



**ROBINS ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, May 20, 2026 | 7:00 p.m. | Robins City Hall**

Call Meeting to Order

Chairperson Brian Cohen called the meeting to order at **7:00 p.m.**

Roll Call

Members Present:

- Brian Cohen, Chairperson
- Molly Iversen, Vice-Chairperson
- Dustin Arnold
- Dawn Svenson-Holland
- Mark Wood

Members Absent:

- None

Staff Present

- Vance McKinnon, Planning & Zoning Administrator
- Doug Herman, City Attorney
- Lisa Goodin, City Clerk/Treasurer

Additional Attendees

Numerous members of the public were present.

Approval of Agenda

Motion by **Svenson-Holland**, seconded by **Arnold**, to approve the agenda.

Ayes: Cohen, Iversen, Arnold, Svenson-Holland, Wood

Nays: None

Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – December 19, 2023

Motion by **Svenson-Holland**, seconded by **Wood**, to approve the December 19, 2023 meeting minutes.

Ayes: Cohen, Iversen, Arnold, Svenson-Holland, Wood

Nays: None

Motion carried unanimously.

Election of Officers – 2026

Chairperson

Nomination: Brian Cohen

Motion by **Arnold**, seconded by **Svenson-Holland**, to elect Brian Cohen as Chairperson.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

Vice-Chairperson

Nomination: Molly Iversen

Motion by **Arnold**, seconded by **Svenson-Holland**, to elect Molly Iversen as Vice-Chairperson.

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

Public Hearing

Request of the Eastern Hindu Temple and Cultural Center

1600 W. Main Street, Robins, Iowa

Variance Request to Exceed the Maximum Building Height Limitation of Thirty-Five (35) Feet Applicable to Property Zoned R-1 Single-Family Residential

Chairperson Cohen opened the public hearing at **7:02 p.m.**

Planning & Zoning Administrator **Vance McKinnon** introduced the application requesting a variance from the height limitation contained within the R-1 zoning district to permit construction of the temple **Gopuram**, an ornamental religious tower structure associated with Hindu temple architecture.

City Attorney **Doug Herman** provided legal background regarding the Board's authority to grant variances under Iowa law and discussed the standards applicable to variance requests. He explained that State law has evolved toward application of a "**practical difficulties**" standard and referenced **Iowa Code Section 414.12**. Mr. Herman noted that the Board must consider the specific facts of the request and make findings supporting any decision.

Applicant Presentation

Paddy Puthige, speaking on behalf of the Eastern Hindu Temple and Cultural Center, thanked City staff, elected officials, appointed officials, and the community for assistance during development of the temple project.

Mr. Puthige explained that:

- The temple serves both religious and cultural purposes for the regional Hindu community;
- The congregation had postponed final religious consecration ceremonies pending completion of the project and final action on the variance request;
- The proposed **Gopuram** represents peace, spirituality, and positivity and functions similarly to church steeples or bell towers found in other faith traditions;
- The temple promotes cultural diversity and community understanding;
- The facility would not generate pollution, safety concerns, or adverse environmental impacts.

He stated the congregation sought to create a welcoming place open to all residents.

Sundara Mungala Venkata, a temple member, described the project as representing **love, unity, and cultural diversity**. He stated the temple would become a destination facility for visitors and noted landscaping plans including trees, gardens, and environmentally conscious site improvements.

Mr. Venkata thanked City staff for their assistance throughout the approximately three-year construction process and emphasized that temple members intended to remain respectful neighbors.

Public Comment – Supportive Testimony

Connie Westphal, 405 Ascot Lane, whose property borders the temple site, stated she was pleased to live near the facility and viewed its operations as comparable to those of churches or other religious institutions.

Satya Vaddadi, 1600 Mackenzie Drive, spoke in favor of the request. He explained that Hindu temples are designed according to religious guidelines and architectural principles and stated that the required dimensions of the sacred space determine the size and proportions of the Gopuram.

Mr. Vaddadi noted there are only a limited number of Hindu temples in Iowa and described the facility as a peaceful place for worship and community gathering.

Kelly Willfarm, 365 Ascot Lane, supported the request, stating that if denial of the variance would interfere with religious practice, approval should be considered. She described temple members as considerate neighbors and referenced proactive communication by the temple during a recent grand opening event regarding traffic and visitor impacts.

Jason Paulson, 365 Ascot Lane, stated that the temple property sits lower than surrounding elevations and that the proposed structure would be near the elevation of West Main Street. He indicated he did not believe the addition would materially alter neighborhood character.

Public Comment – Opposition and Questions

Bob Huffman, 3320 Aster Road and former Planning & Zoning Commission member, stated the building as constructed differed from renderings previously presented during zoning review and appeared more institutional in character than originally anticipated. He questioned whether the building could function as a temple without installation of the Gopuram. Mr. Puthige responded that the temple would not be considered complete or function as a proper place of worship without the Gopuram because the sacred interior elements determine the required tower height.

Alen Green, 690 Kervin Court, clarified that he was not opposed to the Hindu faith or the temple itself and expressed support for religious diversity. However, he encouraged the Board to consider long-term implications and how approval might affect future requests from other religious groups, including hypothetical future mosque proposals.

Greg Wild, 1505 W. Main Street, directly across from the temple property, stated the Gopuram would substantially change the visual landscape and argued the issue should have been anticipated earlier in project development.

Cheryl Cruse, 2959 N. Center Point Road, questioned why a religious institution had been permitted within an R-1 district.

Mr. McKinnon explained that religious uses were permitted at the time plans were submitted and acknowledged the project would create a different character than surrounding residential development.

Lori Schoenauer, 1923 Kaylin Court, respectfully opposed the variance while expressing appreciation for cultural diversity and the congregation.

Ms. Schoenauer cited concerns including:

- Visual compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood;
 - Potential impact on neighborhood character;
 - Precedent for future variance requests;
 - Possible impacts on property values and residential desirability;
 - Compatibility with adjacent residential uses.
-

Perry Cruse, 2959 N. Center Point Road, stated that plans for the Gopuram should have been disclosed with the original building plans and expressed opposition to granting the variance.

Scott Rosekrans, 540 Robinwood Drive, questioned the timing between building approval and the variance application and stated he believed the City was being pressured into approving the request after construction.

Randy Schmidt, 215 Charlotte Avenue, stated that although religious practice should be protected, adding the Gopuram after building completion appeared misleading. He believed the structure would significantly alter neighborhood character and urged adherence to existing zoning standards.

James Gondacker, 890 Tamarack Lane, expressed concern that approval would establish precedent encouraging future variance requests.

Maria Bowman, 1540 W. Main Street, adjacent to the temple property, opposed the request. Ms. Bowman stated that neighborhood character is subjective and argued that all property owners should remain subject to the same regulations. She stated she objected to:

- The location of the temple on the property;
- The timing of the variance request after building completion;
- What she characterized as differences between earlier representations and the current proposal.

Ms. Bowman indicated she had previously been informed the building would appear modern and would not include prominent religious architectural elements.

Leigh Benson, 450 Michelle Avenue, stated that if the Gopuram was essential to the temple's use, it should have been incorporated into the original design while remaining within zoning limitations.

Additional Clarification and Questions

Architect **Paul Montag** addressed the Board and explained that:

- The final Gopuram height was not known during earlier stages of design;
- The structure as built complied with building code requirements;
- The project team was aware of zoning limitations;
- Robins zoning regulations contain no specific exemptions for religious architectural features, while some communities do;
- The Gopuram is ornamental, unoccupied, and constructed using steel framing with fiberglass exterior components.

Chairperson **Cohen** asked whether the Gopuram could be compared to a church steeple.

Mr. Puthige responded affirmatively.

Chairperson Cohen asked staff whether the structure would comply if its height were reduced by approximately 12 feet 10 inches.

Mr. McKinnon stated it would.

Board members further questioned:

- Whether the structure could be redesigned or reduced in height;
- Whether alternative architectural solutions existed;
- Whether the Gopuram must remain centered on the building.

Temple representatives stated religious requirements dictate dimensions, placement, and proportional relationships and indicated redesign would require returning to earlier planning stages.

Board member **Mark Wood** asked whether lighting or loudspeakers would be installed.

Mr. Puthige stated:

- No loudspeakers were proposed;
- No lighting was planned on the Gopuram itself;
- Only standard parking lot lighting would exist.

He acknowledged communication gaps regarding future installation of the structure.

Additional Public Questions

Damon Bowman, 1540 W. Main Street, questioned whether responsibility for omission of the Gopuram rested with the architect or City review process.

Mr. McKinnon stated the City approved plans that did not include the Gopuram and emphasized the City had not overlooked the structure because it had not been submitted.

Satya Vaddadi further explained that final dimensions were determined according to religious guidance.

Mike Kinney, developer of the Sand Ridge subdivision, asked whether City staff first became aware of the Gopuram after delivery of materials to the site.

Mr. McKinnon confirmed that was correct.

Chairperson Cohen closed the public hearing at **8:21 p.m.**

Resolution No. 2026-1

Request for Variance – Eastern Hindu Temple and Cultural Center

Board discussion followed.

Iversen summarized her understanding of how the oversight occurred and requested clarification regarding prior zoning allowances for religious institutions in the district. Discussion included future residential development potential north of the site.

Arnold observed that a reduction of approximately ten feet would have allowed the structure under existing regulations.

Svenson-Holland stated she did not believe the congregation intentionally attempted to deceive the City but believed a mistake had occurred.

Initial Motion

Motion by **Svenson-Holland**, seconded by **Iversen**, to deny the variance.

City Attorney Herman advised the Board regarding procedures for denial and emphasized the importance of articulating findings related to the practical difficulties standard.

The motion and second were withdrawn.

Mr. Herman further advised that:

- City Council could consider ordinance amendments in the future;
- Many communities include exemptions for religious architectural features;
- The Board should take final action to provide closure and preserve appeal rights.

Chairperson Cohen inquired about tabling the request.

Mr. Herman recommended action rather than postponement and reviewed appeal procedures.

Motion to Deny Variance

Motion by **Svenson-Holland**, seconded by **Iversen**, to deny the variance.

Roll Call Vote

Member	Aye	Nay
Molly Iversen	X	
Brian Cohen		X
Dawn Svenson-Holland	X	
Mark Wood		X
Dustin Arnold		X

Motion failed, 2–3.

Motion to Approve Variance

Motion by **Arnold**, seconded by **Wood**, to approve the variance request.

Roll Call Vote

Member	Aye	Nay
Molly Iversen		X
Brian Cohen	X	
Dawn Svenson-Holland	X	
Mark Wood	X	
Dustin Arnold	X	

Motion carried, 3–2.

Resolution No. 2026-1 approving the variance request was adopted.

Adjournment

Motion by **Arnold**, seconded by **Wood**, to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at **8:41 p.m.**

Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Goodin, City Clerk/Treasurer

Brian Cohen, Chairperson

Vance McKinnon, Planning & Zoning Administrator