

3. The property is located at 492 Yale Drive, King of Prussia, PA 19406, Upper Merion Township.
4. The Applicant was not represented by an attorney.
5. The property is zoned "R2" Residential.
6. The lot is approximately 8,265 sq. ft.
7. The subject property currently contains a residential structure.
8. The Applicant is proposing to remove the existing deck and construct a 20 ft. by 12 ft. addition to be used as a first floor bedroom and bathroom for the Applicant's parents.
9. The Applicant's property has a unique feature that renders a hardship inherent in the land because the property lines come to a point in the rear yard making it difficult to build a house within the setback area.
10. The subject addition will only be a one-story addition.
11. The Applicant introduced a petition from the neighbors saying they do not object to the project and marked it as Exhibit "A-1".
12. The Applicant agreed that the exterior of the addition will match the exterior of the current structure.
13. The Applicant's builder testified that the roof for the exterior will be the same pitch and same color as the roof of the existing structure.
14. The only relief being sought is the rear yard setback relief which is necessary because of the unique shape of the lot line.
15. There were no residents who testified in favor of the project.
16. There were no residents who testified against the project.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Applicant, Mohammad Anas Hashmi, (hereinafter referred to as the "Applicant"), filed an application requesting a variance to Section 165-37.D in order to construct an addition that will encroach into the rear yard setback area.

As a preliminary matter, the applicable standards for determining whether to grant a dimensional variance differ from those of a use variance. The standard as outlined by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court is that the Applicant must show that unnecessary hardship will result if a variance is denied and that the proposed use will not be contrary to public interest. Hertzberg v. Zoning Bd. of Pittsburgh, 554 Pa. 249, 721 A.2d 43 (1998); citing, Allegheny West Civic Council, Inc. v. Zoning Bd. of Adjustment of the City of Pittsburgh, 547 Pa. 163, 167, 689 A.2d 225, 227 (1997).

In Hertzberg, the Supreme Court held that the Zoning Hearing Board must, at the beginning of its analysis of an appeal from the terms of a Zoning Ordinance, determine whether the requested relief is for a use variance or a dimensional variance. Id. If the Board determines that the relief is for a use variance, then the Board should use the traditional five-part test, which is set forth in both the Municipalities Planning Code and case law. If the requested relief is for a dimensional variance, then the standard to be applied will be different. Id. While the Court in Hertzberg did not specifically identify a single standard for a dimensional variance, it noted that the requirements for a dimensional variance were something less than that of a use variance. Id.

In its opinion, the Court went on to opine that some of the factors that a Zoning Hearing Board should look at to determine whether to grant a dimensional variance should include, where applicable:

- (1) The economic detriment to Applicant if the variance was denied;

- (2) The financial hardship created by any work necessary to bring the building into strict compliance with the zoning requirements; and,
- (3) The characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. Id.

While these factors are not exhaustive, the Court in Hertzberg and subsequent cases have referred to them specifically as findings a Zoning Hearing Board should make in its determination of whether to grant or deny a dimensional variance.

Although the language of Hertzberg is expansive, the current trend is to apply the relaxed standard for dimensional variances only to the consideration of whether unnecessary hardship results from unique physical characteristics or conditions of the land. The Friendship Preservation Group, Inc. v. Zoning Hearing Board of Adjustment of the City of Pittsburgh, 808 A.2d 327 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2002); Cardamone v. Whitpain Township Zoning Hearing Board, 771 A.2d 103 (Pa. Cmwlth. 2001).

The reasons for granting a variance must be substantial, serious and compelling. POA Company v. Findlay Township Zoning Hearing Board, 551 Pa. 689, 713 A.2d 70 (1998); Evans v. Zoning Hearing Board of the Borough of Spring City, 732 A.2d 686 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1999); Sotereanos, Inc. v. Zoning Board of Adjustment of the City of Pittsburgh, 711 A.2d 549 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1998). Moreover, variances to zoning codes should be granted sparingly and only under exceptional circumstances; a variance should not be granted simply because such a grant would permit the owner to obtain greater profit from or use of the property. Commonwealth v. Zoning Hearing Board of Susquehanna, 677 A.2d 853 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1996).

In order to grant a variance, the Board must make the findings set forth in § 910.2 of the Municipalities Planning Code, 53 P.S. § 10910.2, where relevant. The law established by the Pennsylvania courts further establishes these standards, stated in full herein. See, Alpine Inc. v.

Abington Township Zoning Hearing Board, 654 A.2d 186 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1995); Appeal of Lester M. Prang, Inc., 169 Pa. Cmwlth. 626, 647 A.2d 279 (1994). The findings that the Board must make, where relevant, in granting a variance as set forth in the Municipalities Planning Code are as follows:

1. That there are unique physical circumstances or conditions, including irregularity, narrowness, or shallowness of lot size or shape, or exceptional topographical or other physical conditions peculiar to the particular property and that the unnecessary hardship is due to such conditions and not the circumstances or conditions generally created by the provisions of the zoning ordinance in the neighborhood or district in which the property is located.
2. That because of such physical circumstances or conditions, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the provisions of the zoning ordinance and that the authorization of a variance is therefore necessary to enable the reasonable use of the property.
3. That such unnecessary hardship has not been created by the Applicant.
4. That the variance, if authorized, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood or district in which the property is located, nor substantially or permanently impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent property, nor be detrimental to the public welfare.

5. That the variance, if authorized, will represent the minimum variance that will afford relief and will represent the least modification possible of the regulation in issue.

The Applicant is proposing to erect an addition to an existing residential structure that will encroach into the rear yard setback area. The Applicant currently has a deck and wants to remove the deck while replacing that area with an addition to the rear of the structure. The addition will encompass a bedroom and a bathroom for the Applicant's aging parents. The addition will only be one-story. The Applicant agreed that the exterior materials, as well as the roof pitch and color, will match the existing features of the existing structure. The Applicant's relief is dimensional in nature, therefore, the standards of the Hertzberg case are applicable to the case at bar. The Applicant testified that the parcel has a unique shape because the side property lines come to a point in the rear of the property. The unique physical characteristics of the property create a hardship inherent in the land that prevents the Applicant from reasonably using his property as zoned. Based on the testimony, the Applicant satisfied the criteria of the Hertzberg case cited above, therefore, the variance should be granted.

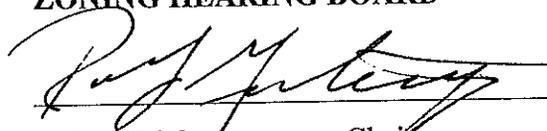
ORDER OF THE UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP

ZONING HEARING BOARD

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED that the Board finds that the Applicant did not present sufficient testimony to grant a variance to Section 165-106 in order to construct an apartment on the second floor of the existing building, therefore, the application is denied.

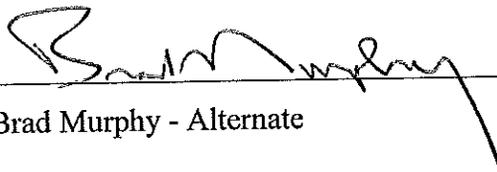
Decision Dated: April 21, 2010

**UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP
ZONING HEARING BOARD**



Robert J. Montemayor - Chairman

Mark S. DePillis, Esq. -- Vice Chairman



Brad Murphy - Alternate

NOTE TO APPLICANT:

There is a thirty (30) day period after the date of a decision for an aggrieved person to file an appeal in the Court of Common Pleas of Montgomery County to contest an approval or denial by the Zoning Hearing Board. If the Applicant has been granted Zoning Hearing Board approval, the Applicant may take action on said approval during the thirty (30) day appeal period; however, the Applicant will do so at his or her own risk. If the Applicant has received Zoning Hearing Board approval, the Applicant must secure all applicable permits from Upper Merion Township within one (1) year of the date of the approval or the decision granting approval.