City of Columbus – Bartholomew County
Planning Department

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CITY OF COLUMBUS
BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS
(January 27, 2026 Meeting)

STAFF REPORT

Docket No. / Project Title: BZA-25-4 (Brandon Nielsen)

Staff: Desiree Aldrich

Applicant: Brandon Nielsen

Property Size: +/- 8,276

Zoning: RE (Residential: Established)

Location: 803 Pearl Street, in the City of Columbus

Background Summary:
The applicant has indicated that the proposed conditional use will allow a shared housing facility (a home for up to 17 individuals) in an RE (Residential: Established) zoning district. The home on this property was previously converted to three apartments. The applicant proposes to use those units to house up to 16 residents and an on-site property manager. The applicant is the executive director of Gemini Recovery Services, which provides treatment for those recovering from substance abuse. He is proposing to operate this facility as an individual (and not associated with Gemini Recovery Services) as housing for those in recovery.

Key Issue Summary:
The following key issue(s) should be resolved through the consideration of this application:

1. Is the existing gravel parking appropriate for the proposed use?

Preliminary Staff Recommendation:
Denial; Criteria #3 has not been met.

Zoning District Intent:
The intent of the RE (Residential: Established) zoning district is as follows: To ensure the continued viability of neighborhoods and developments in existence on the effective date of the Zoning Ordinance. This district should be used to maintain traditional, contextually appropriate setbacks, uses, and other standards in a manner consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. This district should not be applied to any new development.

Current Property Information:	
Land Use:	Multi-family residence (a home previously divided into 3 apartments)
Site Features:	Residential structure
Flood Hazards:	No flood hazards exist on the property

Street/Road Frontage:	Pearl Street (Local, Residential, Urban) 8th Street (Local, Residential, Urban)

Surrounding Zoning and Land Use:		
	Zoning:	**Land Use:**
North:	RE (Residential: Established)	Single and Multi-Family Residential (homes converted to apartments)
South:	RE (Residential: Established)	Single and Multi-Family Residential (homes converted to apartments)
East:	RE (Residential: Established)	Single Family Residential
West:	RE (Residential: Established)	First United Methodist Church

Interdepartmental Review:	
City Engineering:	No response
City Utilities:	No response
Columbus Fire Dept.:	No response
County Code Enforcement:	Our department would have no issues with this proposal.

Planning Consideration(s):

The following general site considerations, planning concepts, and other facts should be considered in the review of this application:

1. The applicant is requesting a conditional use approval to operate the property as a shared housing facility for up to 17 individuals. The applicant is describing the housing as a “Level 1” recovery residence. According to the applicant, a Level 1 recovery residence is a low-intensity residential use with no clinical services, no medical activity, and no commercial operations. Residents are housed at the subject location for a maximum of 90 days while engaged in treatment programs elsewhere.
2. The Zoning Ordinance defines a shared housing facility as a dwelling unit occupied by more than 5 adults, any one of which is not related to the others by blood or marriage. A shared housing facility also includes a residential facility for more than 8 individuals who are developmentally disabled or recovering from substance abuse, a rooming house, a shelter, a housing co-operative, and other similar forms of group housing.
3. The applicant has indicated that all tenants are screened prior to admission and must comply with strict house rules, including sobriety, curfews, quiet hours, routine house meetings, and zero-tolerance policies for violence, threats, or illegal activity. Quiet hours are from 10:00pm – 7:00am.
4. The subject property is broken up into 3 units. Unit 1 is 1,000 square feet and will house up to 8 tenants. Unit 2 is 800 square feet and will house the on-site property manager. Unit 3 is 1,400 square feet and will house up to 8 tenants.

5. The applicant has indicated there is onsite parking for up to 5 vehicles. On-street parking is also available on both 8th and Chestnut Streets. The applicant has indicated that a majority of anticipated tenants do not have a drivers license or vehicle and utilize public transportation.
6. Parking is provided off the alley and consists of a gravel area that is considered legal non-conforming.
7. The city bus route crosses the intersection of 8th and Chestnut Streets, which is 1 block east of the subject site.
8. The nearest public open space/park is 1 mile to the west at Mill Race Park.
9. The applicant has indicated that tenants will be required to receive treatment through Gemini Recovery Center. Gemini Recovery Center provides transportation to and from all treatment appointments.
10. The applicant has indicated that most tenants will not have employment upon entry and will be required to submit weekly job search verifications until work is obtained. The applicant states that the goal is for tenants to achieve stable employment by the end of their 90-day stay.
11. For transportation outside of treatment, tenants will utilize ride sharing services, the city bus system, or in some cases their personal vehicles. The applicant has indicated that all tenants with a personal vehicle must provide proof of a valid driver's license and active insurance to keep a car on property.
12. The applicant has indicated that visitors are not permitted on the subject site. Limited exceptions are made for family members to briefly drop off items when needed. No one is allowed inside the residence under any circumstances with the exception of probation, parole, and emergency personnel.

Comprehensive Plan Consideration(s):

The Comprehensive Plan designates the future land use of properties in this area as Residential.

The Comprehensive Plan includes this property in the Columbus Central Neighborhoods character area. The following planning principles for that character area apply to this application: When conversion of single-family houses to multifamily is permitted, appropriate off-street parking should be required. Converting front yard areas to parking lots is not in the best interests of the area.

The following Comprehensive Plan goal(s) and/or policy(ies) apply to this application:

1. **POLICY A-2-9**: Preserve and enhance the character of neighborhoods.
   Older neighborhoods have distinctive characteristics which should be retained. These vary from one neighborhood to another, but they include such things as smaller lots, lesser setbacks, service alleys, and a distinctive architectural style.
2. **GOAL D-2**: Encourage development of a sufficient supply of diverse housing types, sizes, and price ranges in the community.
3. **POLICY D-2-1**: Encourage housing which is affordable to those whose incomes are below the median, particularly those significantly below the median.
   A thriving community needs socio-economic diversity which in turn requires a range of housing prices. The city should encourage the development of housing in a variety of price ranges so that all citizens will have decent, safe, and sanitary housing at prices they can afford.
4. **POLICY D-2-2**: Allow for various housing types.
   A diverse population needs diverse housing. The city should encourage a variety of housing types, including single-family detached houses, townhouses, and apartments.
5. **POLICY D-2-6**: Encourage development of a sufficient supply of housing in all price ranges so that all citizens of the community can enjoy decent, safe, and sanitary housing in desirable neighborhood settings.
   A diversity of housing prices and types accommodates a diverse population and differing preferences.

Provisional Findings of Fact/Decision Criteria:

Section 12.4(D) of the Zoning Ordinance permits the Board of Zoning Appeals to allow conditional uses that meet the criteria listed below. The Board may impose reasonable conditions as part of an approval.

1. The proposal will not be injurious to the public health, safety, and general welfare of the community.

Provisional Findings: There were no concerns raised from other City departments and agencies. *This criterion has been met.*

2. **The development of the property will be consistent with the intent of the development standards established by the Zoning Ordinance for similar uses.**

   Provisional Findings: The subject property meets the development standards in the RE zoning district. The existing structure complies with required setbacks and lot coverage. *This criterion has been met.*

3. **Granting the conditional use will not be contrary to the general purposes served by the Zoning Ordinance, and will not permanently injure other property or uses in the same zoning district and vicinity.**

   Provisional Findings: The subject site is in a location that has a mix of both single-family residences and multifamily residences used for rental properties. However, the requested 17 residents to be served by only 5 off-street parking spaces could have an adverse impact to the area in terms of vehicle congestion and overburdening on-street parking. *This criterion has **not** been met.*

4. **The proposed use will be consistent with the character of the zoning district in which it is located and the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.**

   Provisional Findings: The Comprehensive Plan states a goal of the community is to encourage development of a sufficient supply of diverse housing types, sizes, and prices ranges in the community. *This criterion has been met.*

Board of Zoning Appeals Options:

In reviewing a request for *conditional use* the Board may (1) approve the petition as proposed, (2) approve the petition with conditions, (3) continue the petition to a future meeting of the Board, or (4) deny the petition (with or without prejudice). Failure to achieve a quorum or lack of a positive vote on a motion results in an automatic continuance to the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Record No: BZA-25-4

Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) Application

Status: Active

Submitted On: 12/9/2025

Primary Location

803 PEARL ST
COLUMBUS, IN 47201

Owner

COLUMBUS HOMES FOR RENT LLC
S 550 W 9464 COLUMBUS, IN 47201

Application Information

Application Type*

Conditional Use

You may enter multiple requests for the same application type. If you are also requesting a different application type, you will need to submit a separate application.

Pre-Application Meeting

Have you had a pre-application meeting with the Planning Department?*

Yes

What staff member did you meet with?*

Desiree Aldrich

When did you meet?*

12/08/2024

Conditional Use Request

I am requesting a Conditional Use per Zoning Ordinance Section (insert the ordinance section number below):*

3.12 (B)

Please Describe the Proposed Use:*

To allow for a Level 1 Recovery Residence in a RE zoning district.

The approval of the conditional use will not be injurious to the public health, safety, and general welfare of the community. For example: What harm could come from approving the conditional use? Would it create any public safety issues? Why or why not?*

This use is safe, low-impact, and operates exactly like a typical residential household. A Level 1 recovery residence is a low-intensity residential use with no clinical services, no medical activity, and no commercial operations. It does not generate traffic, noise, or congestion beyond what is typical for a shared household.

Residents are screened prior to admission and must comply with strict house rules, including sobriety, curfews, quiet hours, routine house meetings, and zero-tolerance policies for violence, threats, or illegal activity. This creates a level of structure and accountability that exceeds that of a standard rental property.

We work closely with local treatment providers, peer recovery organizations, and the criminal justice and court systems to ensure residents receive coordinated support. Housing is one of the number-one barriers to establishing and maintaining long-term recovery, and this residence directly addresses that barrier in a safe, structured, and supervised environment.

National research from HUD, NARR, SAMHSA, and Oxford House consistently shows that recovery residences do **not** increase crime, do **not** elevate calls for police service, and do **not** negatively impact surrounding property values. Federal agencies and courts recognize these homes as protected residential uses under the Fair Housing Act and ADA.

Residents must maintain employment or active recovery engagement and are subject to immediate discharge for rule violations. This results in a stable, motivated population that reduces homelessness, recidivism, and community burden.

For these reasons, the proposed use will not be injurious to public health, safety, or general welfare and is fully consistent with the intent of the zoning ordinance.

The development of the property will be consistent with the intent of the development standards established by the Zoning Ordinance for similar uses. For example: Will the conditional use be able to meet minimum building setbacks, parking standards, and other requirements? If not, are variances being sought to address those items?*

The residence meets all applicable development standards and will continue to function as a standard residential dwelling. The existing structure already complies with required setbacks, lot coverage, parking standards, and residential design criteria. No exterior additions, structural changes, or site modifications are proposed.

Parking demand for a Level 1 recovery residence is comparable to that of any shared household. Residents often work, carpool, or use public transportation, resulting in parking needs equal to or less than a typical multi-adult dwelling. Typically are unable to obtain or have lost their license. Adequate on-site parking is available, and no overflow or congestion impacts are anticipated.

No variances are being requested. The conditional use fits fully within the existing zoning framework, and the residence will remain visually indistinguishable from surrounding homes.

Bartholomew County zoning rules allow up to **eight (8)** residents in recovery per household, and this residence will remain within that limit per unit. Occupancy will remain consistent with typical residential density and will not exceed what is common for multi-adult households.

The proposed use is therefore fully consistent with the development standards of the Zoning Ordinance.

Granting the conditional use will not be contrary to the general purposes served by the Zoning Ordinance, and will not permanently injure other property or uses in the same zoning district and vicinity. For example: Are there risks that the conditional use will cause harm to the neighbors' ability to use and enjoy their property? Is there reason to believe that the conditional use will cause harm to neighboring property values?*

This use is compatible with surrounding residential properties and does not create any adverse impacts. The RE zoning district is intended to preserve low-density residential character and promote neighborhood stability. A Level 1 recovery residence meets these objectives because it operates as a standard household with residents functioning as a single housekeeping unit.

There is no commercial activity, no signage, no increased traffic, and no structural or site modifications. The home will continue to appear and function as a typical residential property. Residents maintain employment, participate in ordinary community routines, and use the home solely for residential purposes.

Research from HUD, SAMHSA, and Oxford House shows that well-managed recovery residences do **not** reduce property values, do **not** increase crime, and often enhance neighborhood stability by ensuring consistent occupancy, strong oversight, and clear behavioral expectations.

Residents must maintain sobriety, comply with curfews, participate in random drug and alcohol screening, and follow strict house rules. Violations result in immediate discharge. This level of oversight exceeds that of a typical rental property and significantly reduces the likelihood of disruptive conduct.

The property will remain clean, well-maintained, and visually consistent with neighboring homes. There is no credible evidence that the proposed use will injure neighboring properties or diminish property values.

For these reasons, the conditional use is fully consistent with the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance and will not harm surrounding properties.

The conditional use will be consistent with the character of the zoning district in which it is located and the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. Will the conditional use change the character of the area? Will it involve a building, operation, or features that are significantly different than what is common to the zoning district?*

The proposed use preserves the residential character of the neighborhood and aligns with the goals of the Columbus Comprehensive Plan. A Level 1 recovery residence does not alter the physical appearance, intensity, or residential nature of the property. There are no exterior modifications, no signage, and no operational characteristics that differ from a typical shared household.

Residents live as a single housekeeping unit and follow strict expectations regarding quiet hours, property maintenance, and respectful conduct. All activities occur indoors, and the home remains visually indistinguishable from surrounding residences.

The use supports multiple goals of the **Columbus Comprehensive Plan (1999)**:

Housing Diversity & High-Quality Residential Environments

Goal D2: Encourage diverse housing types and price ranges.

Goal D3: Provide high-quality residential neighborhood environments.

Recovery residences expand stable, well-managed housing options and maintain high residential standards.

Efficient Use of Existing Infrastructure

Goal A4: Promote wise use of land and resources.

Goal D1: Develop housing where public services already exist.

No new construction or public investment is required; the use efficiently utilizes an existing residential structure.

Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

Goal B4: Promote health, safety, and protect property through wise development practices.

Stable housing is one of the most significant barriers to long-term recovery. This residence directly addresses that barrier while reducing homelessness, instability, and justice involvement.

Consistency With Residential Character

The RE district is intended for low-intensity residential uses. A Level 1 recovery residence:

Operates as a standard household

Generates typical residential traffic

Requires no variances

Maintains the existing building footprint

Preserves the quiet, low-density character of the area

Remains within the zoning allowance of up to **eight (8)** residents in recovery

For these reasons, the conditional use is fully consistent with the zoning district and the Comprehensive Plan.

The City of Columbus Comprehensive Plan can be found at: https://www.columbus.in.gov/planning/comprehensive-plans/.

The Bartholomew County Comprehensive Plan can be found at: https://www.columbus.in.gov/planning/comprehensive-plans/comprehensive-county-plans/.

Applicant Signature

The undersigned acknowledges that the information included in and with this application is completely true and correct to the best of his/her knowledge and belief. * Denotes a required field

Signature*

Brandon Nielsen
Dec 9, 2025

Narrative of Proposed Use — Zoning Ordinance Section 12.4(A)

Level 1 Recovery Residence — Bartholomew County (RE Zoning District)

The proposed use of the subject property is to operate a **Level 1 recovery residence**, a low-intensity residential use that functions in all respects as a typical single-household dwelling. The home will provide stable, supportive housing for individuals in recovery from substance use disorders, consistent with the allowances of the Bartholomew County Zoning Ordinance and the protections afforded under the Fair Housing Act and Americans with Disabilities Act.

Residential Nature of the Use

The residence will continue to operate as a standard dwelling unit with no clinical services, no medical activity, and no commercial operations. All activities within the home are residential in nature, and the property will remain visually indistinguishable from surrounding homes. No exterior construction, additions, structural changes, or site modifications are proposed. The existing building footprint, setbacks, lot coverage, and design characteristics will remain unchanged.

Residents live together as a single housekeeping unit, sharing common spaces, household responsibilities, and daily routines. The home will house no more than eight (8) residents, consistent with Bartholomew County's zoning allowance for recovery residences and comparable to typical multi-adult households.

Operational Features Related to the Conditional Use

The recovery residence is structured to ensure safety, stability, and accountability. All residents are screened prior to admission and must comply with strict house rules, including:

Sobriety requirements

Curfews and quiet hours

Routine house meetings

Zero-tolerance policies for violence, threats, or illegal activity

Random drug and alcohol screening

Employment or active recovery engagement

House Manager on site

These expectations create a level of oversight and structure that exceeds that of a standard rental property. Violations result in immediate discharge, ensuring the home remains safe, orderly, and respectful of the surrounding neighborhood.

The residence does not generate traffic, noise, or congestion beyond what is typical for a shared household. Residents often work, carpool, or use public transportation, resulting in parking needs equal to or less than a typical multi-adult dwelling. Adequate on-site parking is available, and no overflow impacts are anticipated.

Consistency With Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

National research from HUD, SAMHSA, NARR, and Oxford House consistently demonstrates that well-managed recovery residences:

Do **not** increase crime

Do **not** increase calls for police service

Do **not** negatively impact property values

Often **enhance neighborhood stability** through consistent occupancy and strong oversight

The proposed residence directly supports public health and welfare by addressing one of the most significant barriers to long-term recovery: stable housing. Residents receive coordinated support through partnerships with local treatment providers, peer recovery organizations, and the criminal justice system. This reduces homelessness, recidivism, and community burden.

Consistency With Development Standards

The property meets all applicable development standards for the RE zoning district. No variances are requested. The use fits fully within the existing zoning framework and maintains the low-density residential character intended for the district. The home will continue to function as a standard residential dwelling with no changes to its physical appearance or intensity of use.

Compatibility With Surrounding Properties

The proposed use is compatible with surrounding residential properties and will not injure neighboring uses. The home will remain clean, well maintained, and visually consistent with the neighborhood. There is no credible evidence that a Level 1 recovery residence negatively affects property values or neighborhood conditions. Instead, the structured environment and strong behavioral expectations reduce the likelihood of disruptive conduct and support neighborhood stability.

Consistency With the Comprehensive Plan

The proposed use aligns with multiple goals of the Columbus Comprehensive Plan, including:

Housing Diversity & High-Quality Residential Environments

Expands stable, well-managed housing options

Maintains high residential standards

Efficient Use of Existing Infrastructure

Utilizes an existing residential structure

Requires no new public investment

Public Health, Safety, and Welfare

Supports long-term recovery

Reduces homelessness and justice involvement

Preservation of Residential Character

No signage, commercial activity, or exterior changes

Typical residential traffic and household routines

Maintains the quiet, low-density character of the RE district

Conclusion

The proposed Level 1 recovery residence is a safe, low-impact, residential use that fully complies with the intent of the Zoning Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan. It preserves neighborhood character, meets all development standards, and provides a structured, accountable environment that supports both residents and the broader community. The use will not be injurious to public health, safety, or welfare and will not harm surrounding properties.