

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals

MINUTES January 29, 2026

A regular meeting of the Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals was held on Thursday, January 29, 2026 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 - chair, Karen Stott, Steve Ozella, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

MEMBERS ABSENT (note if excused):

OTHERS PRESENT: Zoning Administrator Joseph Crowe.

C. HEARING PROCEDURES & OPEN MEETING ACT NOTICE

The chair provided procedural instructions regarding the room acoustics and asked speakers to approach the podium and speak audibly.

The meeting is governed by the Illinois Open Meetings Act.

Proceedings were being recorded verbatim for the administrative record.

D. MINUTES

Minutes from the Thursday, November 6, 2025 meeting were presented for approval.

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

ROLL CALL

 4 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Ozella, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed:

MOTION CARRIED

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

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

G. ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Zoning Administrator Crowe introduced the case by stating: RCM CO-OP with main offices located at 26352 Quarry Avenue, Athens Illinois, are requesting a 'Special Use Permitting' for operations of an "Agri-business" as is outlined by the Menard County Zoning Ordinance (Revised Nov. 25, 2025) in chapter 5 A-Agricultural District Regulations, specifically contained in section 504 Uses by special use permit, subsection (1)(e);

- (e) grain elevator/storage

Proposed development to include:

- Shuttle grain elevator / high-volume loadout facility
- Six concrete silos (140 ft tall)
- Three pit dump house
- Truck receiving/loading infrastructure
- Rail infrastructure:
 - 8,500–9,000 ft spur and loop
 - 110-car capacity

Direct Union Pacific access

- Plat of Survey, was conducted March 11, 2025 by Robert Cox, Land Surveyor Licensed in the State of Illinois, listing tracts A, B and additional tract as +/- 331.45 acres and located in rural Menard County Illinois, identifying this specific tract as that which RCM CO-OP seek to permit.

Public Hearing Opened

Counsel for the applicant Mr. Daniel Hamilton presented on behalf of RCM Co-op, accompanied by CEO Dave Kunken and Board Chairman Doug Penrod, explained that RCM is proposing to develop a grain elevator and rail loop system. Their development plan includes:

- Economic benefits to local agriculture - RCM operates 11 grain elevators throughout Christian, Cass, Menard, and Macon counties and provides valuable service to farmers throughout central Illinois. It is a strong economic force in central Illinois that supports farmers and agribusiness. The addition of the new grain elevator and railroad loop will be a significant improvement to the operations that RCM currently provides. The new elevator will increase the local grain handling capacity and reduce transportation costs that will improve farm profitability. It's going to keep grain marketing and processing local and support the county's agricultural economy.
- Increased grain storage and market access – RCM plans to help farmers capture the value during volatile commodity markets because of the improved storage and marketing that comes from this new facility. The long-term operations create a stable environment and will increase the tax base for the county. Rail access to the facility is going to allow farmers to reach far beyond local markets and access larger markets for more profitability.

- Rail shipping to reduce outbound truck traffic - Because of the rail operation, there is going to be less truck traffic. Of course, much of the grain will still come in via truck, but most of the exit will be via rail. So as a result, there will be less truck traffic than in traditional elevator arrangements where trucks both handle in and outbound loads.
- State-of-the-art dust control systems - There's going to be a modern grain handling system at this state-of-the-art facility that is going to handle dust collection, both at the offloading and loading sites, such that there will be reduced dust from that that is traditionally produced at older grain elevators.
- Loop track system - The loop track system is also different from your standard rail spur. Standard rail spur, there is a lot of moving of rail cars on the spur, but with the loop design, it minimizes the movement, which also minimizes the amount of noise, minimizes the amount of activity, and there will be less activity than with a traditional rail spur.
- Compatible agricultural land use – by minimizing the effects of the grain elevator due to the nature of the design and state of the art design of the facility. The vacuums I described that collect the dust, the rail loop system, these all cost much, much more than a traditional grain elevator, but that shows RCM's commitment to minimizing the effects to the community and providing the best result for not only the community, but the farmers that it works with and RCM itself. Lighting is going to be arranged such that lighting is all directed downward.

Mr. Hamilton continued, the applicant has significant experience with grain elevators operating in multiple counties in Central Illinois, 11 different locations, and there's very little likeliness of abandonment or repurposing of this facility for something else. RCM's been here for a very long time and will continue to be here, and we believe that RCM will be a great operator to bring many, many economic benefits to the community through this site. As I have gone through these factors and the other factors that are listed in the petition, we believe that the grain elevator meets or exceeds all the special use criteria under the zoning ordinance, and this is a compatible use with the agricultural uses in the area. There is already an existing facility across the street, and there is already a rail line that operates. Those are part of the community already, and this is just in addition to those improvements that are already there. The locality will not be changed with these improvements because there are already types of improvements that are in this area.

Upon completion of Mr. Hamilton's statements, the chair recognized County Highway Engineer Corey Dowd.

Mr. Dowd stated: It would be a recommendation by the Menard County Highway Department of Construction for new concrete pavement to be constructed on Corey Avenue. This concrete pavement construction would include the existing roadway for a length of 300 feet, both east and west of the centerline of the proposed entrance, a right-turn lane for eastbound traffic, and the facility's entrance to the right-of-way line. This recommendation comes from the intended use on the facility compared to the existing condition of Quarry Avenue at the proposed entrance location. This facility will generate a larger amount of truck traffic, turning the facility to grain or grain deliveries. Quarry Avenue is currently 8 inches of hot mix asphalt with chips in the surface. Both roadway surface materials are prone to rutting, tearing, and wash boarding under continuous braking and turning in high truck traffic areas, such as the proposed facility. He further discussed that this would help reduce accidents in this area, as well as help reduce any type of maintenance with the pavement, with the turning happening off to the side.

If the location was to be left in its existing condition, the roadway would need much more maintenance material than the corridors previously required. Mr. Dowd offered his project notes into evidence providing insight into previous design and pre-engineering work that he had undertaken in the area regarding this project.

Upon completion of Mr. Dowd's statements, the chair recognized the County Zoning Administrator Joe Crowe.

Mr. Crowe discussed how the grain storage facility would fall in under the special use permitting. He went on to discuss how the facility is designed to quickly load and it's not designed to store the grain. Additionally, he stated that the zoning ordinance does not account for the rail loop system and that for this use a condition would need to be applied allowing such a use. He also noted to close his remarks, concerns regarding the access agreement to the project site and the need to have the legal framework in place prior to any issuance of a building permit.

Upon completion of Mr. Crowe's statements, the chair swore in public commenters wishing to speak on the issue.

The chair then recognized testimony from Mr. Kevin Lefferts.

Mr Lefferts opened his testimony describing that his property will be the closest to the proposed project site, he questioned if this even qualifies for the permitting based on reading of the ordinance language. He expressed that the ordinance describes the priorities of agriculture over commercial uses such as this and that the area would be drastically changed due to the rail and grading that would be required for the project and the impact of the loss of the prime farm ground. He expressed additional concern regarding dust, noise, and visual intrusions as well as the increase of truck traffic. He explained that his house is 700 feet from the proposed site and that the rail impact and presence will harm his quality of life. He went on to describe the loss of property value and explained the significant investment he has made to his property. He finished his remarks by stating: "Approving this permit will substantially change the character of the area for the reasonable enjoyment and value of my home. Once this facility is approved, not only does it set a precedent for the county that is counterproductive for the scope of the county". "What is being proposed in the initial proposal leaves no meaningful way for us or future residents to protect themselves from these ongoing repercussions. I asked the board to consider their impact on our property and the value property value in the 16 years of labor and love that we put into our home. This is an Industrial silo complex with a rail loop, that potentially could have hundreds of trucks. With trains coming at all hours of the year, all days of the week, all weeks of the year. At a minimum I do not think the applicant has demonstrated a plan that mitigates the impacts. adequate Impacts on our property".

Upon completion of Mr. Lefferts statements, the chair recognized Mr. John Jones.

Mr. Jones began by expressing that he lives on the north side of the proposed project, and that the accessway proposed by RCM would be very close to his house. He was concerned about potential dust from the roadway, and privacy issues. He explained that he was never approached by RCM to explain this project and the devaluation of his home would be significant. He explained that he has driven semis his whole life and that the roadway especially at the entrance of Quarry Avenue is a blind corner and dangerous. His opinion would have been to route traffic to Shanghi lane instead.

Upon completion of Mr. Jones statements, the chair recognized Mr. Dave Kunken CEO of RCM CO-OP.

Mr. Kunken opened his remarks by expressing that he wanted to make some clarifications regarding testimony that was previously given. He explained that the loading frequency of the rail would fluctuate throughout a year but on average he thought that weekly rail traffic would be realistic. He also wanted to define the term storage as its not a definition of time, it is a place.

Upon completion of Mr. Kunken's statements, the chair recognized Mr. William Mayfield.

Mr. Mayfield explained that he was a multi-generational farmer and this project would reduce haul times for him and improve his market access.

Upon completion of Mr. Mayfield's statements, the chair recognized Ms. Linda Connelly.

Ms. Connelly remarked that her family farm spans the Route 29 corridor. She expressed concern over the traffic safety that this project poses. She also described the intersection of Route 29 and Quarry Avenue as dangerous. She felt that this proposal would cause additional concern for her farm equipment and horse trailering.

Upon completion of Ms. Connelly's statements, the chair recognized Ms. Ivy Ingram.

Ms. Ingram also expressed her family farms nearby this proposed project site, while she recognizes the potential benefit, she shared her traffic safety concerns and hoped for more information to be provided.

Chairman Robertson then closed the public discussion and invited the applicants counsel Mr. Hamilton to respond to concerns raised.

Mr. Hamilton discussed the substantial increase in the cost of project due to the improvements suggested by the highway engineer; RCM being governed by a board simply does not have the authority to say that they could agree to it. So, for that reason, they respectfully request that this board not make that a condition of this zoning. He also suggested that there should not be any improvements required unless there is a proper traffic study conducted, and there is a shown need, a documented need for those sorts of improvements. Without a documented need, we are going on the notes of the county highway engineer that we have not seen and been able to analyze to say whether there really is truly a need, that those issues will all be addressed in the development of the project, but not in zoning.

Additionally, he explained that zoning code does not establish a specific time for storage. He explained that if the rail loop must be approved as a condition, then that is what must occur but he viewed this as a permitted use as it is currently not required. Mr. Hamilton addressed the easement discussion and he described the proper term instead of easement would be site control. Site control, not easement, because site control can take place through the acquisition of the property, through a purchase, an easement, some other mechanism. So, I think site control is the terminology we would appreciate for using for that sort of condition if you entertain that sort of condition. He explained that would be a part of a downstream process. He also addressed the dust issue and accounting for that through EPA compliance, as well as the rail loop identifying that the rail already exists as an essential character of the locality. He also did not expect any significant impact on property values.

He closed by saying: “the essential character of the neighborhood is not changing. The essential character of the neighborhood includes a grain elevator and it includes a railroad track. Those uses are already occurring, which makes this a site that is specifically suited for this type of use, as opposed to another site where those uses are not already occurring”. He then asked the board to make a recommendation based on the conditions as he described.

Chairman Robertson asked counsel if they wished to have a recess to discuss county recommendations. Mr. Hamilton responded that RCM is run by a board and he felt that any arrangement could not be reached during this hearing regarding these issues. Chairman Robertson offered to recess to a later date, and Mr. Hamilton explained this is the sort of condition that should be approached through the building permit process. Whenever a building permit is applied for and development is occurring, that’s where road improvements should be mandated or required or studied. For the purposes of this hearing, we do not believe that it is appropriate for that condition to be attached. And we also, for the timeline of the project and wanting to get it moving and break ground, do not want to delay it further. Chairman Robertson addressed the additional zoning concerns regarding commercial projects such as wind and solar in Menard County. Mr. Hamilton asked to review the conditions.

Chairman Robertson called for a 20-minute recess.

Chairman Robertson returned from recess and gave an overview before adjourning the public portion of the hearing. He discussed the county highway engineer and the zoning administrator had asked for some stipulations to be attached to the special use permit, which were new conditions for the petitioner being the first that they heard about it. The Zoning Board of Appeals will move those issues to the building permit process, and we will remove the conditions from the petition.

Chairman Robertson discussed some clarification issues with members of the public and Mr. Lefferts noted for the record that he felt there was a cemetery in existence on the potential project site. This assertion was rebuffed by Mr. Hamilton as he pointed to the detailed survey that did not indicate a cemetery.

Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals Deliberation

Deliberation of case by members.

H. 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 or to disapprove the petition from RCM co-op. This is the discussion of the meeting this evening.

Member Becker motion, Member Wilken second.

ROLL CALL

 4 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Ozella, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed: none

 0 Abstain: none

MOTION CARRIED

I. DETERMINATION OF FINDINGS OF FACT

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

J. ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS

The Zoning Board of Appeals voted unanimously to recommend approval of Case 2601SU to the Menard County Board, recognizing the RCM CO-OP proposal as a agribusiness development contributing to the local economy, education, and rural character of the county.

K. ZONING ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

There was no new business to be discussed.

L. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: The Menard County Zoning Board of Appeals motions to adjourn proceedings.

Member Ozella motion, Member Wilken second.

ROLL CALL

 4 in Favor: Karen Stott, Steve Ozella, Steve Wilken, Chris Becker

 0 Opposed: none

 0 Abstain: none

MOTION CARRIED

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.