

Coe residence from Google Earth
323 North Ave, Libertyville



er-3/15/2025

100 m

Coe residence from Google Earth (highlighted with a bold outline)

323 North Ave, Libertyville, IL 60048



Narrative Description of Proposal, as part of the application for Variation for Front Yard Setback

Deborah and Jeffrey Coe, 323 North Ave., Libertyville, IL 60048

October 10, 2025

We have a 100-year-old home that until this summer had an inadequate set of front steps. As shown in the image below, they were not built with hand railings, and it would not have been easy to add railings due to the design, which included plywood “walls”. The whole assemblage was made of painted wood and had to be repainted twice in the five years we have lived there. The paint was peeling yet again this year, and the treads were starting to rot. They needed to be replaced.

But even more importantly, there was *no landing at the top of the stairs*, making it difficult to enter and leave the house safely. To get the mail (from the mailbox hanging to the right side of the door), we literally had to open the door, step down a couple of steps to walk around the open door, then step up to reach the mail, then step back down to walk around the door again, and then step back up to re-enter the house.



(Image from Google Earth, 2018)

And there was an added complication. In summer/fall 2024, we had a new sewer line installed, which created a trench that ran between our house and the one next door (on the right), then turned and ran horizontally across the front yard toward the driveway, and then from there along the driveway to meet the public sewer that runs under the street. In the process, the digging destroyed most of the front landscaping and took out some of the sidewalk leading to the front door, and also the sidewalk to the driveway.

We decided to wait until 2025 before redoing the landscaping, to allow the piles of dirt mounded over the trench to level out. It made sense to address the issues with the front steps this year, at the same time, since we had to do something about the missing section of front walk, which is still missing, and is quite

unsightly. You can see it in the image below, which was taken this summer after the front steps were removed. Chalk lines and circles mark locations for piers for proposed new steps.



(photo taken in summer 2025 after stairs were removed)

As we imagined what our new front yard landscaping and new steps might look like, we walked around Libertyville and saw this home just around the corner from us on First Street (see the images below for reference), which has recently had the landscaping completely redone. We loved the way that the stepped-down hardscaping helped to integrate the home beautifully into the landscape. There are a few steps from the front door to a lower landing, and from there, you can either walk a few steps down to the public walk in front, or a few steps down to the driveway to the side. There is cohesive landscaping to tie it all together.



We started dreaming of something like that, knowing that our budget would not allow us to build it from stone as they had done. But we imagined we could take some of the elements of this landscaping design that we really liked and implement it using composite wood for stairs and two small landings.

So, this summer, we contracted with Great American Exteriors to build a new set of front entry stairs, with two landings, so that from the lower landing, you can either walk down two steps to the front public walk or down two steps to the side to the driveway. It would have attractive (and safe) railings. A rough drawing, provided by the contractor, is included below.



It would be built from composite material so we don't have to worry about painting and wood rot again. We decided on white vertical surfaces (the sides will be solid white all the way to the ground, with classic white decorative molding to look paneled) and white railings (which are a textured matte finish aluminum), with warm brown decking and stair treads. It will have a very traditional look, fitting for our cottage-style home.

Great American Exteriors secured a permit from the village this summer, removed the old front steps, had materials delivered, and marked out the location for the concrete piers. They began pouring concrete for the piers. We were so excited! That's the photo shown above on page 2.

However, during a village inspection, it was discovered that our house was encroaching on a setback code, which village ordinance requires to be 30 feet back from the front property line. The house without any front steps, or stoop or anything, is only 21 feet back. We were told at that time that *the permit should not have been issued*. All work had to stop until we figured it out. It was a huge disappointment. At the time, we had no front steps or any way to use our front door. And it looked terrible.

After meeting with the senior planner, David Smith, in the village planning office, we learned that not only could we not build our beautiful two-stoop design without seeking a variation; *we could not even replace the old steps with something the same size as what had been there previously*.

Allow us to explain how that could be. Although we were given some grace so that we could build something *up to 7 feet out from the front of the house*, there was a minimum requirement of a 3-foot-deep front stoop. That would only give us 4 feet for stairs, and you could not get down to the front yard with only 4 feet. The steps would need to be so tall they would be in violation of another code.

Going sideways to the driveway from a front stoop would possibly work, but the stairs would have to be placed literally up against the house, which would require us to lose a shrub, and the bottom step would actually be *on the driveway*. It would be quite ugly. And the front walk leading to our house from the public walk would lead to well, nowhere. We think this is not an option, as it would be unsightly, and it would likely have a negative impact on the value of our property. We doubt our neighbors would like it, either.

So, we were now in a position in which, *no matter what, we really had no choice but to apply for this variation*. We were allowed to continue to build a 4-foot-deep stoop (so we can now easily walk around the front door to reach the mailbox) that is six feet wide, because we do still have a valid permit and we would not be violating the requirement to stay within 7 feet of the house. We love this new deck. It looks really nice; it feels safe, and we can actually have a welcome mat now. We have included photos below, because it's illustrative of how the final proposed project will look.

We were also allowed to build temporary stairs so we could actually begin using our front door again, so those temporary stairs as shown in the photo will be replaced with the more attractive composite ones described above, with railings that will match this new upper stoop. And there will be white skirting all the way to the ground on the sides, and the stair risers will be white, not open as they are currently in the temporary steps. So, it will have a classic look that fits in well with the neighborhood.

As you can see in the photo at left below, we are still missing some of the front sidewalk. The proposed project, when completed, would include a few steps down to a lower stoop, with only one additional step down to the front sidewalk, and down to the driveway, and it will cover the missing section of the walk.

There will still be two sections of sidewalk (about six feet in total) between the front steps and the front public walk (you can only see one of those two sections in the photo below), so it won't feel too close to the public walk.



At left: our current situation. The upper stoop was allowed by our building permit, so we completed it. But the stairs are temporary, to provide a safe exit at the front of the house until the construction can resume.

Detail at right shows the attractive new light brown composite wood decking and white railings. Stair risers will be white.

The proposed design will give us an opportunity to add a wider sidewalk to the driveway (currently, we only have three stepping stones, as shown above, which we put in temporarily after our sidewalk was removed in the sewer line construction last year).

We also like the idea of being able to have that lower landing as a spot to place potted flowers. The new stoop at the door is a bit small for that. And, a lower landing means fewer stairs to have to navigate all at once, with a safe spot to stop and rest, which will be helpful in the winter when conditions are icy.

We are envisioning large pavers for sidewalks as shown in the drawing below, similar to those in the third photo of our neighbor's house (page 2). We anticipate adding landscaping plantings to make this new set of stairs truly fit into the landscape. It will add curb appeal and significant value to our property (though we don't intend to move anytime soon).

As shown in the accompanying documents, the front of the closest element of this proposed construction will still be six feet back from the public walk, which is also technically the front property line.

Responses to Standards for Variations

a. General Standard: No variation shall be granted pursuant to this Section 16-8 unless the applicant shall establish that carrying out the strict letter of the provisions of this Code would create a particular hardship or a practical difficulty.

Response: The above narrative explains that once we removed the rotting, peeling front steps from our home, we were not allowed to replace them because we would be violating a setback requirement if we built out more than 7 feet from the front door. The front door is several feet above the front yard, so stairs are needed to access the door. Although we might have been able to replace them within that 7' allowance, we would be violating a code that requires a minimum 3-foot landing.

The *only option* for us to get front steps without seeking this variation would be to build a 3-foot landing with stairs leading sideways to our driveway, up against the house. There would be no stairs coming down from the front. This would actually decrease our property value, which is a hardship to us, and *not building anything* would mean we would no longer be able to use the front door of our home (we could have a little balcony, but no stairs down the front).

b. Unique Physical Condition: the subject lot is exceptional as compared to other lots subject to the same provision....

Response: our home is 100 years old, built before this provision of code was set in place, and therefore it was automatically in violation of the code when the code was created. The front-property-line setback is 30 feet; our house's physical walls are only 21 feet from the public walk, which is also our front property line, and adding entry steps to the front door would encroach even more.

c. Not Self-Created: the aforesaid unique physical condition is not the result of any action or inaction of the owner or its predecessors in title, other than the construction of structures that were lawful at the time of such construction.....

Response: I believe that our response to item b. above covers this; the home is 100 years old. We needed to replace the stairs; doing so put us in a situation in which doing so would violate this code. We did not create this situation; it was imposed on us.

d. Denied Substantial Rights: The carrying out of the strict letter of the provision from which a variation is sought would deprive the owner of the subject lot of substantial rights commonly enjoyed by owners of other lots subject to the same provision.

Response: We would lose the use of our front door, or only allow us to have an ugly sideways set of steps shoved up against the house (which would also require us to remove existing shrubbery to make room for the stairs), and we would have a front walk leading to nowhere.

Other homes in the surrounding area have attractive front porches, stoops, or decks, and several have steps that lead right up to the front property line or within only a few feet of the front property line, so our request for variation would not make our property stand out unduly.

e. Not Merely Special Privilege: The alleged hardship or difficulty is neither merely the inability of the owner to enjoy some special privilege or additional right not available to owners or occupants of other lots subject to the same provision.....

Response: We believe that having a nicely designed, attractive and safe front entrance stoop and stairway that provides easy access to both the driveway and the public walk is not a special privilege. We think it is an expectation of the community that whatever we build, it will add curb appeal and not bring down property values for surrounding homes. We believe this design will do that.

f. Code and Plan Purposes: The variation would not result in a use or development of the subject lot that would not be in harmony with the general and specific purposes for which this Code....is sought....

Response: If we understand this standard correctly, it is stating that we are not to use this variation for some other purposes than as the front entrance to our home and that it will be in harmony with the surrounding neighborhood. We agree; if granted this variation, it will only be used as stated above.

And we feel that our proposed two-stoop design will add more curb appeal than a simple stoop with seven steps down the front. Although other homes do have such a setup, which can be attractive, our proposed setup will add more value to our home than would a simple single-stoop design and be more aligned with the “dream” landscape of the home on First Street that is pictured on page 2.

g. Essential Elements of the Area: The variation would not result in a use or development on the subject lot that....would be materially detrimental to the public welfare or materially injurious to the enjoyment, use, development, or value of property or improvements permitted in the vicinity....etc.

Response: This project would not cause any risk to neighbors. We believe that our *not seeking this variation* and building a simple 3- or 4-foot-deep front stoop with stairs leading down to the driveway (and none out to the front) would actually make our home look “cheaper” and could potentially negatively impact neighborhood property values. Our home is quite small compared to others in the neighborhood, and we worry that it would look more like a mobile home with such a front stoop. We believe that, instead, the proposed improvement will have the potential to help maintain or increase our property value, and in so doing, we do not harm the value of surrounding properties.

h. No Other Remedy: There is no means other than the requested variation by which the alleged hardship or difficulty can be avoided or remedied to a degree sufficient to permit a reasonable use of the subject lot.

Response: We believe that we have adequately demonstrated that we feel that there is no other remedy for us to achieve the desired outcome that would be most appropriate for our situation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our proposal. We hope you will agree that it is a good investment for this property and for our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Deborah and Jeffrey Coe

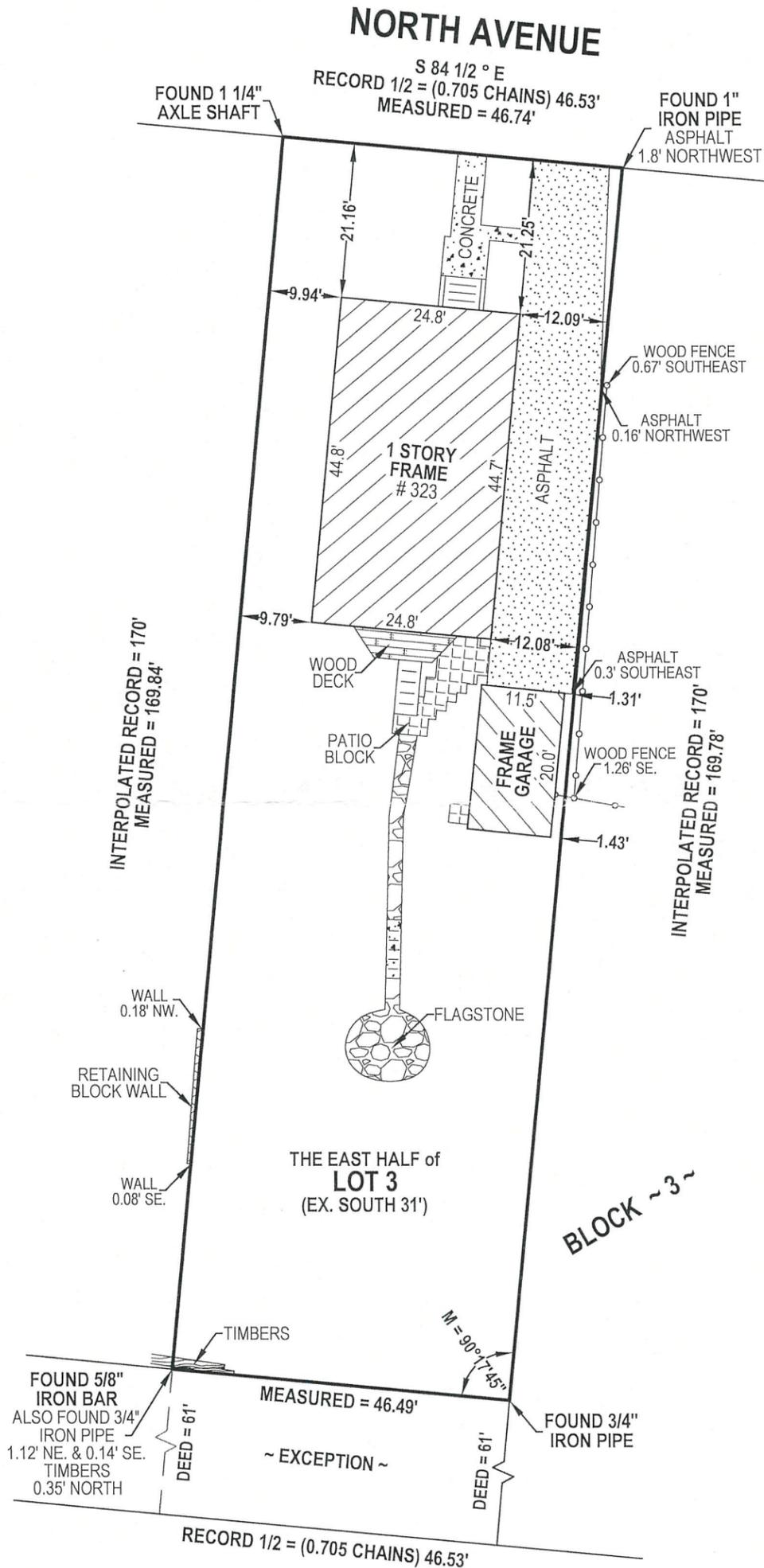
MidLakesSurvey.Com
382 Lake Sreet
Antioch, IL 60002

MID LAKES SURVEY COMPANY

Illinois Professional Design Firm 184.006153
PLAT OF SURVEY

Phone: 847-973-1873
Fax: 847-973-9783
midlakes.survey@yahoo.com

THE EAST HALF OF LOT 3 (EXCEPT THE SOUTH 61 FEET THEREOF) IN BLOCK 3 IN LIBERTYVILLE, BEING A SUBDIVISION OF PART OF LOT 14 OF THE SCHOOL TRUSTEE'S SUBDIVISION OF SECTION 16, TOWNSHIP 44 NORTH, RANGE 11, EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF, RECORDED NOVEMBER 13, 1880, AS DOCUMENT 23528 IN BOOK "A" OF PLATS, PAGE 42, IN LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS.



SURVEY AREA = 7,916 Sq.Ft.± 0.18 ACRES.

Only those Building Lines and Easements shown on the Recorded Plat of Subdivision or disclosed on a current Title Policy are shown hereon. All Distances shown in feet and decimal parts thereof. No distances are to be determined by scaling. All fences are located to centerlines, unless otherwise noted. Field work completed on 08/12/2020.

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Job no. 462048 P.I.N. 11 - 16 - 408 - 016
Address 323 NORTH AVENUE Ordered By JUDY L. DEANGELIS, ATTY.
LIBERTYVILLE, IL 60048 Scale 1" = 20'
Township LIBERTYVILLE Platted By LR Checked By NNM

STATE OF ILLINOIS)
) S.S.

COUNTY OF LAKE)
On behalf of MID LAKES SURVEY COMPANY, I hereby certify that the above described property was surveyed under my supervision and that the annexed plat is a correct representation of said survey. This professional service conforms to the current Illinois minimum standards for a boundary survey.

Dated AUGUST 13, 2020

MID LAKES SURVEY COMPANY

By Nathaniel N. Messer, PLS.
Illinois Professional Land Surveyor. My license expires 11/30/2020

CERTIFIED COPIES EMBOSSED WITH RAISED SEAL

EXISTING HOUSE

LAG IN TO HOUSE FRAME
(GRK RAS)
SYMPSON 2X8 JOIST HANGERS

2X8" TREATED JOIST

12" O.C.
FOR COMPOSITE
DECKING SPAN

2X12
TREATED STRIMMERS

5/4 COMPOSITE
DECKING

NOTE

1/2" OC

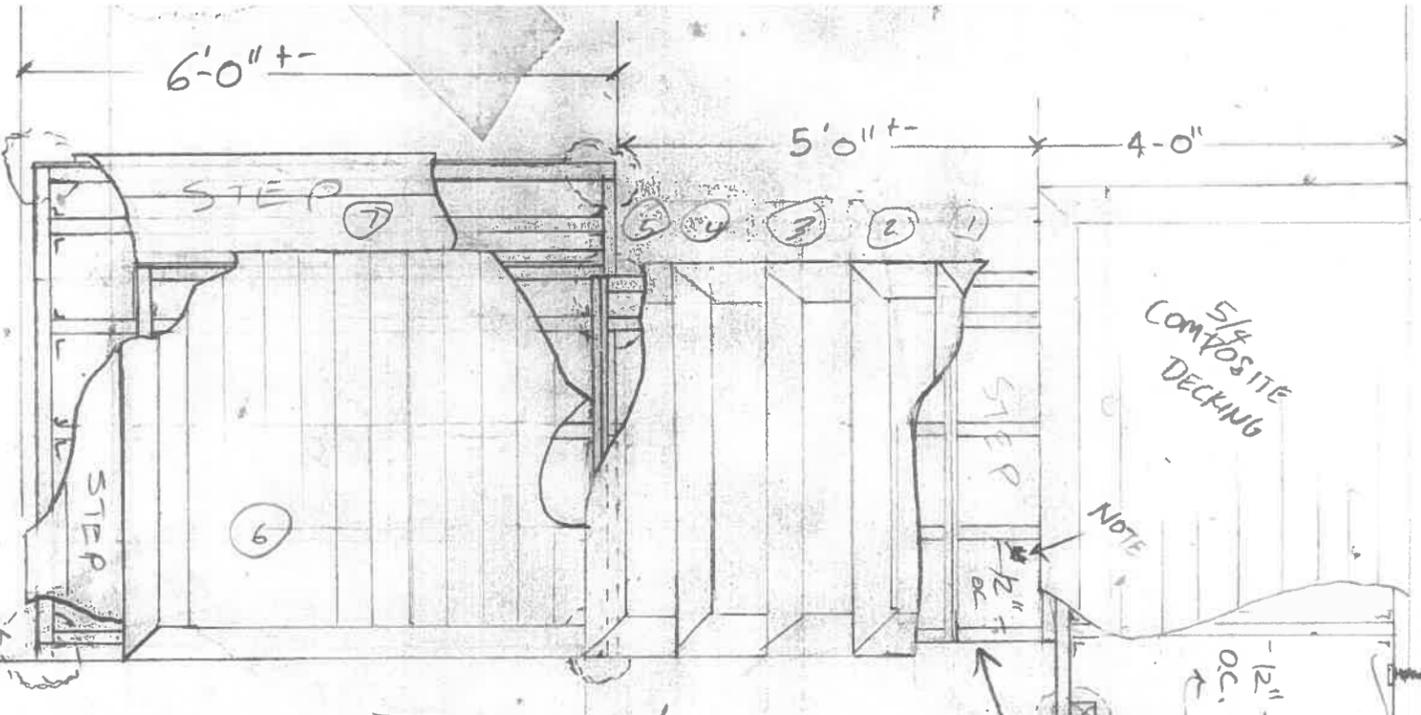
5'-0" +/-

4'-0"

6'-0" +/-

5'-0" +/-

1/2" = 1'-0"

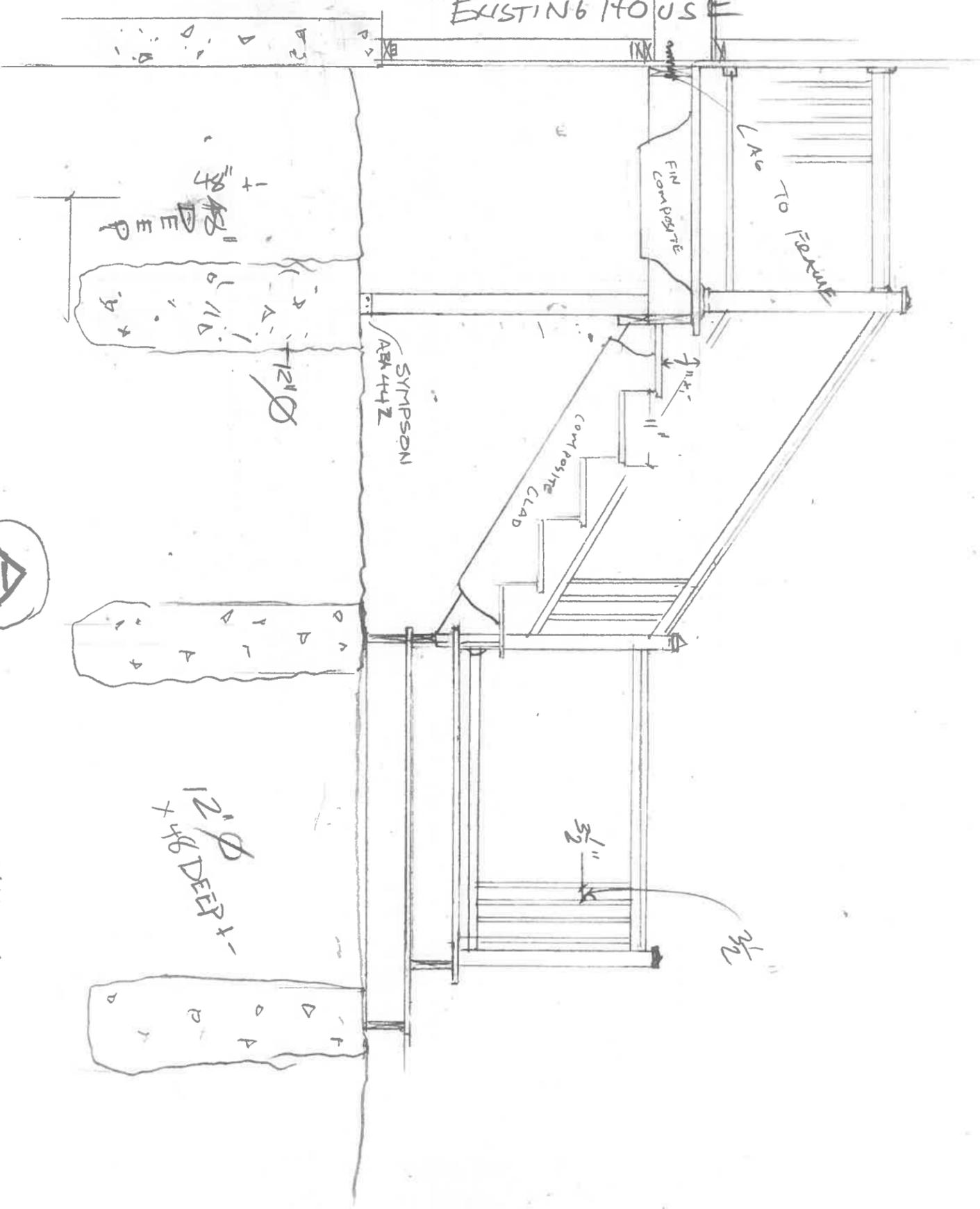


TOP VIEW



COE

EXISTING HOUSE



SIDE VIEW

1 1/2" DEPT

5/2"

3/2"

Jeff & Deb Coe

323 DASH AVE.

1. No. 1. 11/11/11 11/11/11

Drawn By:

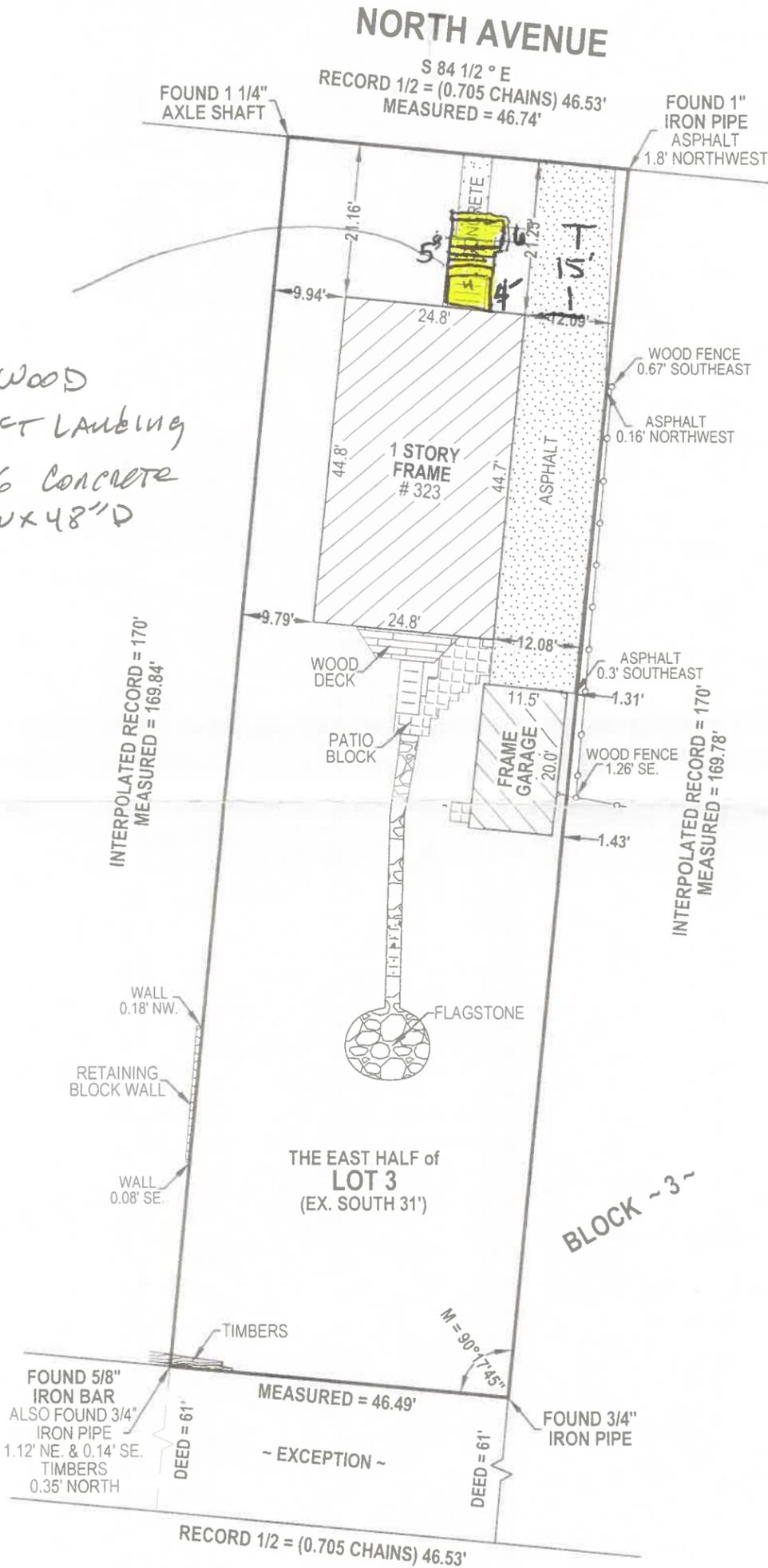
Tony SamFillippo
Tom Marino

MID LAKES SURVEY COMPANY

Illinois Professional Design Firm 184.006153
PLAT OF SURVEY

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*Remove
Wood steps,
Build New Wood
steps w/ 4 FT Landling
to door. 6 concrete
piers, 12" w x 48" D
treated*



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) S.S.

COUNTY OF LAKE)
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Dated AUGUST 13, 2020

MID LAKES SURVEY COMPANY

By Nathaniel N. Messer, PLS
Illinois Professional Land Surveyor. My license expires 11/30/2020

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