

**ZONING HEARING BOARD OF UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP**

**APPLICATION NO.** 2010-24 : **HEARING DATE:** September 15, 2010  
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**APPLICATION OF:** Salvatore Rossini : **DECISION DATE:** October 20, 2010  
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:  
**PROPERTY:** 273 Lawndale Avenue :  
:  
Upper Merion Township :

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

The Applicant, Salvatore Rossini, (hereinafter referred to as the “Applicant”), filed an application requesting a variance to Section 165-65.G in order to construct a deck that will encroach into the required rear yard setback area. The application was properly advertised, and a public hearing was held before the Upper Merion Township Zoning Hearing Board on September 15, 2010 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 Salvatore Rossini, 273 Lawndale Avenue, King of Prussia, PA 19406.
2. The Applicant is the legal owner of the subject property.
3. The property is located at 273 Lawndale Avenue, King of Prussia, PA 19406, Upper Merion Township.
4. The Applicant was not represented by an attorney.
5. The property is zoned “R3-A ” Residential.

6. The lot is approximately 2,100 sq. ft.
7. The Applicant is proposing a deck that will encroach into the rear yard setback area.
8. Several variances have been granted in the neighborhood for decks of a similar nature.
9. The deck that the Applicant is installing is 4 ft. larger than the existing deck.
10. The Applicant wants to accommodate his growing family.
11. The Applicant's adjacent neighbor was recently approved for a similar deck and the Applicant wants to match the encroachment of his neighbor.
12. Linda Lasner, a resident in the neighborhood, objected to the proposal because it reduces the open space area.
13. The reduction of open space is *de minimus* and will have no impact on the use and enjoyment of the residents in the community.
14. The Applicant agreed as a condition of approval to have the deck be no more than 14 ft., including the stairway.
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, Salvatore Rossini, filed an application requesting a variance to Section 165-65.G in order to construct a deck that will encroach into the required 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 requesting permission to encroach into the rear yard setback to install a deck that is 4 ft. larger than an existing deck. Several residents in the complex have received similar variances for similar decks. The adjacent neighbor of the Applicant recently received relief for a similar encroachment and the Applicant wants to match his neighbor's encroachment. The only objection came from a resident who is concerned about open space, however, the

encroachment is so *de minimus* that it will have no impact on the use and enjoyment of the open space for the neighborhood. To assure the protestant that there will be no significant encroachment, the Applicant agreed as a condition of approval to have the deck be no more than 14 ft., including the stairs.

**ORDER OF THE UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP**

**ZONING HEARING BOARD**

**IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED** that the Board finds that the Applicant presented sufficient testimony to grant a variance to Section 165-65.G in order to construct a deck that will encroach into the required rear yard setback area.

This variance is conditioned upon the following:

1. The Applicant must comply with the testimony of the Applicant at the public hearing on September 15, 2010.
2. The Applicant's deck can not be more than 14 ft., including the steps from the deck.

Decision Dated: October 20, 2010

**UPPER MERION TOWNSHIP  
ZONING HEARING BOARD**

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Robert J. Montemayor - Chairman

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Mark S. DePillis, Esq. – Vice Chairman

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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.