

Final Minutes
JACKSON COUNTY ZONING COMMISSION

6:00 p.m.

Monday, November 17, 2025

Community Room, Jackson County Courthouse

201 W Platt Street, Maquoketa, Iowa

Commissioners Present: Chair Mike Burke, Vice Chair Tom Stewart, Commissioners Sandra Gerlach, Emerita Kies, Kristine Pfab, Monica McHugh (via Zoom), and Brian Venema

Staff Member Present: Zoning Administrator Becca Pflughaupt

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL The meeting was called to order by Chair Burke at 6:00 p.m. and roll call taken. Commissioner Monica McHugh was in attendance via Zoom. A sign-in sheet was distributed. The Zoom meeting was launched. Those noted in attendance were:

Rhonda Rowan – Spragueville

Randy Rowan – Spragueville

Dale Stillmunkes – Bellevue

Tyler Ohl – via Zoom

MINUTES Motion by Kies, seconded by Gerlach, to approve the minutes of the October 20, 2025 Zoning Commission meeting as submitted. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

PUBLIC HEARING Zoning Case ZC25-05

Rezoning – Yvonne Marie Carns – 858 Hwy 64, Monmouth, IA 52309 in Section 19 of Monmouth Township, PIN 271619100003000.

Applicant: Jackson County Zoning Administrator

Owner: Yvonne Marie Carns

Chair Burke requested a motion to open the public hearing. Pfab motioned to open the public hearing, Venema seconded. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Chair Burke invited public comment.

- One online participant, Tyler Ohl, stated he had received a notice and was attending to understand what the rezoning was about. No comments in favor or against were offered.
- No written or additional public comments were received.

Chair Burke requested a motion to close the public hearing. Stewart motioned to close the public hearing, Pfab seconded. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Request: Rezone a portion of the property (barn/stable area) from A-1 Agricultural District to C-1 Commercial Retail District. The separate house parcel is to remain A-1.

Staff Report - Zoning Administrator

- The subject site is the former Gib Marcucci Stables, a well-known commercial equestrian facility that operated for over 50 years and was public-facing, regularly bringing customers onto the property.

- The property has been assessed and treated as commercial since before 1976, but the official zoning map still shows the parcel as A-1 Agricultural, which does not allow retail business.
- The new owner, Ms. Carns, recently purchased the property and contacted the zoning office to discuss operating a small gift shop in the existing barns featuring Iowa makers and artists.
- Based on the longstanding commercial use and assessment history, staff identified a mismatch between the mapped zoning (A-1) and the documented commercial use.
- This is the third such mapping/use mismatch discovered in the last several years and is being addressed on a case-by-case basis as cases come forward.
- In this case, only the barn/stable parcel is proposed to be rezoned to C-1 Commercial Retail. The house parcel will remain A-1, consistent with the historic use pattern (commercial activity confined to the barns).

Health Department Review

- Environmental Health reviewed the proposal.
- The well and septic were recently inspected at the time of sale and found to be operating properly.
- The anticipated traffic for a small gift shop is not expected to negatively impact the septic system.

Comprehensive Plan Consistency

The rezoning is consistent with the County's land use policy, including:

- Objective 1: Accommodating commercial uses in appropriate locations.
- Objective 4: Encouraging development near existing towns.
- Objective 9: Accommodating existing development without encouraging scattered or inappropriate rural development.
- ZA Pflughaupt emphasized that the rezoning does not introduce a new commercial area, but rather corrects the zoning map to reflect a site the County has already treated as commercial for decades.

Maps and zoning/assessment exhibits were reviewed showing:

- Location of the house parcel and the barn parcel.
- Existing parking areas.
- Commercial assessment classification.

Commission Discussion

Commissioners asked clarifying questions about:

- The precise area to be rezoned (barn/stable parcel only).
- Historical use of the site as a commercial equestrian facility.
- Traffic and septic impacts for the proposed gift shop.

No concerns were raised regarding compatibility or required conditions. Commissioners noted that the proposed rezoning primarily brings the map into alignment with long-standing use.

Motion & Recommendation

- Motion by Stewart to recommend approval of ZC25-05, rezoning the barn/stable portion of the property from A-1 Agricultural District to C-1 Commercial Retail District, with no special conditions, seconded by Pfab.
- Roll Call Vote:
 - Venema – Yes
 - Pfab – Yes
 - McHugh – Yes
 - Kies – Yes
 - Gerlach – Yes
 - Stewart – Yes
 - Burke – Yes

Motion carried 7-0.

The Commission's recommendation will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors.

WORK SESSION High Density Computing Facilities Ordinance (Data Processing / Crypto Mining)

The Commission held an extended work session on the draft High Density Computing Facilities (HDCF) Ordinance, formerly referred to as the "data processing center" ordinance. The ordinance is intended to regulate data centers, crypto mining, and other high-density computing facilities.

Commissioner Monica McHugh exited the meeting at approximately 6:49 p.m. (Zoom). A quorum remained present.

No formal action was taken. Key discussion points and consensus directions included:

Terminology and Definitions

- The ordinance will use the broader term "High Density Computing Facilities (HDCF)", which encompasses data processing centers, crypto mining, and similar uses.
- Commissioners acknowledged that technology and terminology are rapidly evolving.
- The draft will retain a provision to revisit the ordinance every three years to keep pace with new technologies and industry practices.
- Clarification in opening language: HDCFs "may generate" continuous operational noise, rather than stating that they always do.

Noise & Vibration (Section 6)

- Commissioners favored aligning noise limits with the County's wind energy ordinance, both for consistency and legal defensibility.
- Consensus direction:
 - Set the noise limit at 50 dBA at the nearest sensitive receptor (same as wind ordinance).
 - Add a +5 dBA penalty for tonal or low-frequency "hum" where testing identifies a distinct tone, consistent with presentations and examples seen from Linn County.

- Commissioners discussed whether similar tonal provisions should be added to the wind ordinance at a later date for consistency.

Cooling & Water Use (Section 7)

- The Commission strongly favored protecting rural aquifers and preventing consumptive or once-through water use.

Consensus direction:

- Cooling Systems Requirement:
 - HDCF cooling systems must be closed-loop or air-cooled.
 - Open-loop, once-through, or consumptive water-cooling systems are prohibited.
- Limited Exception (Board of Adjustment):
 - The Board of Adjustment may consider an alternative cooling technology only if the applicant provides a certified engineering report demonstrating:
 - No net consumptive water loss.
 - No increased risk to nearby wells or hydrologically sensitive features.
 - Compliance with all IDNR water use and discharge regulations.
- Chemical & Coolant Containment:
 - All coolants, lubricants, and water treatment chemicals must have secondary containment to prevent discharge to soil, groundwater, or stormwater systems.
- Water Use Transparency:
 - Unless connected to a municipal system, operators must submit a simple annual summary of total water use and any changes to cooling equipment.
 - Additional reporting may be requested if required by IDNR or if water-use conflicts arise.
- State Authority:
 - Language will clarify that nothing in the ordinance supersedes Iowa DNR authority and that facilities must comply with Iowa Code Chapter 455B.

Sanitary Facilities

- Commissioners discussed at length whether the ordinance should require connection to public water/sewer or allow private systems.
- Options considered:
 1. Requiring municipal connection where available.
 2. Requiring connection within a set distance of service.
 3. Requiring connection unless IDNR approves a private system.
- The Commission ultimately concluded that sanitary and drinking water systems fall primarily under the Health Department's authority, not zoning.

Consensus direction:

- Replace detailed sanitary connection requirements with a general requirement that sanitary facilities comply with County Health Department regulations and applicable state rules, with zoning coordinating referrals as needed.
- This avoids zoning overstepping into health code while still ensuring sanitary facilities are properly addressed.

Structural Standards

Based on site visits to facilities in other counties:

Consensus direction for structural standards:

- Permanent Construction:
 - All principal buildings and equipment enclosures must be constructed on a permanent concrete foundation.
- Condition of Structures:
 - Structures must be maintained in good repair and kept free of deterioration, corrosion, and defects that could create safety hazards or operational failures.
- Prohibited Structures:
 - Cargo containers, railroad cars, semi-trailers, mobile storage units, or similar portable structures may not be used to house computing equipment, electrical components, cooling systems, or other critical facility elements.
- Commissioners noted that container-style facilities observed elsewhere were visually unappealing and did not represent the standard the County wishes to allow.

Setbacks (Section 5)

The Commission spent considerable time discussing setbacks and how best to protect neighboring uses, livestock, and sensitive features while remaining defensible.

Consensus direction:

- Occupied Structures & Cemeteries:
 - Minimum setback of 1,000 feet from any occupiable structure (not just “residential dwellings”) and from cemeteries.
- Property Lines:
 - Minimum setback of 500 feet from all property lines.
- Sensitive Features:
 - Minimum setback of 500 feet from any sinkhole, well, creek, river, or IDNR-regulated surface water feature.
- Board of Adjustment Flexibility:
 - The Board of Adjustment may require greater setbacks where site conditions, topography, or facility orientation indicate additional distance is needed to meet noise, vibration, or safety standards.
 - The BOA must adopt written findings of fact referencing applicable studies or modeling data and apply the greater of multiple standards where more than one setback applies.
- The Commission requested that staff mirror the structure of the wind ordinance where appropriate and consider adding illustrative diagrams to clarify how setbacks are measured.

Pre-Application Conference & Application Process (Section 4)

Pre-Application Conference:

- The draft currently states applicants are “encouraged” to meet with staff prior to filing.
- Consensus direction: Change to “required” – applicants shall meet with:
 - Zoning Administrator
 - County Engineer

- Environmental Health
- Purpose is to identify issues early, ensure coordination among departments, and avoid applicants incurring large costs before understanding ordinance requirements.

Courtesy Notices & Public Hearing:

- Current language: notices to adjacent property owners “may” be provided.
- Consensus direction:
 - Change “may” to “shall”.
 - Set the notification radius to one (1) mile, consistent with the County's wind energy ordinance.
- Application requirements will continue to include a site plan and technical studies (e.g., noise analysis, hydrogeologic study, utility load confirmation).

Timeline and Third-Party Review:

- Scheduling: An HDCF special exception/conditional use hearing before the Board of Adjustment should be scheduled no sooner than 45 days after acceptance of a complete application to allow adequate review, notice, and utility coordination.
- Action Deadline: The draft will specify that the County shall act on the application within 90 days of acceptance. The Commission discussed clarifying whether this refers to the Board of Supervisors, Board of Adjustment, or “County” as defined, and requested consistent terminology.
- Tolling the Clock: The 90-day review period may be paused during authorized third-party technical review or while required documentation is outstanding.
- The cost of third-party review must be reasonable, documented, and limited to actual billed expenses.

Applicability & Zoning Districts (Section 3)

- HDCFs are prohibited in:
 - A-1 Agricultural District
 - Floodplain Overlay District
 - Wetland or Conservation Overlay District
- The Burial Mound Overlay will require additional review; staff may consult with qualified archaeologists (Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist) to ensure no disturbance of protected resources.
- For properties currently zoned A-1, the site must be rezoned to M-1, M-2, or C-1 (as appropriate) before an HDCF special exception/conditional use permit can be issued.
- HDCF uses will be processed as special exceptions now, but the forthcoming zoning ordinance update will convert these to conditional use permits; the HDCF ordinance will be edited to match final terminology.

Power Supply, Emergency Events & Utility Coordination (Section 8)

Utility Load Confirmation:

- Before permit issuance, the utility provider must submit a load confirmation letter verifying that:
 - Adequate electrical capacity is available or can be made available; and
 - Any required upgrades or extensions will be completed at the operator's expense, consistent with utility policy; and

- Service to existing customers will not be materially degraded.

Emergency Power & Events:

- Commissioners discussed draft language requiring notification of the Zoning Administrator, County Engineer, and fire department within 24 hours of abnormal events.
- Members with electrical background expressed concern about requiring lay responders to operate large electrical disconnects and questioned how useful zoning notification would be during an active event.
- Consensus direction:
 - Retain the requirement for an emergency power shutoff plan, including 24-hour emergency contacts, but merge it into the fire response/fire safety section.
 - Strike or substantially reduce language that requires immediate detailed reporting to zoning staff and cooperative resumption provisions that add little practical value.
 - Rely on the utility's existing SCADA systems and internal protections to handle electrical system events.

Fire Safety & Emergency Response (Section 9)

Fire Response Plan:

- Prior to permit issuance, the applicant must submit a Fire Response Plan approved in writing by the nearest fire department having jurisdiction.
- The plan must address:
 - Access routes and gate codes;
 - Location of hydrants, water sources, and fire-suppression connections;
 - Emergency contacts and after-hours procedures;
 - Facility-specific electrical and cooling system shutdown protocols.
- Commissioners noted that local departments, mutual aid partners, and emergency management should be able to tour the facility and be briefed on procedures.

Fire Protection & Suppression Systems:

- All buildings and equipment enclosures must include automatic fire detection and suppression systems designed, installed, and maintained per NFPA 75 and NFPA 76, as amended.
- Facilities must obtain annual certification from a qualified fire-protection professional, verifying systems are operational and compliant.
- At the operator's expense will be added to clarify responsibility.
- Certification reports are to be submitted to the Zoning Administrator and the local fire department for recordkeeping.

Electrical Disconnects:

- Draft language requiring "externally accessible" disconnect switches was discussed.
- There was concern about having large-scale electrical disconnects available for operation by non-utility personnel.
- Consensus direction:
 - Rely on the Fire Response Plan and utility coordination rather than forcing external, publicly accessible large-power disconnects.

- Draft language requiring such disconnects will be removed or significantly revised.

Containment & Hazardous Materials:

- All storage of coolants, fuels, and battery systems must include secondary containment to prevent releases to soil, surface water, or storm drainage, with references to NFPA 30 and NFPA 855 where applicable.
- Operators must conduct annual fire safety inspections and maintain written records available to the County upon request.
- Non-compliant systems must be corrected within 30 days (or a shorter period if the fire department deems it necessary for public safety).

Waste & Hazardous Materials (Section 10)

E-Waste & Hazardous Waste Handling:

- Language will be updated to refer to “e-waste” (rather than just “servers”) to capture a broader category of electronic equipment.
- All solid and hazardous waste (e-waste, solvents, damaged parts, batteries, coolants, etc.) must be removed from the site within 15 days of generation and disposed of in accordance with all local, state, and federal regulations, including Iowa Code Chapter 455B.
- Proof of proper disposal or recycling must be submitted to the Zoning Administrator within 30 days of replacement or removal; failure to provide documentation constitutes a zoning violation.
- Operators must retain hazardous waste receipts and documentation for five (5) years and provide them to the County on request.
- The County may coordinate with Iowa DNR on investigation or enforcement of environmental violations.

Screening, Fencing & Lighting (Section 11)

Security Fencing:

- An 8-foot security fence is required around the full perimeter of the HDCF.
- Fencing must be of durable, non-reflective material.
- Commissioners requested that fencing requirements be made consistent with the County’s existing substation fencing standards and other fence provisions in the zoning ordinance (particularly regarding visibility and road safety).

Visual Screening & Buffers:

- Draft language proposes a landscape buffer along property lines abutting public rights-of-way or residential uses, with a goal of obscuring at least 50% of structures within two years.
- Commissioners discussed potential conflicts with traffic visibility and snow removal if tall vegetation is placed near intersections or roadways.

Consensus direction:

- Keep an option for landscape buffers, especially adjacent to residential uses, but not in a way that conflicts with safety or existing fence/ROW rules.
- Reference or align with the County’s general fence and visibility standards so County Engineer concerns (sight triangles, snow, etc.) are addressed.
- Emphasize that building design standards (permanent structures, no containers, matte earth-tone finishes) should already reduce visual impact.

Lighting:

- All exterior lighting must be downcast, shielded, and directed away from adjacent properties and roadways to prevent glare and light trespass.
- Lighting levels must not exceed 0.2 foot-candles at the property line.
- Use of motion sensors or timed controls is encouraged to reduce continuous illumination.
- The color temperature of exterior fixtures must not exceed 3000 Kelvin to reduce sky glow and visual impact.

Reflective Surfaces & Maintenance:

- Reflective, mirrored, or high-gloss finishes are prohibited on buildings, fences, and equipment enclosures.
- Structures must use matte or earth-tone colors consistent with rural/industrial character.
- Operators are responsible for maintaining all fencing, screening, lighting, and overall property appearance in good condition. Failure to comply with approved plans is a zoning violation.

General Editing & Consistency

Commissioners requested the following editorial improvements for the next draft:

- Make "Board of Adjustment (BOA)" and "High Density Computing Facilities (HDCF)" abbreviations consistent and defined once, then used consistently.
- Make subsection headings (e.g., "Noise and Vibration," "Cooling and Water Use," "Emergency Access") visually distinct (bold/underline) to improve readability.
- Ensure Iowa Code and NFPA citations are consistent (e.g., "Iowa Code Chapter 455B," "Iowa Code § 455B.307A").
- Clarify the public hearing path:
 - Zoning Commission only if rezoning is required.
 - Board of Adjustment for the HDCF special exception/conditional use in an appropriate district.

No formal vote was taken on the draft ordinance. Staff will incorporate the Commission's direction and bring a revised draft back to the next meeting.

ITEMS FROM THE COMMISSION

- Chair Burke expressed appreciation to the Board of Supervisors and to Becca for the decision to formally appoint Becca Pflughaupt as Zoning Administrator (rather than "interim" Zoning Administrator).
- Commissioners commented that the transition has been seamless from their perspective and that:
 - Technical assistance from Laura Carstens (ECIA) is valuable; and
 - The online permitting system has significantly reduced administrative workload.

ITEMS FROM THE STAFF

Zoning Administrator Pflughaupt reported:

- Next Zoning Commission Meeting:
 - Date: Monday, December 15, 2025
 - Time: 6:00 p.m.
 - Purpose: Continued review of the HDCF ordinance draft. No new zoning cases are currently scheduled.

- Board of Supervisors Public Hearing – Zoning Ordinance:
 - Date: November 25, 2025
 - Time: 8:30 a.m.
 - Topic: Public hearing on the proposed new Jackson County Zoning Ordinance.
 - Presentation: ECIA's Laura Carstens will present the same PowerPoint previously shown to the Commission.
 - The Board may choose to adopt the ordinance in one reading or proceed with three readings, depending on public input.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Gerlach, seconded by Pfab, to adjourn. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Becca Pflughaupt
Zoning Administrator

Adopted: 12/15/2025