

NOTICE
This Order was filed under
Supreme Court Rule 23 and is
not precedent except in the
limited circumstances allowed
under Rule 23(e)(1).

2026 IL App (4th) 260216-U

NO. 4-26-0216

IN THE APPELLATE COURT

OF ILLINOIS

FOURTH DISTRICT

FILED

October 16, 2026

Carla Bender

4th District Appellate
Court, IL

LIVINGSTON COUNTY, ILLINOIS,	)	Appeal from the
Plaintiff-Appellee,	)	Circuit Court of
v.	)	Livingston County
BRENDA MORRIS,	)	No. 22OV12
Defendant-Appellant.	)	
	)	Honorable
	)	Mary E. Koll,
	)	Judge Presiding.

JUSTICE LANNERD delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Vancil and Harris concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held:* Defendant's appeal was dismissed because of her failure to comply with Illinois Supreme Court Rule 341(h) (eff. Oct. 1, 2020).

¶ 2 Defendant, Brenda Morris, appearing *pro se*, appeals from a trial court order allowing plaintiff, Livingston County, Illinois, to enter her property and remove personal property for purposes of bringing it into compliance with a local zoning ordinance prohibiting junkyards. Because of the deficiencies of defendant's appellant's brief, we strike her brief and dismiss the appeal.

¶ 3 I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 In February 2022, plaintiff filed a complaint alleging defendant violated a zoning ordinance by operating a junkyard, which was a nonconforming use of her property. In July 2023, the trial court found the property was nonconforming and ordered defendant to bring the property

into compliance. The record shows multiple subsequent orders requiring defendant to bring the property into compliance. Meanwhile, defendant filed multiple motions challenging the initial order finding noncompliance, all of which were denied. In March 2024, the court adjudicated defendant in contempt. The record indicates that defendant served time in jail as a contempt sanction and did not purge the contempt.

¶ 5 In December 2024, plaintiff sought an order allowing it to enter the property and allow two businesses to provide estimates of the cost of bringing the property into compliance. The trial court granted the motion, and defendant appealed. We dismissed the appeal because defendant failed to comply with Illinois Supreme Court Rule 341(h) (eff. Oct. 1, 2020). *Livingston County v. Morris*, 2025 IL App (4th) 250040-U, ¶ 16.

¶ 6 Following the appeal, the trial court held a compliance review, determined defendant had not brought the property into compliance, and allowed plaintiff to enter the property to inspect it and obtain estimates of the cost of bringing the property into compliance. On January 16, 2026, the court entered an order following a hearing in which the court “heard the evidence consisting of testimony[and] the admitted exhibits of the Plaintiff.” The court found the inspection had not occurred, but plaintiff was willing to hire third parties to remove any personal property necessary to bring the property into compliance. The court authorized plaintiff to do so. The court vacated an order imposing periodic imprisonment on defendant. Defendant filed a motion to stay the proceedings, which was denied. There are no transcripts of the hearings in this case in the record. However, there are numerous exhibits, including photographs of the property, which clearly support a finding it was used as a junkyard.

¶ 7 This appeal followed. Defendant filed a bystander’s report in the trial court. However, the record does not show the report was served on plaintiff or certified by the court. The

bystander's report also does not include facts concerning evidence provided regarding the merits of the case.

¶ 8

II. ANALYSIS

¶ 9

On appeal, defendant raises issues of due process, excessive fines, unreasonable search and seizure, unauthorized prosecution, judicial bias, and service of process. However, because defendant's appellant's brief fails to comply with multiple paragraphs of Illinois Supreme Court Rule 341 (eff. Oct. 1, 2020), which governs the form of appellate briefs, we dismiss the appeal.

¶ 10

At the outset, we note plaintiff has not submitted an appellee's brief in this appeal. However, because we find the record in this case is simple and the issues can be easily decided without the aid of an appellee's brief, we will not reverse on that basis. See *First Capitol Mortgage Corp. v. Talandis Construction Corp.*, 63 Ill. 2d 128, 133 (1976). This is especially the case where, as here, we dismiss the appeal for failure to comply with Rule 341. See *Hamberlin v. Flemming*, 2025 IL App (4th) 241102-U, ¶¶ 14-15.

¶ 11

This court has the discretion to strike an appellant's brief and dismiss an appeal when the appellant's brief does not comply with the requirements of Rule 341. *Litwin v. County of La Salle*, 2021 IL App (3d) 200410, ¶ 11. This is a harsh but appropriate sanction when the appellant's violations of procedural rules hinder our review of the case. *Id.*

¶ 12

We recognize defendant is appearing *pro se*. However, Illinois courts treat *pro se* litigants the same as licensed attorneys. A *pro se* litigant must comply with the same rules and is held to the same standard as a licensed attorney. *Holzrichter v. Yorath*, 2013 IL App (1st) 110287, ¶ 78. This is true in both the trial court and this court of review. "[T]he procedural rules governing the content and form of appellate briefs are mandatory and not suggestions." *Litwin*, 2021 IL App

(3d) 200410, ¶ 3. A *pro se* appellant is not excused from following the requirements of Rule 341. *Id.*

¶ 13 “Failure to comply with the rules regarding [appellate] briefs is not an inconsequential matter.” *Burmac Metal Finishing Co. v. West Bend Mutual Insurance Co.*, 356 Ill. App. 3d 471, 478 (2005). The purpose of the rules is to require parties before a reviewing court to present clear and orderly arguments so the court can properly ascertain and dispose of the issues involved. *Zadrozny v. City Colleges of Chicago*, 220 Ill. App. 3d 290, 292 (1991). A brief that lacks any substantial conformity to the rules may justifiably be stricken. *Tannenbaum v. Lincoln National Bank*, 143 Ill. App. 3d 572, 574 (1986).

¶ 14 Defendant’s appellate brief violates multiple rules that govern appeals. In particular, Rule 341(h)(6) requires an appellant’s brief to contain a statement of the facts necessary to an understanding of the case, stated fairly and without argument or comment, and with appropriate citations to the record on appeal. Ill. S. Ct. R. 341(h)(6) (eff. Oct. 1, 2020). “A reviewing court is not obligated to search the record for evidence on which to base a reversal, and unless reference is made to those portions of the record supporting reversal, the argument will not be considered.” *Webb v. Angell*, 155 Ill. App. 3d 848, 854 (1987).

¶ 15 Here, defendant provides brief paragraphs of procedural facts with brackets and blank lines inserted, indicating an intent to insert citations to the record. However, no actual citations are given. In addition, no facts pertaining to the merits are given, despite a hearing having been held where testimony was provided and photographs admitted into evidence depicting the property as junkyard.

¶ 16 Further, Rule 341(h)(7) requires the brief to contain an argument section, “which shall contain the contentions of the appellant and the reasons therefor, with citation of the

authorities and the pages of the record relied on.” Ill. S. Ct. R. 341(h)(7) (eff. Oct. 1, 2020). An appellant is obligated to define issues clearly, cite pertinent authority, and present a cohesive legal argument. *Gandy v. Kimbrough*, 406 Ill. App. 3d 867, 875 (2010). Moreover, defendant does not assert that her failure to cite pertinent authority is the result of her claims being matters of first impression or novel in nature. Moreover, in much the same manner that this court is not obligated to search the record to find reasons to reverse the trial court’s judgment, this court is also not a depository into which an appellant may dump the burden of research and argument with regard to the issues he or she raises on appeal. *In re Marriage of Hundley*, 2019 IL App (4th) 180380, ¶ 82. Instead, this court is “entitled to have the issues clearly defined and a cohesive legal argument presented.” *Id.* Contentions that are inadequately presented on appeal, such as by the failure to provide coherent argument or cite pertinent authority, do not merit consideration. *Holmstrom v. Kunis*, 221 Ill. App. 3d 317, 325 (1991).

¶ 17 Defendant’s legal contentions generally consist of short paragraphs stating a boilerplate proposition of law and a conclusory assertion of error. Defendant routinely provides broad legal principles without a cogent explanation of their relevance or how they apply to the facts of her case. Nothing is applied to facts elicited at hearings regarding the merits of the case.

¶ 18 As an example, defendant asserts the trial court imposed excessive fines and enforcement measures that were grossly disproportionate to the alleged zoning violation. However, she does not provide facts and analysis concerning the merits of the court’s findings regarding any fines, any enforcement measures, or the severity of the zoning violation. Instead, she merely states without meaningful analysis that the enforcement measures were unconstitutional. Defendant’s other arguments suffer from the same deficiencies.

¶ 19 Defendant’s lack of a complete statement of facts concerning the merits of the

issues presented for review, coupled with her lack of substantive legal arguments, results in an inability to address her issues on appeal. Overall, defendant failed to provide any cogent or meaningful legal analysis. Accordingly, we dismiss the appeal.

¶ 20 We also note, even if we were to excuse the shortcomings of defendant's brief, we would then affirm based on the lack of a report of proceedings.

¶ 21 "[A]n appellant has the burden to present a sufficiently complete record of the proceedings at trial to support a claim of error, and in the absence of such a record on appeal, it will be presumed that the order entered by the trial court was in conformity with law and had a sufficient factual basis. Any doubts which may arise from the incompleteness of the record will be resolved against the appellant." *Foutch v. O'Bryant*, 99 Ill. 2d 389, 391-92 (1984). In the absence of a complete record, we must presume that the trial court acted properly. See *id.* at 392.

¶ 22 Defendant filed a bystander's report, which she states in her brief was approved by the trial court. However, we are unable to find a certification of the report by the court in the documents in the record or the court's docket entries. Defendant has not provided a citation to the location of any such certification in the record. The record also does not contain anything showing the report was served on plaintiff. Illinois Supreme Court Rule 323(c) (eff. July 1, 2017) requires service on all parties and does not allow an uncertified bystander's report to be included in the record on appeal. Defendant's bystander's report also failed to include facts concerning the testimony and evidence presented by the parties concerning the merits of the action.

¶ 23 Here, we lack a record of the testimony and full extent of the evidence presented at the hearings. Thus, were we to consider the merits, we would affirm based on the lack of a complete record.

¶ 24 We recognize the dismissal of an appeal is a harsh sanction. However, because of

the deficiencies in defendant's appellant's brief, we find the dismissal of her appeal appropriate.

¶ 25

III. CONCLUSION

¶ 26

For the foregoing reasons, we strike defendant's brief and dismiss the appeal.

¶ 27

Appeal dismissed.