



Title 22

Municipalities

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Subchapter II Boards of Adjustment

§ 321 Creation and powers.

The legislative body of cities or incorporated towns shall provide for the appointment of a board to be known as the board of adjustment and in the rules and regulations adopted pursuant to the authority of this chapter shall provide that the board may, in appropriate cases and subject to appropriate conditions and safeguards, make special exceptions to the terms of the ordinance in harmony with its general purpose and intent and in accordance with general or specific rules therein contained.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 321.)

§ 322 Composition; terms of office.

(a) In cities or incorporated towns not having heretofore adopted a home rule charter pursuant to Chapter 8 of this title, the board of adjustment shall consist of all of the following members or their authorized agents:

- (1) The chief engineer of the street and sewer department, the public works commissioner, or the city manager.
- (2) The city solicitor.
- (3) The mayor.

If the city or incorporated town has no city engineer or public works commissioner, or city solicitor, then the mayor or chief executive of such city or town shall appoint 2 members, each to be appointed for a term of 3 years and removable for cause by the appointing authority upon written charges and after public hearing, who, with the presiding officer of the zoning commission, shall constitute the board of adjustment for such city or town. Vacancies shall be filled for the unexpired term of any member whose term becomes vacant.

(b) In cities or incorporated towns having heretofore or hereafter adopted a home rule charter pursuant to Chapter 8 of this title, the legislative body thereof may establish a board of adjustment consisting of 5 members who shall be residents of the city or incorporated town and who shall have knowledge of and experience in the problems of urban or suburban or rural development, and who, at the time of appointment, shall not be candidates-elect for or incumbents of an elective public office. The mayor or chief executive officer of such city or incorporated town, with consent of the legislative body thereof, shall appoint 4 members for terms of 4 years, provided that the terms of the original members shall be established in a manner that 1 shall expire each year. The mayor or chief executive officer of such city or incorporated town, with the consent of the legislative body thereof, shall appoint 1 member who shall be chairperson and who shall serve at the pleasure of that appointing official. The members shall be entitled to compensation as determined by the city or incorporated town.

(c) In the event that a city or incorporated town qualifying under subsection (b) of this section fails to establish a board of adjustment as permitted in subsection (b) of this section, the board of adjustment shall consist of those persons designated in subsection (a) of this section.

(d) (1) Anything heretofore in this section to the contrary notwithstanding, any city or town, by its legislative body, may establish a board of adjustment consisting of not less than 3 nor more than 5 members who shall be residents of the city or town and who shall have knowledge of the problems of urban or suburban or rural development and who, at the time of appointment and throughout the term of office, shall not be candidates nor members of the legislative body nor employees of the city or town. The mayor or chief executive officer of such city or town shall appoint such members of the board of adjustment, and all such appointments shall be confirmed by a majority vote of the elected members of the legislative body.

(2) All appointments shall be for a period of 3 years, provided that the terms of the original members shall be established in such a manner that the term of at least 1 member shall expire each year and the successor shall be appointed for a term of 3 years. The board of adjustment so selected shall elect from among their own number a chairperson and a secretary.

(3) Any member of the board of adjustment may be removed from office by the legislative body for cause after a hearing by a majority vote of all the elected members of the legislative body of such city or town. A vacancy occurring otherwise than by the expiration of term shall be filled for the remainder of the unexpired term in the same manner as an original appointment.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 322; 57 Del. Laws, c. 717; 58 Del. Laws, c. 276; 59 Del. Laws, c. 137, § 1; 64 Del. Laws, c. 284, § 1; 70 Del. Laws, c. 186, § 1; 78 Del. Laws, c. 211, § 1; 81 Del. Laws, c. 218, § 1.)

§ 323 Rules; meetings; administration of oaths; records.

The board of adjustment shall adopt rules in accordance with any ordinance adopted pursuant to this chapter. Meetings of the board shall be held at the call of the chairperson and at such other times as the board may determine. Such chairperson, or in the chairperson's absence, the acting chairperson, may administer oaths and compel the attendance of witnesses. All meetings of the board shall be open to the public. The board shall keep minutes of its proceedings showing the vote of each member upon each question or, if absent or failing to vote, indicating such fact, and shall keep records of its examinations and other official actions, all of which shall be immediately filed in the office of the board and shall be a public record.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 323; 70 Del. Laws, c. 186, § 1.)

§ 324 Appeals to board.

Appeals to the board of adjustment may be taken by any person aggrieved or by any officer, department, board or bureau of the

municipality affected by any decision of the administrative officer. Such appeal shall be taken within a reasonable time as provided by the rules of the board by filing with the officer from whom the appeal is taken and with the board a notice of appeal specifying the grounds thereof. The officer from whom the appeal is taken shall forthwith transmit to the board all the papers constituting the record upon which the action appealed from was taken.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 324.)

§ 325 Stay of proceedings.

An appeal stays all proceedings in furtherance of the action appealed from, unless the officer from whom the appeal is taken certifies to the board of adjustment after the notice of appeal has been filed with the officer that, by reason of facts stated in the certificate, a stay would in the officer's opinion cause imminent peril to life or property. In such case proceedings shall not be stayed otherwise than by a restraining order which may be granted by the board or by a court having jurisdiction on application on notice to the officer from whom the appeal is taken and on due cause shown.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 325; 70 Del. Laws, c. 186, § 1.)

§ 326 Notice and hearing on appeal.

The board of adjustment shall fix a reasonable time for the hearing of the appeal, give public notice thereof, as well as due notice to the parties in interest, and decide the same within a reasonable time. Upon the hearing any party may appear in person, by agent or by attorney.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 326.)

§ 327 Determinations of board.

(a) The board of adjustment may:

(1) Hear and decide appeals where it is alleged there is error in any order, requirement, decision or determination made by an administrative official in the enforcement of this chapter or of any ordinance adopted pursuant thereto;

(2) Hear and decide special exceptions to the terms of the ordinance upon which the board is required to pass under such ordinance;

(3) Authorize, in specific cases, such variance from any zoning ordinance, code or regulation that will not be contrary to the public interest, where, owing to special conditions or exceptional situations, a literal interpretation of any zoning ordinances, code or regulation will result in unnecessary hardship or exceptional practical difficulties to the owner of property so that the spirit of the ordinance, code or regulation shall be observed and substantial justice done, provided such relief may be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without substantially impairing the intent and purpose of any zoning ordinance, code, regulation or map; provided, however, that notwithstanding any provision of law to the contrary, the legislative body of any city or incorporated town may, by ordinance, vest a designated town official or department with authority to administratively grant a dimensional variance for existing conditions that do not exceed 1 foot of the required dimension restrictions without the application being considered by the board of adjustment, subject to the standards, procedures and conditions set forth in the ordinance granting such authority.

(b) In exercising the powers provided in subsection (a) of this section the board may, in conformity with this chapter, reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify the order, requirement, decision or determination appealed from and may make such order, requirement, decision or determination as ought to be made, and to that end shall have all the powers of the officer from whom the appeal is taken.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 327; 65 Del. Laws, c. 61, § 1; 76 Del. Laws, c. 371, § 1.)

§ 328 Appeal to Superior Court from board's decision.

(a) Any person or persons, jointly or severally aggrieved by any decision of the board of adjustment, or any taxpayer or any officer, department, board or bureau of the municipality may present to the Superior Court a petition, duly verified, setting forth that such decision is illegal, in whole or in part, specifying the grounds of the illegality. Such petition shall be presented to the Court within 30 days after the filing of the decision in the office of the board.

(b) Upon the presentation of the petition, the Court may allow a writ of certiorari directed to the board to review such decision of the board and shall prescribe therein the time within which a return thereto must be made and served upon the relator's attorney, which shall not be less than 10 days and may be extended by the Court. The allowance of the writ shall not stay proceedings upon the decision appealed from, but the Court may, on application, on notice to the board and on due cause shown, grant a restraining order.

(c) The Court may reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify the decision brought up for review.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 328.)

§ 329 Priority of proceedings.

All issues in any proceeding under this subchapter shall have preference over all other civil actions and proceedings.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 329.)

§ 330 Hearing on appeal.

If, upon the hearing, it shall appear to the court that testimony is necessary for the proper disposition of the matter, it may take evidence or appoint a referee to take such evidence as it may direct and report the same to the court with findings of fact and conclusions of law, which shall constitute a part of the proceedings upon which the determination of the court shall be made.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 330; 70 Del. Laws, c. 186, § 1.)

§ 331 Record on appeal.

The board of adjustment shall not be required to return the original papers acted upon by it, but it shall be sufficient to return certified or sworn copies thereof or of such portions thereof as may be called for by the writ. The return shall concisely set forth such other facts as may be pertinent and material to show the grounds of the decision appealed from and shall be verified. The cost of a transcript of the hearing appealed from is the responsibility of the person appealing the decision, unless the cost is awarded against the board as provided in § 332 of this title.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 331; 73 Del. Laws, c. 38, § 1.)

§ 332 Costs on appeal.

Costs shall not be allowed against the board of adjustment, unless it appears to the Court that it acted with gross negligence, in bad faith or with malice in making the decision appealed from. For purposes of this section, the word “costs” includes all fees paid or owed to the Prothonotary’s Office in connection with the appeal to the Superior Court and all documented out-of-pocket expenses incurred by the board of adjustment in preparing, filing and serving sufficient copies of the record of the proceedings appealed from, including but not limited to expenses for photocopying, copying and/or duplication of survey drawings or plots, audio tape recordings, video tape recordings, computer discs, and expenses for preparing the transcript of the hearing.

(39 Del. Laws, c. 22, § 8; Code 1935, § 6234; 22 Del. C. 1953, § 332; 73 Del. Laws, c. 38, § 2.)