

§2691. Board of appeals

This section governs all boards of appeals established after September 23, 1971. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

1. Establishment. A municipality may establish a board of appeals under its home rule authority. Unless provided otherwise by charter or ordinance, the municipal officers shall appoint the members of the board and determine their compensation.

[PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

2. Organization. A board of appeals shall be organized as follows.

A. The board shall consist of 5 or 7 members, serving staggered terms of at least 3 and not more than 5 years, except that municipalities with a population of less than 1,000 residents may form a board consisting of at least 3 members. The board shall elect annually a chairman and secretary from its membership. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

B. Neither a municipal officer nor a spouse of a municipal officer may be a member or associate member of the board. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

C. Any question of whether a particular issue involves a conflict of interest sufficient to disqualify a member from voting on that issue shall be decided by a majority vote of the members, excluding the member who is being challenged. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

D. The municipal officers may dismiss a member of the board for cause before the member's term expires. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

E. Municipalities may provide under their home rule authority for a board of appeals with associate members not to exceed 3. If there are 2 or 3 associate members, the chairman shall designate which will serve in the place of an absent member. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

[PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

3. Procedure. The following provisions govern the procedure of the board.

A. The chairman shall call meetings of the board as required. The chairman shall also call meetings of the board when requested to do so by a majority of the members or by the municipal officers. A quorum of the board necessary to conduct an official board meeting must consist of at least a majority of the board's members. The chairman shall preside at all meetings of the board and be the official spokesman of the board. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

B. The secretary shall maintain a permanent record of all board meetings and all correspondence of the board. The secretary is responsible for maintaining those records which are required as part of the various proceedings which may be brought before the board. All records to be maintained

or prepared by the secretary are public records. They shall be filed in the municipal clerk's office and may be inspected at reasonable times. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

C. The board may provide, by regulation that must be recorded by the secretary, for any matter relating to the conduct of any hearing, except that the chair may waive any regulation upon good cause shown. Unless otherwise established by charter or ordinance, the board shall conduct a de novo review of any matter before the board subject to the requirements of paragraph D. If a charter or ordinance establishes an appellate review process for the board, the board shall limit its review on appeal to the record established by the board or official whose decision is the subject of the appeal and to the arguments of the parties. The board may not accept new evidence as part of an appellate review. [PL 2017, c. 241, §1 (AMD).]

D. The board may receive any oral or documentary evidence but shall provide as a matter of policy for the exclusion of irrelevant, immaterial or unduly repetitious evidence. Every party has the right to present the party's case or defense by oral or documentary evidence, to submit rebuttal evidence and to conduct any cross-examination that is required for a full and true disclosure of the facts. [PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 (NEW); PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §106 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

E. The transcript or tape recording of testimony, if such a transcript or tape recording has been prepared by the board, and the exhibits, together with all papers and requests filed in the proceeding, constitute the public record. All decisions become a part of the record and must include a statement of findings and conclusions, as well as the reasons or basis for the findings and conclusions, upon all the material issues of fact, law or discretion presented and the appropriate order, relief or denial of relief. Notice of any decision must be mailed or hand delivered to the petitioner, the petitioner's representative or agent, the planning board, agency or office and the municipal officers within 7 days of the board's decision. [PL 1991, c. 234 (AMD).]

F. The board may reconsider any decision reached under this section within 45 days of its prior decision. A request to the board to reconsider a decision must be filed within 10 days of the decision that is to be reconsidered. A vote to reconsider and the action taken on that reconsideration must occur and be completed within 45 days of the date of the vote on the original decision. The board may conduct additional hearings and receive additional evidence and testimony as provided in this subsection.

Notwithstanding paragraph G, appeal of a reconsidered decision must be made within 15 days after the decision on reconsideration or within the applicable time period under section 4482-A if the final municipal review of the project is by a municipal administrative review board other than a board of appeals. [PL 2017, c. 241, §2 (AMD).]

G. Any party may take an appeal, within 45 days of the date of the vote on the original decision, to Superior Court from any order, relief or denial in accordance with the Maine Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 80B. This time period may be extended by the court upon motion for good cause shown. The hearing before the Superior Court must be without a jury. [PL 1991, c. 234 (AMD).]

H. For purposes of this section, a decision of the board is a final decision when the project for which the approval of the board is requested has received all required municipal administrative approvals by the board, the planning board or municipal reviewing authority, a site plan or design review board, a historic preservation review board and any other review board created by municipal charter or ordinance. If the final municipal administrative review of the project is by a municipal administrative review board other than a board of appeals, the time for appeal is governed by section 4482-A. Any denial of the request for approval by the board of appeals is considered a final decision even if other municipal administrative approvals are required for the project and

remain pending. A denial of the request for approval by the board of appeals must be appealed within 45 days of the date of the board's vote to deny or within 15 days of final action by the board on a reconsideration that results in a denial of the request. [PL 2017, c. 241, §3 (NEW).]
[PL 2017, c. 241, §§1-3 (AMD).]

4. Jurisdiction. Any municipality establishing a board of appeals may give the board the power to hear any appeal by any person, affected directly or indirectly, from any decision, order, regulation or failure to act of any officer, board, agency or other body when an appeal is necessary, proper or required. No board may assert jurisdiction over any matter unless the municipality has by charter or ordinance specified the precise subject matter that may be appealed to the board and the official or officials whose action or nonaction may be appealed to the board. Absent an express provision in a charter or ordinance that certain decisions of its code enforcement officer or board of appeals are only advisory or may not be appealed, a notice of violation or an enforcement order by a code enforcement officer under a land use ordinance is reviewable on appeal by the board of appeals and in turn by the Superior Court under the Maine Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 80B. Any such decision that is not timely appealed is subject to the same preclusive effect as otherwise provided by law. Any board of appeals shall hear any appeal submitted to the board in accordance with Title 28-A, section 1054. [PL 2013, c. 144, §1 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1987, c. 737, §§A2,C106 (NEW). PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 104, §§A24,C8,C10 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 234 (AMD). PL 2003, c. 635, §1 (AMD). PL 2013, c. 144, §1 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 241, §§1-3 (AMD).

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§4353. Zoning adjustment

Any municipality which adopts a zoning ordinance shall establish a board of appeals subject to this section. [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

1. Jurisdiction; procedure. The board of appeals shall hear appeals from any action or failure to act of the official or board responsible for enforcing the zoning ordinance, unless only a direct appeal to Superior Court has been provided by municipal ordinance. The board of appeals is governed by section 2691, except that section 2691, subsection 2, does not apply to boards existing on September 23, 1971.

[PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

2. Powers. In deciding any appeal, the board may:

A. Interpret the provisions of an ordinance called into question; [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

B. Approve the issuance of a special exception permit or conditional use permit in strict compliance with the ordinance except that, if the municipality has authorized the planning board, agency or department to issue these permits, an appeal from the granting or denial of such a permit may be taken directly to Superior Court if required by local ordinance; and [PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §24 (AMD); PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §41 (AFF).]

C. Grant a variance in strict compliance with subsection 4. [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

[PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §24 (AMD); PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §41 (AFF).]

3. Parties. The board shall reasonably notify the petitioner, the planning board, agency or department and the municipal officers of any hearing. These persons must be made parties to the action. All interested persons must be given a reasonable opportunity to have their views expressed at any hearing.

[PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §25 (AMD); PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §41 (AFF).]

4. Variance. Except as provided in subsections 4-A, 4-B and 4-C and section 4353-A, the board may grant a variance only when strict application of the ordinance to the petitioner and the petitioner's property would cause undue hardship. The term "undue hardship" as used in this subsection means:

A. The land in question can not yield a reasonable return unless a variance is granted; [PL 1991, c. 47, §1 (AMD).]

B. The need for a variance is due to the unique circumstances of the property and not to the general conditions in the neighborhood; [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

C. The granting of a variance will not alter the essential character of the locality; and [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

D. The hardship is not the result of action taken by the applicant or a prior owner. [PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. A, §45 (NEW); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §10 (NEW).]

Under its home rule authority, a municipality may, in a zoning ordinance, adopt additional limitations on the granting of a variance, including, but not limited to, a provision that a variance may be granted only for a use permitted in a particular zone.

[PL 2013, c. 186, §1 (AMD).]

4-A. Disability variance; vehicle storage. A disability variance may be granted pursuant to this subsection.

A. The board may grant a variance to an owner of a dwelling for the purpose of making that dwelling accessible to a person with a disability who resides in or regularly uses the dwelling. The board shall restrict any variance granted under this paragraph solely to the installation of equipment or the construction of structures necessary for access to or egress from the dwelling by the person with the disability.

The board may impose conditions on the variance granted pursuant to this paragraph, including limiting the variance to the duration of the disability or to the time that the person with the disability lives in the dwelling. For the purposes of this paragraph, the term "structures necessary for access to or egress from the dwelling" is defined to include railing, wall or roof systems necessary for the safety or effectiveness of the structure. [PL 2009, c. 342, §1 (NEW).]

B. If authorized by the zoning ordinance establishing the board, the board may grant a variance to an owner of a dwelling who resides in the dwelling and who is a person with a permanent disability for the construction of a place of storage and parking for a noncommercial vehicle owned by that person and no other purpose. The width and length of the structure may not be larger than 2 times the width and length of the noncommercial vehicle. The owner shall submit proposed plans for the structure with the request for the variance pursuant to this paragraph to the board.

The person with the permanent disability shall prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the person's disability is permanent.

For purposes of this paragraph, "noncommercial vehicle" means a motor vehicle as defined in Title 29-A, section 101, subsection 42 with a gross vehicle weight of no more than 6,000 pounds, bearing a disability registration plate issued pursuant to Title 29-A, section 521 and owned by the person with the permanent disability. [PL 2009, c. 342, §1 (NEW).]

The board may impose conditions on the variance granted pursuant to this subsection.

All medical records submitted to the board and any other documents submitted for the purpose of describing or verifying a person's disability are confidential.

For purposes of this subsection, "disability" has the same meaning as a physical or mental disability under Title 5, section 4553-A.

[PL 2015, c. 152, §1 (AMD).]

4-B. Set-back variance for single-family dwellings. A municipality may adopt an ordinance that permits the board to grant a set-back variance for a single-family dwelling. An ordinance adopted under this subsection may permit a variance from a set-back requirement only when strict application of the zoning ordinance to the petitioner and the petitioner's property would cause undue hardship. The term "undue hardship" as used in this subsection means:

A. The need for a variance is due to the unique circumstances of the property and not to the general conditions in the neighborhood; [PL 1991, c. 659, §3 (NEW).]

B. The granting of a variance will not alter the essential character of the locality; [PL 1991, c. 659, §3 (NEW).]

C. The hardship is not the result of action taken by the applicant or a prior owner; [PL 1991, c. 659, §3 (NEW).]

D. The granting of the variance will not substantially reduce or impair the use of abutting property; and [PL 1991, c. 659, §3 (NEW).]

E. That the granting of a variance is based upon demonstrated need, not convenience, and no other feasible alternative is available. [PL 1991, c. 659, §3 (NEW).]

An ordinance adopted under this subsection is strictly limited to permitting a variance from a set-back requirement for a single-family dwelling that is the primary year-round residence of the petitioner. A

variance under this subsection may not exceed 20% of a set-back requirement and may not be granted if the variance would cause the area of the dwelling to exceed the maximum permissible lot coverage. An ordinance may allow for a variance under this subsection to exceed 20% of a set-back requirement, except for minimum setbacks from a wetland or water body required within shoreland zones by rules adopted pursuant to Title 38, chapter 3, subchapter I, article 2-B, if the petitioner has obtained the written consent of an affected abutting landowner.

[PL 1993, c. 627, §1 (AMD).]

4-C. Variance from dimensional standards. A municipality may adopt an ordinance that permits the board to grant a variance from the dimensional standards of a zoning ordinance when strict application of the ordinance to the petitioner and the petitioner's property would cause a practical difficulty and when the following conditions exist:

A. The need for a variance is due to the unique circumstances of the property and not to the general condition of the neighborhood; [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

B. The granting of a variance will not produce an undesirable change in the character of the neighborhood and will not unreasonably detrimentally affect the use or market value of abutting properties; [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

C. The practical difficulty is not the result of action taken by the petitioner or a prior owner; [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

D. No other feasible alternative to a variance is available to the petitioner; [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

E. The granting of a variance will not unreasonably adversely affect the natural environment; and [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

F. The property is not located in whole or in part within shoreland areas as described in Title 38, section 435. [PL 1997, c. 148, §2 (NEW).]

As used in this subsection, "dimensional standards" means and is limited to ordinance provisions relating to lot area, lot coverage, frontage and setback requirements.

As used in this subsection, "practical difficulty" means that the strict application of the ordinance to the property precludes the ability of the petitioner to pursue a use permitted in the zoning district in which the property is located and results in significant economic injury to the petitioner.

Under its home rule authority, a municipality may, in an ordinance adopted pursuant to this subsection, adopt additional limitations on the granting of a variance from the dimensional standards of a zoning ordinance. A zoning ordinance also may explicitly delegate to the municipal reviewing authority the ability to approve development proposals that do not meet the dimensional standards otherwise required, in order to promote cluster development, to accommodate lots with insufficient frontage or to provide for reduced setbacks for lots or buildings made nonconforming by municipal zoning. As long as the development falls within the parameters of such an ordinance, the approval is not considered the granting of a variance. This delegation of authority does not authorize the reduction of dimensional standards required under the mandatory shoreland zoning laws, Title 38, chapter 3, subchapter 1, article 2-B.

[PL 2005, c. 244, §2 (AMD).]

5. Variance recorded. If the board grants a variance under this section, a certificate indicating the name of the current property owner, identifying the property by reference to the last recorded deed in its chain of title and indicating the fact that a variance, including any conditions on the variance, has been granted and the date of the granting, shall be prepared in recordable form. This certificate must be recorded in the local registry of deeds within 90 days of the date of the final written approval of the variance or the variance is void. The variance is not valid until recorded as provided in this subsection.

For the purpose of this subsection, the date of the final written approval shall be the date stated on the written approval.

[PL 1989, c. 642 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1989, c. 104, §§A45,C10 (NEW). PL 1989, c. 642 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 47, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 659, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 1993, c. 627, §1 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 212, §1 (AMD). PL 1997, c. 148, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 2005, c. 244, §2 (AMD). PL 2009, c. 342, §1 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §§24, 25 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 655, Pt. JJ, §41 (AFF). PL 2013, c. 186, §1 (AMD). PL 2015, c. 152, §1 (AMD).

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