MINUTES OF AUGUST 19, 2019

The regular meeting of the Sussex County Board of Adjustment was held on Monday, August 19, 2019, at 7:00 p.m. in the County Council Chambers, 2 The Circle, Georgetown, Delaware.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 p.m. with Chair Ellen Magee presiding. The Board members present were: Dr. Kevin Carson, Mr. Jeff Chorman, Ms. Ellen Magee, and Mr. John Williamson. Also, in attendance were Mr. James Sharp, Esquire – Assistant County Attorney, and staff members Mr. Jamie Whitehouse – Planning Manager, Ms. Jennifer Norwood, Planner, and Ms. Ann Lepore – Recording Secretary.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Ms. Magee.

Motion by Dr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously to approve the revised agenda. Motion carried 4 – 0.

Motion by Mr. Chorman, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously to approve the Minutes for the July 1, 2019, meeting. Motion carried 4 – 0.

Motion by Dr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Chorman, and carried unanimously to approve the Findings of Facts for the July 1, 2019, meeting. Motion carried 4 – 0.

OLD BUSINESS

Case No. 12341 – Hilary T. & Clark B. Schenck seek variances from the front yard and side yard setback requirements for proposed structures (Sections 115-34 and 115-182 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property located on the west side of South Ave. approximately 357 ft. north of Ann Ave. 911 Address: 20892 South Ave., Rehoboth Beach. Zoning District: MR. Tax Parcel: 334-20.09-197.00

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case which was tabled at the Board’s meeting on August 5, 2019. Mr. Whitehouse stated that this case was left open for submission of a plan to show steps and other structures; that variances for steps are not necessary for this dwelling because there are no steps to the dwelling; that the dwelling is only inches above the ground; and that a front yard variance may be required for the HVAC unit if it is placed to the side of the dwelling instead of the rear.

Mr. Sharp stated that the only additional variance to the Application presented at the previous meeting is a variance of 11.9 ft. from the required thirty (30) feet front yard setback requirement for the HVAC unit.

There was no discussion among Board members.

Mr. Williamson moved to approve Application No. 12341 as the Applicant has met all the criteria for granting a variance.
Mr. Williamson moved, seconded by Mr. Chorman, and carried that the variances be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 3 - 1.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – nay and Ms. Magee – yea.

**Case No. 12342 – Toby M. & Alexandra M. Chrostowski** seek variances from the front yard setback requirements for a proposed dwelling (Sections 115-34 and 115-182 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located on the north side of Baltimore St. approximately 226 ft. west of Andrew St. in the Bay View Park subdivision. 911 Address: 39667 Baltimore St., Bethany Beach. Zoning District: MR. Tax Parcel: 134-20.11-34.00

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case which was tabled at the Board’s meeting on August 5, 2019.

The Board discussed the Application.

Dr. Carson moved to approve Application No. 12342 as the Applicants have met all the criteria for granting a variance.

Dr. Carson moved, seconded by Mr. Chorman, and carried unanimously that the variances be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

**Case No. 12343 – Donald Hall** seeks a variance from the front yard and corner front setback requirements for proposed structures (Sections 115-82, 115-182 and 115-196 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located on the southwest corner of Central Ave. and Johnston St. 911 Address: 37386 Central Ave., Rehoboth Beach. Zoning District: C-1. Tax Parcel: 334-13.20-29.00

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case which was tabled at the Board’s meeting on August 5, 2019.

Mr. Sharp stated that the record was left open for staff to research the history of the property.

Mr. Whitehouse stated that staff was able to locate a trailer permit dated July 10, 1972, following a reference on the property card and at that time the property was stated to be zoned General Residential.

The Board discussed the Application.
Mr. Chorman moved to approve Application No. 12343 with the following motion:

I move that we approve Case # 12343 for Donald Hall for the requested variances pending a final written decision based upon the record made during the public hearing and for the following reasons:

1. Based on the property records, it is clear that the property was previously zoned GR and was improved and permitted with a manufactured home. Testimony from a neighbor also indicates that the property has been improved with a manufactured home since at least 1968. The Applicant seeks approval to place a newer manufactured home on the lot in largely the same footprint as the previous home the lot. This replacement constitutes a replacement of a non-conforming home pursuant to §115-196 and, as part of this motion, I move to approve this replacement and the variances necessary to allow for the home and steps to be located on the lot as proposed.

2. The property has unique physical conditions because the property is a small and shallow corner lot. The lot is undersized and the building envelope is exceptionally limited. The exceptional practical difficulty is due to such conditions.

3. Due to such physical circumstances or conditions, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the Sussex County Zoning Code and the variances are therefore necessary to enable the reasonable use of the property. The variances will allow for a reasonably sized manufactured home and steps to be located on the property.

4. The exceptional practical difficulty has not been created by the Applicant. Rather, the exceptional practical difficulty has been created by the lot’s unique conditions.

5. The variances will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood, nor substantially or permanently impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent property, nor be detrimental to the public welfare. The property has been historically developed by a manufactured home and the record is clear that there are other manufactured homes in the neighborhood.

6. The variances represent the minimum variances necessary to afford relief and represent the least modifications of the regulation at issue. The variances will allow a reasonably sized replacement home to be located on the property. The home is quite narrow and is similar in size to the prior manufactured home located on the lot.

Mr. Chorman moved, seconded by Dr. Carson, and carried unanimously that the variances be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.
The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Mr. Sharp read a statement explaining how the Board of Adjustment meeting is conducted and the procedures for hearing the case.

**Case No. 12345 – James O. Marshall, III** seeks a variance from the maximum fence height requirements for a proposed fence (Sections 115-25 and 115-185 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located on the north end of Green Rd. approximately 0.26 miles north of Lawton Ln. Address: 33557 Green Rd., Millsboro. Zoning District: AR-1. Tax Parcel: 234-18.00-54.00

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received one letter in support of and none in opposition to the Application and zero mail returns. The Applicant is requesting a variance of 0.5 ft. from the required 3.5 ft. setback for a 313.51 ft. length of proposed fencing within the front yard setback.

James Marshall, Irene Haas, and Robert Haas were sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Mr. Marshall testified that he wants to put a 4 ft. fence around his property to keep his dogs in and keep deer out; that the front yard is next to a cornfield; that he has 2 dogs and they jumped over a 3.5 ft. tall fence at his prior home; that the fence may also serve as a dust barrier; that the fence will measure 4 ft. tall around the property; that the property is unique because it is an unusual shape with only three sides; that it is at the end of a dirt road; that there are no other houses in front of this property; that the property cannot otherwise be developed for at 4 ft. fence to keep wildlife out without the variance; that it was not created by the Applicant as he did not create the uniqueness of the lot; that it will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood; that the neighbors submitted a letter of support; that the fence could be built to 7 ft. on the other two sides; that the Applicant wants to keep it all uniform at 4 ft.; that the fence has not yet been installed; and that, if the lot was traditionally shaped, he would have been able to place the fence in the rear yard and not the front yard.

Ms. Haas testified that this property is at the end of a long gravel driveway; that this will not impede traffic visibility; and that the driveway is only used by the Marshall household.

Mr. Haas testified that arborvitaes are not an option as they are a non-native species; that the property is close to the water; and that the arborvitaes would require a lot of maintenance.

The Board found that no one appeared in support of or in opposition to the Application.
Dr. Carson moved to approve Application No. 12345 as the Applicant has met all the criteria for granting a variance.

Dr. Carson moved, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously that the variance be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

Case No. 12346 – John Taylor seeks variances from the rear yard setback and side yard setback requirements for proposed and existing structures (Sections 115-34 and 115-183 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located at the east side of Nomad Ln. approximately 117 ft. south of Dune Rd. in the Tower Shores Development. 911 Address: 39560 Dune Rd., Unit A-1, Bethany Beach. Zoning District: MR. Tax Parcel: 134-5.00-75.01 Unit A-1

Ms. Norwood presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received no correspondence in support of or in opposition to the Application and five mail returns. The Applicant is requesting a variance of 2 ft. from the required 10 ft. rear yard setback for a dwelling and deck.

Brian Martin was sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Mr. Martin testified that the request is for the rear yard setback; that Dune Road is considered the front yard side of the lot; that the Property is located in Nomad Village; that it is unique as it is the last remaining A-frame house in Nomad Village; that the existing home cantilevers two feet into the setback area; that the Applicant is raising the home to add an additional floor; that the dwelling will remain in the same building envelope as the current home; that the property is one lot, similar to condominium properties, though the dwelling is not connected to the neighboring dwellings; that the variance is necessary for the cantilever which comes about 2 ft. into the 10 ft. setback; that the house was originally built in 1959; that the homeowners association supports the request; that it was purchased by the Applicant in 2014; that it will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood but will fit better with the neighboring homes following the remodel; that a letter of support from the immediate neighbor was submitted with the Application; that it is the minimum variance to afford relief; that the remodeled dwelling will not go any farther into the setback than the existing house; and that an amendment to the declaration plan will be recorded if the variance is approved.

Mr. Whitehouse stated that staff will consider the variance to be on the side of the property; and that the property is a through lot with sides and no rear.

Mr. Sharp stated that there is no change in the setback required and that the property line will be clearly stated in the written decision for the future.
The Board found that two parties appeared in support of and no one appeared in opposition to the Application.

Mr. Williamson moved to approve Application No. 12346 as the Applicant has met all the criteria for granting a variance.

Mr. Williamson moved, seconded by Mr. Chorman, and carried unanimously that the variance be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

Case No. 12347 – Susan Machado seeks variances from the side yard setback and rear yard setback requirements for proposed structures (Sections 115-34, 115-183 and 115-185 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property located on the east side of Dodd Ave. at the intersection of Carla Ave. and Dodd Ave. in the Ann Acres subdivision. 911 Address: 21071 Dodd Ave., Rehoboth Beach. Zoning District: MR. Tax Parcel: 334-20.13-102.00

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received one letter in support of and no correspondence in opposition to the Application and one mail return. The Applicant is requesting variances of 3 ft. from the required 5 ft. side yard setback on the northeast side and 3 ft. from the required rear yard setback for a proposed shed.

Susan Machado and Stuart Ortel were sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Mr. Sharp submitted an email of support which had been sent to him.

Mr. Ortel submitted additional letters of support and two photographs showing an example of the proposed shed.

Mr. Ortel testified that the property is a corner lot with front setbacks on two sides, that the property is located in Ann Acres; that the house was oriented away from the intersection; that the Applicant does not want to place the shed along Dodd Avenue for safety reasons and vehicular visibility; that the rear yard is shallow so the only place to develop the property for a shed is in the proposed location; that the Applicant intends to erect a 6 foot tall fence to mitigate the view; that the setback will allow adequate room for maintenance; that the shed will measure 12 feet tall at its tallest point; that the “gravel area” noted on the survey is a patio area; that he is a landscape architect; that the property has public water and sewer; that trees would have to be removed to fit the shed on the lot; that there are no drainage issues; that the patio will measure 20 feet by 22 feet and will accommodate seating and dining; that the Applicant purchased the property with the home placed in the rear corner; that the variance will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood as it will not be seen from the road; that the shed will match the siding on the dwelling; and that it is the
minimum variance to afford relief to allow for a 2 ft. space between the shed and the fence.

Ms. Machado testified that the shed will be used for storage; that the gravel patio is designed to allow for permeability; that the variance is necessary to retain trees on the property; and that the Applicant owns all the fencing surrounding the property.

Lynn Wong and Christopher Andrews were sworn in to give testimony in support of the Application.

Ms. Wong testified that she supports the request for a variance; that she lives across the street; that the Applicants are good neighbors; that the Applicants maintain their property; and that the placement of the shed will not be visible from that road.

Mr. Andrews testified that he supports the request for a variance; that he owns neighboring property; and that there are nice trees on the property.

Jonathan Skolnik was sworn in to give testimony in opposition of the Application.

Mr. Skolnik testified that he is opposed to the Application; that he owns a small cottage adjacent to the property; that the shed will be located in the area where his views will be; that the shed will effectively create a 12 foot tall wall; that he does not want to see a shed when he sits on his screened porch; that the Applicant offered to plant trees on his property; that he would like to see a site plan; that he has a small yard; that his house consists of 650 square feet and the shed is large in comparison; and that he suggested the Applicant construct the shed farther off the property line.

The Board found that two parties appeared in support of and one party appeared in opposition to the Application.

Dr. Carson moved to deny Application No. 12347 as the Applicant did not meet the criteria for granting a variance as the exceptional practical difficulty is being created by the Applicant.

Motion by Dr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously that the variances be denied for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

The Board took a six (6) minute recess.

**Case No. 12348 – Taxi Properties, LLC** seek variances from the front yard setback requirements for existing structures (Sections 115-25 and 115-182 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located on the west side of Zoar Rd. approximately 235 ft. south of Wood Branch Rd. 911

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received no correspondence in support of or in opposition to the Application and zero mail returns. The Applicant is requesting an 18.8 ft. variance from the required 40 ft. front yard setback for an existing porch, a 21.8 ft. variance from the required 40 ft. front yard setback for existing steps, and a 16 ft. variance from the required 40 ft. front yard setback for an existing dwelling.

Jeffrey Workman was sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Mr. Workman testified that the Applicant owns neighboring Lot 13 and built a house on that lot; that the Applicant is constructing a house on this lot (Lot 11); that he is not a builder; that his building permit had setbacks of 30 ft. in the front but the setbacks were 40 ft. on the building permit for Lot 13; that he called the permitting office about the discrepancy; that he believed he could move the house 10 feet closer; that he measured from the edge of pavement instead of the actual property line and he added 10 feet to the measurement; that the property is unique because it is a shallow lot; that the septic is in the rear of the property; that the house has already been placed on the property; that the exceptional practical difficulty was not caused by the Applicant as he was given incorrect information from Sussex County Permitting Department; that the property is improved with well and septic; that the septic is in the rear yard; that the well is in the front south corner of the lot; that neighbors are fine with the request; that that is will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood as it is a residential neighborhood; that there are no complaints from neighbors; that the property is well maintained; that it is the minimum variance requested to complete the dwelling and keep it in its current location; that the lot is not deep and room is needed for the septic system; that septic lines run in the rear yard; that the error was caught by the Planning & Zoning staff and he stopped work immediately; that the house is framed, wired, and plumbed; that the septic has not yet been installed; and that the well has been installed.

Eric Sackett was sworn in to give testimony in opposition of the Application.

Mr. Sackett testified that he lives opposite the Applicant’s property; that he opposes the Application; that the uniqueness of the property was known to the Applicant prior to purchasing the property; that a survey should have been completed prior to building; that the house could have been built smaller and the septic reconfigured; that the exceptional practical difficulty was created by the Applicant; that the variance will alter the essential character of the neighborhood as all the other houses on Zoar Road meet the front yard setbacks; that the Applicant’s house is too close to the road; that DelDOT has plans to make improvements to Zoar Road; that, if the road has to be widened, the burden would be put on the property owners on the opposite side of the road because the Applicant has his house in the setbacks; that the variance requested is not the least modification possible; that Applicant re-subdivided a larger parcel into 3 lots – including this property; and that the well does not meet Code requirements.
Mr. Workman testified that he does not consider himself a developer; and that there is an error in the building permit.

The Board found that no one appeared in support of and one party appeared in opposition to the Application.

Mr. Chorman moved to table Case No. 12348 until the September 16, 2019, meeting, and to leave the record open for the limited purpose to allow staff to get copies of the building permit and associated documents to Board members for review.

Motion by Mr. Chorman, seconded by Mr. Williamson, carried unanimously to table this case until the September 16, 2019, meeting to allow the Board to review building permit information obtained by staff. Motion carried 4 – 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

**Case No. 12349 – Kathleen & James Skowyra** request a Special Use Exception to operate a Bed and Breakfast (Sections 115-23 and 115-210 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property is located on the south side of Handy Rd. approximately 0.83 miles south of McDonnell Rd. and 467 ft. east of the Maryland Stateline. Address: 19505 Handy Rd., Bridgeville. Zoning District: AR-1. Tax Parcel: 131-12.00-27.02

Mr. Whitehouse presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received no correspondence in support of or in opposition to the Application and zero mail returns. The Applicant is requesting a Special Use Exception for the use of an existing 3-bedroom dwelling as a Bed and Breakfast.

Kathleen Skowyra was sworn in to give testimony about the Application. Ms. Skowyra submitted a petition from neighbors supporting the Application.

Ms. Skowyra testified that the dwelling is two years old on a large lot; that it is a quiet neighborhood and there will be a minimal traffic impact to the area; that there is adequate parking for guests; that there will be no more than four quests at any time; that the State of Delaware food code approves of a bed and breakfast; that there are agricultural lands in the area; that granting this special use exception will not substantially affect adversely the uses of adjacent and neighboring properties; that she intends to rent out 2 bedrooms; that there will be no cooking facilities in the individual rooms; and that the facility is not yet in operation.

The Board found that one person appeared in support of and no one appeared in opposition to the Application.
Dr. Carson moved to approve Application No. 12349 for a Special Use Exception for a period of five (5) years as it will not substantially affect adversely the uses of adjacent and neighboring properties.

Motion by Dr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously that the special use exception be granted for a period of five (5) years for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.


Ms. Norwood presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received no correspondence in support of and one letter in opposition to the Application and zero mail returns. The Applicant is requesting variance of 0.3 ft. from the required 10 ft. rear yard setback and 0.2 ft. from the required 10 ft. side yard setback on the south side for an existing garage. Ms. Norwood stated that this Application was considered for an Administrative Variance but due to the opposition it was brought before the Board.

Robert and Charlotte DiFebo were sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Ms. DiFebo testified that the property was purchased in 1982; that, in 1992, the Applicants tore down the house and built a new house on the same footprint; that the house has no basement or attic and additional storage space was needed; that the garage was built to align with the house; that the original house was built in the 1940s; that the Applicants depended on the builder to place the garage within the building envelope; that it could not otherwise be developed for a garage as it is placed to have access to the existing driveway and not impede access to the well; that, if moved away from the well, the garage would be in front of the house; that they do not own the bank of the Assawoman Canal; that the State took a right-of-way in the rear yard and they believed that the property line went to an existing monument; that the garage to the northwest is an old clam house; that the property is unique as it is a unusual shaped small lot with a non-conforming dwelling and garage existing; that is will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood as there are other detached garages in the area; and that it is a minimum variance to afford relief without the garage being too close to the well and the dwelling.

Mr. DiFebo testified that there is a well on the property located near the house; that the surveyor marked out the area but DeShields builder made an error placing the garage; that it is just
outside the building envelope by a few inches; and that the garage goes right to the well.

Bessie Kotsiras was sworn in to give testimony in opposition of the Application.

Ms. Kotsiras testified that the property is not unique; that the garage should have been built within the building envelope; that she has concerns about any future development on her property; that her lot is vacant; and that she cannot find her boundary marker any more.

During the discussion, it was decided that the existing dwelling and garage are non-conforming and variances should be added to the request for completeness and to bring the entire property into compliance. So additional variances of 3.5 ft., 3.3 ft., 3.3 ft., and 3.7 ft. from the required 5 ft. side yard on the north side for an existing garage and a 1.3 ft. from the required 10 ft. rear yard for the existing dwelling are needed.

The Board found that no one appeared in support of and one party appeared in opposition to the Application.

Mr. Williamson moved to approve Application No. 12351 as the Applicants have met all the criteria for granting a variance.

Mr. Williamson moved, seconded by Mr. Chorman, and carried unanimously that the variances be granted for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

**Case No. 12352 – Earl & Iris Downing** seek a variance from the rear yard setback requirements for proposed steps (Sections 115-25 and 115-183 of the Sussex County Zoning Code). The property located on the south side of Wild Cherry St. approximately 141 ft. west of S. Old State Rd. 911 Address: 18366 Wild Cherry St., Ellendale. Zoning District: AR-1. Tax Parcel: 230-26.20-18.00

Ms. Norwood presented the case and stated that the Office of Planning and Zoning received no correspondence in support of or in opposition to the Application and one mail return. The Applicant is requesting a variance of 9.2 ft. from the required 20 ft. rear yard setback for a staircase and landing to serve the approved transitional home.

Iris Downing and John Roach were sworn in to give testimony about the Application.

Mr. Roach testified that the Ms. Downing has received a Conditional Use permit to operate transitional housing in a dwelling that was previously a daycare center; that most of the agency approvals have been received; that an additional means of egress is part of the ADA requirements for this home; that it is unique because the existing home already encroaches into the rear setback; that
this is the only placement for the steps to retain ten bedrooms; that this is an existing condition and was not created by the Applicants; that granting the variance will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood; that this is the minimum variance to allow for the steps as an additional means of egress from the dwelling; and that the stairs are a safety feature.

Mr. Whitehouse advised the Board that the Applicants will have to go back to Planning & Zoning for approval of the site plan but the Applicants have received conditional use approval; and that the Fire Marshal prefers steps which protrude straight out.

The Board found that no one appeared in support of or in opposition to the Application.

Dr. Carson moved to approve Application No. 12352 as the Applicants have met all the criteria for granting a variance.

Motion by Dr. Carson, seconded by Mr. Williamson, and carried unanimously that the variance be approved for the reasons stated. Motion carried 4 - 0.

The vote by roll call; Mr. Chorman – yea, Mr. Williamson – yea, Dr. Carson – yea and Ms. Magee – yea.

**ADDITIONAL BUSINESS**

Dr. Carson stated that he will not be able to attend the September 9, 2019.

Ms. Magee asked for consensus on having Old Business at the beginning of the meeting and the Board agreed to move Old Business to the front of the agenda going forward.

Mr. Sharp stated that the meeting on September 16, 2019 will include training for the Board.

**Meeting was adjourned at 9:43 p.m.**