permit,
 - (a) greenhouse/nursery
 - (q) lawn & landscaping services (may include greenhouse(s), nursery & other associated uses)
 - (r) Agri-business, including any of the following:
 - Must be home-based from primary residence
 - No larger than 1,200 square feet

- Must have documented Tax ID
- Ample parking per county ordinance
- No pod/trailer type structures
- (s) To allow venues to host reunion, proms, graduation and other similar events, weddings and wedding receptions, fundraisers, celebrations of life and similar gatherings.
- Plat of Survey, was filed February 10, 2006 by John Garrison, Land Surveyor Licensed in the State of Illinois, listing tract 1 as +/- 8.81 acres and located in rural Menard County Illinois, identifying this specific tract as that which Mr. & Mrs. Halsey seek to permit.

Public Hearing Opened

Applicant William Halsey testified under oath, explaining that he and his wife propose to develop a lavender farm with a small retail operation and future event venue.

Their two-phase plan includes:

1. Phase I: Cultivation of lavender for essential oils, soaps, and aromatherapy products, to be sold on-site from a barn storefront.
2. Phase II: Development of a small-scale event venue within 3–5 years for weddings, reunions, fundraisers, and other gatherings, consistent with Section 6.03A(S) of the zoning ordinance.

The applicant addressed concerns regarding chemical drift from neighboring farms, explaining mitigation through site orientation, tree buffering, and soil monitoring. Lavender's soil compatibility was confirmed through prior testing. Board members acknowledged that site conditions provided natural protection.

The applicant estimated initial event sizes of 40–80 guests, expanding to 200–300 guests as facilities develop. The Chair expressed concern over the broad definition of "venue" under current county ordinances, noting potential enforcement challenges once a permit is issued.

Zoning Administrator Crowe confirmed that the forthcoming revised zoning ordinance would provide clearer definitions and create temporary special use permits (up to 15 events annually) to address such cases.

Board members reported that neighboring property owners, including the Fitschen's, BJ and Larry, had been consulted and expressed support. The rural location was noted as minimizing potential noise or traffic conflicts.

Mr. Halsey emphasized that:

- The venue will be non-alcoholic,
- Events will conclude at reasonable hours,
- The business will maintain a family-oriented and community-based character,
- Safety and traffic control will be top priorities, given his professional background in safety management.

Board members discussed prior venue permits, referencing Old Farm and Countryside Relics (Heffner property), both serving as precedents under current agribusiness provisions. Members agreed that future ordinances would better address potential overuse and noise concerns.

The Board confirmed compliance with zoning ordinance standards for:

1. Safe ingress/egress for vehicles and pedestrians,

2. Proper placement of driveways and parking areas,
3. On-site waste and service area maintenance,
4. Adequate screening, signage, lighting, and open space,
5. Compatibility with surrounding agricultural uses.

The applicants expressed intent to partner with Athens FFA and other local schools to educate students on specialty crop farming. The Board commended this initiative as beneficial to local agritourism and education.

Chairman Robertson then closed the public discussion.

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals Deliberation

Deliberation of case by members.

E. DETERMINATION OF ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals members determined the following and published their findings.

MOTION: The Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals recommends to approve this application (25-02SU) for Special Use as determined in a public hearing held on Thursday October 30, 2025, for William and Sarah Halsey allowing:

“Allowing the establishment of a lavender-based agribusiness and related retail operations at 11292 Fitschen Road, with the following conditions:

1. All events remain non-alcoholic unless future permits are obtained.
2. Event activities shall conclude by 10:00 p.m. to minimize noise disturbance.
3. Access shall be solely from Fitch Road; no direct access shall be created to the public trail.
4. Any future expansion into full venue operations shall be re-reviewed under the revised zoning ordinance upon its enactment”.

Member Stott motion, Member Wilken second.

ROLL CALL

 3 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed: none

 0 Abstain: none

MOTION CARRIED

F. DETERMINATION OF FINDINGS OF FACT

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals members determined the following and published their findings.

Case #: **25-02SU - Halsey**

Address: **11292 Fitschen Road, Cantrall Illinois**

The Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals makes the following recommended factors as it relates to each standard for special use:

- (i) Ingress and egress to property and proposed structures shall be located and designed in a manner which will maximize automotive and pedestrian safety and convenience, facilitate traffic flow and control and provide easy and adequate access in regular use and in case of fire or other catastrophe.

Access to the Halsey property will be provided via Fitschen Road, avoiding direct access to the adjacent bike trail per state right-of-way restrictions. The applicant worked with County Highway Engineer Cory Dowd to ensure safe vehicular entry and exit. A designated parking area in the south field will support visitor flow, and emergency access is confirmed adequate. The Board finds ingress and egress compliant with safety and accessibility standards.

- (ii) Off-street parking and driveway areas where required or provided, shall be located and designed in a manner which will maximize the items referred to in Paragraph (a) above and will minimize any adverse economic, noise, glare or odor effects of the special use on adjoining or nearby properties.

The proposed site plan includes off-street parking located in the south field, separated from the lavender field and venue site. The rural location and natural buffering minimize potential impacts from noise or lighting. The applicants have also committed to maintaining low-intensity lighting consistent with agricultural surroundings. The Board finds that off-street parking arrangements satisfy all applicable criteria.

- (iii) Refuse and services areas, if provided, shall be located and designed in a manner so as to accomplish the objectives specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

Refuse and service areas will be located near the main barn and screened from view. Because the owners reside on-site, daily maintenance and property upkeep are expected to remain consistent. The Board finds this criterion satisfactorily met.

- (iv) Utilities provided in connection with the special use shall be designed and located so as to encourage the efficient and economic utilization, extension and expansion of the public utility system.

The property operates on existing well and septic systems appropriate for agricultural use. No major public utility extensions are required. The Board finds this standard adequately satisfied.

- (v) Landscaping screening and buffering materials shall be sufficient to insure that the proposed special use will have no greater impact on surrounding land uses than other uses authorized as a matter of right.

The property is buffered by a bike trail to the east, roadways to the west, and a tree line to the north, providing natural screening. The Board finds the site's existing features sufficient to minimize visual and noise impacts on neighboring properties.

- (vi) Signs of proposed exterior lighting, if any, shall be located and designed to maximize traffic safety and compatibility and harmony with adjoining or nearby properties and so as to minimize glare, noise and adverse economic impact on surrounding properties or authorized land uses.

The applicant has confirmed that exterior lighting will comply with county ordinances and remain minimal to preserve rural character. Any signage will be modest and conform to zoning regulations. The Board finds this standard met.

- (vii) Required yards and open spaces shall be sufficient to insure that the proposed special use will have no greater impact on surrounding land uses than other uses authorized as a matter of right.

The property encompasses approximately 8.81 acres, providing ample open space. The layout allows for proper setbacks, separation from adjacent land, and sufficient area for agricultural and event-related activities. The Board finds this requirement satisfied.

- (viii) The site on which the special use is located shall be designed to make the proposed use generally compatible with adjoining or nearby properties.

Neighboring landowners, including the Fitschen's BJ and Larry, expressed support for the proposal. The property's agricultural character and proposed agribusiness use are compatible with nearby rural land. The Board finds the proposed use compatible with surrounding properties.

- (ix) The special use shall in all other respects conform to the applicable regulations of the district in which it is located and of the entire zoning code, except as such regulations may in each instance be modified by the County Commissioners pursuant to the recommendations of the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The proposed lavender farm and agribusiness conform to Section 6.03A of the Menard County Zoning Ordinance governing Agricultural District Regulations. All required notices were properly issued, exhibits entered into the record, and procedural requirements met. The Zoning Board of Appeals finds the application consistent with the zoning code and recommends approval of the special use permit as presented.

Member Becker motion, Member Stott second.

ROLL CALL

 3 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed: none

MOTION CARRIED

G. OLD BUSINESS – There was no old business to be discussed.

H. NEW BUSINESS – There was no new business to be discussed.

I. ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

The Zoning Board of Appeals voted unanimously to recommend approval of Case 2502SU to the Menard County Board, recognizing the Halsey proposal as a well-planned agribusiness development contributing positively to the local economy, education, and rural character of the county.

J. ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Administrator Joe Crowe reported on:

- Procedures for joint meetings between the Zoning Board, Planning Commission, and County Board,
- Upcoming public meeting schedules for November 6 and November 11,
- Updates to the zoning ordinance addressing short-term rental (STR) regulation gaps,
- Pending Senate Bill 25 concerning renewable energy and storage systems,
- Progress on the Greenview Solar Project and RCM Grain Elevator/Enterprise Zone proposal, including projected infrastructure and tax abatement details.

K. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.