

ZONING HEARING BOARD OF UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP

APPLICATION NO. 2009-32 : **HEARING DATE:** November 18, 2009
:
APPLICATION OF: John & Geraldine : **DECISION DATE:** December 16, 2009
Moley :
:
:
PROPERTY: 503 Coates Lane :
:
Upper Merion Township :

**OPINION AND ORDER OF THE UPPER MERION
TOWNSHIP ZONING HEARING BOARD**

The Applicant, John & Geraldine Moley, (hereinafter referred to as the "Applicant"), filed an application requesting a variance to Section 165-61.B in order to locate two (2) accessory structures within the required front yard setback area. The application was properly advertised, and a public hearing was held before the Upper Merion Township Zoning Hearing Board on November 18, 2009 at the Upper Merion Township Building. All members of the Zoning Hearing Board were present as well as the Solicitor, Zoning Officer, and Court Reporter.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Applicant is John and Geraldine Moley, 503 Coates Lane, King of Prussia, PA 19406.
2. The Applicant is the legal owner of the subject property.
3. The property is located at 503 Coates Lane, King of Prussia, PA 19406.
4. The Applicant was not represented by an attorney.
5. The property is zoned "R-3" Residential.

6. The lot is approximately 13,800 sq. ft.
7. The Applicant is proposing to locate two (2) accessory structures within the required front yard setback area.
8. The Applicant offered no credible testimony to show a hardship inherent in the land that would justify the granting of a variance.
9. The Applicant offered no testimony to show that the property could not be reasonably be used and still comply with the zoning ordinance.
10. The Applicant offered no testimony indicating that the proposal is consistent with the character of the neighborhood.
11. The Applicant offered no testimony indicating that the proposed relief is the minimum relief necessary to reasonably use the property.
12. The Applicant offered four (4) pictures and had them marked collectively Exhibits "A-1" through "A-4".
13. The Applicant introduced letters of support and had them collectively marked as Exhibit "A-5".
14. The Applicant introduced a shed brochure and marked as Exhibit "A-6".
15. Nick Dirosato testified against the application, however, he is a resident that is not affected by the project.
16. The Applicant can reasonably use the property as zoned without the relief requested.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

The Applicant, John & Geraldine Moley, (hereinafter referred to as the "Applicant"), filed an application requesting a variance to Section 165-61.B in order to locate two (2) accessory structures within the required front 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 requesting a variance to Section 165-61.B to permit two (2) accessory structures to be within the required front yard setback area. The Applicant's variance request is dimensional in nature, therefore, the standards of the Hertzberg case are applicable to the case at bar. Although the Hertzberg case reduced the criteria for the granting of a dimensional variance, it did not totally eliminate the need to prove a hardship. The Applicant was reasonably using the property without the accessory structures in the front yard. The Applicant offered no testimony indicating how the property can not be reasonably be used as zoned. The Applicant offered no testimony regarding whether the sheds are consistent with other sheds in the area. The Applicant offered no testimony indicating that the relief requested is the minimum relief necessary to cure a hardship. The Applicant offered no testimony regarding the financial hardship involved to bring the property into compliance with the code. In short, the Applicant did not prove its case in accordance with the criteria outlined in the Hertzberg case, therefore, the variance must be denied.

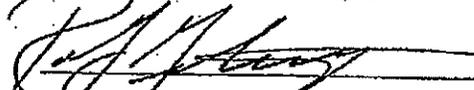
ORDER OF THE UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP

ZONING HEARING BOARD

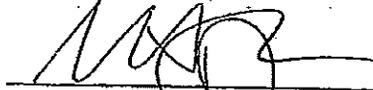
IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED that the Board finds that the Applicant did not present sufficient testimony to grant a variance to Section 165-61.B, therefore the application is denied.

Decision Dated: December 16, 2009

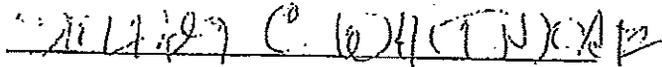
UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP
ZONING HEARING BOARD



Robert J. Montemayor - Chairman



Mark S. DePillis, Esq. - Vice Chairman



William C. Whitmore, Sr. - Secretary

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.