



**NOTICE OF MEETING  
ROBINS ZONING BOARD OF  
ADJUSTMENT**

**Wednesday, June 17th, 2026  
6:00 p.m. – Robins City Hall**

*(ONE OR MORE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL MAY BE ATTENDING VIA ELECTRONIC DEVICE)*

**AGENDA:**

1. Call the Meeting to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag
3. Roll Call
4. Approval of the Agenda
5. Motion to Approve the Minutes of the May 20, 2026 Meeting
6. Discussion: May 20, 2026 Facts & Findings: Eastern Iowa Hindu Temple and Cultural Center Variance
7. Motion to Approve May 20, 2026 Facts & Findings Document
8. **MOTION TO ADJOURN MEETING**



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

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**Call Meeting to Order**

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

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**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.

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**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.**

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**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.**

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**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.**

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### **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.

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### **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.

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**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.

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### **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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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### **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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.
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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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

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**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.

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**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.

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### **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.

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### **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.

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

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**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.

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**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.

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**Motion to Deny Variance**

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

**Roll Call Vote**

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

**Motion failed, 2–3.**

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**Motion to Approve Variance**

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

**Roll Call Vote**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Aye</b>	<b>Nay</b>
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.**

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**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**

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Brian Cohen, Chairperson

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Vance McKinnon, Planning & Zoning Administrator



**CITY OF ROBINS, IOWA  
OFFICIAL VARIANCE APPROVAL**

Height Variance – Eastern Iowa Hindu Temple and Cultural Center  
Date of Approval: May 20, 2026  
ZBA Resolution: 2026-1  
Applicant: Eastern Iowa Hindu Temple and Cultural Center  
Property Owner: Eastern Iowa Hindu Temple and Cultural Center  
Property Address: 1600 W. Main Street, Robins, Iowa  
Property Size: 10.57 Acres  
Parcel ID: LAIRD'S 1ST LOT 2, GPN 112012600500000

**Background**

Prior to May 20, 2026, the Eastern Iowa Hindu Temple and Cultural Center submitted a Variance Application seeking relief from the maximum building height requirements applicable to property zoned R-1 Single-Family Residential.

The variance request was submitted to permit construction of a Gopuram, an ornamental religious tower structure associated with traditional Hindu temple architecture. The proposed structure exceeds the maximum thirty-five (35) foot building height limitation otherwise applicable within the R-1 zoning district.

After appropriate notice, the Robins Zoning Board of Adjustment held a public hearing on May 20, 2026. The Board received testimony from City staff, the Applicant, neighboring property owners, and other interested members of the public. The Board also reviewed plans, exhibits, and other materials submitted in support of and opposition to the request.

The Applicant presented testimony that the Gopuram serves an important religious and cultural function and is an integral architectural component of a traditional Hindu temple. The Applicant further testified that the dimensions, placement, and proportional relationships of the structure are dictated by religious requirements and traditions.

Following the public hearing and Board deliberations, the Board voted 3-2 to approve the variance request.

**Decision**

After considering the application, applicable provisions of the Robins Municipal Code, testimony presented, and evidence in the record, the Zoning Board of Adjustment found that the variance should be granted and hereby approves the variance request based upon the following factual findings and conclusions:

1. The proposed Gopuram is a traditional and customary architectural element of Hindu temple design and serves a religious purpose associated with the use of the property as a place of worship.
2. The Board finds that the property is currently developed and utilized as a religious institution and cultural center, a use lawfully established on the property.
3. The Board considered testimony that the dimensions, placement, and proportional relationships of the Gopuram are determined by religious and architectural requirements unique to Hindu temple construction and that the absence of the Gopuram would prevent the temple from being sanctified as a place of worship.
4. The Board finds that the requested variance relates to an ornamental, non-occupied architectural feature and not to additional occupied building area. The structure will not create additional residential density, traffic, noise, or demand upon public infrastructure.
5. The Board considered testimony that no loudspeakers are proposed, no lighting is planned on the Gopuram itself, and only standard site lighting will be utilized.
6. The Board considered testimony from neighboring property owners both supporting and opposing the request. Several adjacent property owners testified that the temple has operated as a respectful neighbor and that the proposed Gopuram would not materially alter the character of the area. Other neighboring property owners expressed concerns regarding neighborhood character, precedent, and the timing of the variance request. The Board considered all testimony in reaching its decision.
7. The Board finds that granting the variance will not create a substantial detriment to adjacent property owners, will not create a threat to public health or safety, and will not interfere with the reasonable use and enjoyment of neighboring properties.
8. The Board finds that the variance request is limited to the height of a religious architectural feature and represents the minimum relief necessary to accommodate the intended religious and architectural function of the structure as presented in the application.
9. Consideration of Iowa Code Section 414.12 supports granting the variance.
  - a. Granting the variance will not be contrary to the public interest.
  - b. Owing to special conditions associated with the religious and architectural requirements of the proposed Gopuram, strict application of the ordinance would result in practical difficulties in completing the temple as designed and intended.
  - c. Granting the variance is consistent with the spirit of the zoning ordinance while allowing reasonable accommodation of a religious institutional use.
  - d. The practical difficulties presented arise from the unique nature of the proposed religious architectural feature and are not generally applicable to residential structures within the zoning district.
  - e. The Board finds that approval of the variance will not significantly alter the essential character of the surrounding area nor impair the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties.

## **Variance Granted**

The Board of Adjustment approves the following variance:

- Zoning Code Section: Chapter 165, Robins Zoning Ordinance, Section 165.24 (3)
- Permitted Height: Thirty-Five (35) Feet
- Approved Height: Principal Building Height – 28’; Structure Height – 17’9”; Overall Height – 45’9”
- Structure: Gopuram (Traditional Hindu Temple Tower)

## **Conditions of Approval**

This variance is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. Updated building plan and site plan, indicating overall height of total structure must be submitted to the City and approved by the Building Inspector prior to installation
2. Applicable building permits must be obtained from the City of Robins prior to installation.
3. This Variance shall apply only to this request as depicted in the site plan.
4. The additional structure may not be illuminated.
5. Upon approval of this Variance by the Board of Adjustment, the applicant(s) signature(s) below shall indicate acceptance of the conditions listed on this Resolution. This notarized document shall be recorded with the Linn County Recorder.
6. Non-compliance with any condition shall render this approval null and void.

## **Appeal Rights**

Decision of the Board of Adjustment may be appealed to District Court within thirty days (30) by anyone objecting to this decision. No approval should be considered completely final until this period has passed.

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Brian Cohen, Chairperson

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Lisa Goodin, City Clerk/Treasurer