

1-27-25

ZB – 5/24

Applicants: Roy & Kathie Baldassari
7 Bennington Drive
Lawrence Township, NJ 09648
To: Lawrence Township Zoning Board of Adjustment

Homeowner Application for “Bulk (C)”, Flexible (Type 2) Variance

Responses to information requested on page 2 of the *Procedures for Homeowner Application* document (which also seem to answer the questions on Form B-3 – “Bulk Variance [Homeowner]”):

6a. *Describe the property, existing structures and surrounding properties and structures*

Our single-family, freestanding home is in the Lawrenceville Green neighborhood in northern Lawrence, which is a Residential 2A (R2A) District. Block 5503, Lot 5. The neighborhood was built in the early 1980s and consists of 4 or 5 different models of homes. It is currently fully developed. Our model, the Vernon, is the smallest model in the development, although its lot size (approximately one-half acre), is similar to that of most of the homes in this neighborhood. All four of the bedrooms in our home are on the second floor. There is a deck, 2 patios, a walkway and an 18 x 36 feet in-ground pool in the backyard.

6b. *Explain the type of variance requested and the reason the variance is needed.*

Reasons the variance is needed:

A couple of years ago Kathie was diagnosed with mild but progressing idiopathic polyneuropathy in both of her feet and lower legs. The cause is unknown and no treatment is available at this time. But with the intermittent numbness in both of her feet she must be extra careful going up and down steps. So, we need to plan for a first-floor bedroom & bath (and, planning ahead, this space should be handicap-accessible).

We purchased our home in 1992 when we had two young teenagers. In 2016 our adult daughter and her three young children moved in with us. So, now we’re a household of six that includes three growing children (one at the Lawrence Middle

School, and two at the Lawrence Intermediate school) whom we help our daughter to raise.

Kathie (retired after 26+ years teaching at Lawrence Intermediate School) and I are now in our seventies and realize that we are going to need to add a first-floor bedroom, with bath (including a walk-in shower) and closets, to be able to safely remain in this home for the long term.

While currently we are helping our daughter take care of our grandchildren, we realize that, in the future, the roles will be reversed because we (hope to) live out our lives in this house.

A collateral benefit of moving our bedroom to a first-floor addition is that our daughter and three grandchildren will have more bedroom and bathroom space on the second floor, which will be increasingly helpful as the kids get older.

Type of Variance Requested:

Building this first-floor bedroom & bath addition in the only reasonably viable place on our property (in terms of access from the existing structure, minimizing damage to the existing structure, being most harmonious with the neighborhood, and being built on otherwise unused yard space) would require a side-yard setback variance. We are requesting a variance of 7 feet, reducing the setback from 15 feet to 8 feet for a portion of our side yard.

However, please note that, even though the setback would be reduced, we are very mindful about minimizing any adverse impact on our neighbors. They are a very likeable young professional couple who have lived there 5 years. We want them to be as comfortable as possible with whatever we do, as we want to maintain the good relationship we have with them. The proposed addition is on the "driveway, parking & garage" side of their home, so even with the variance, the addition would still be approximately 37 feet from their garage, and approximately 45 feet from

their closest living space, so we hope the addition wouldn't unduly cramp their personal space.

- We are sensitive about the site view from the neighbor's house. Since that side is their driveway and garage, and because there's an existing fence running more than half of the length of the proposed addition, we're hopeful that our improvement would not be detrimental to their site view. Although it's not part of our plan, if they'd like, we'd be glad to extend the current six foot fence for the full length of our addition, at no cost to them.
- We hope to move the utilities (gas, electric, phone, cable) and the HVAC units (all of which are currently in their view), to a place out of their view, and not affected by the variance. (This desire is subject to the realities of construction practicalities and the input of the utility companies.)
- The plan is for the side of the addition facing the neighbor's home to be very similar to the current side – vinyl siding that matches the existing house and with the only windows being small, high windows for lighting (not for looking out). (Please see attached elevations.)
- There will not be a door on their side; the only outside exit would be to the existing deck in our backyard, out of their view.
- Once the addition is complete, we plan to get our neighbor's input on the landscaping we install on the side that faces their property (e.g., what plants, ground cover, etc. are desired) so that it is pleasing to them.

As you can tell, we've tried to plan this addition to minimize any adverse effects on our neighbor's privacy, comfort and lifestyle. From the beginning we have kept them informed of our thinking as it has evolved, shared applicable documents, encouraged their feedback, and incorporated their feedback in the above plans.

6c. Explain any exceptional conditions or circumstances

“Exceptional Conditions”: We have considered all other options we could think of for the location of this first-floor addition and found them to be either impossible or highly impractical.

- The back of the house isn't suitable because of the design of the house/location of the rooms along the back of the house (please refer to the diagrams included with our application).
 - Outside of the back living room wall is a deck and a swimming pool.
 - The kitchen wall facing the rear is covered with cabinets and a big picture window, under which is a “false wall” containing the sewer and water pipes for the recently-added adjacent mud/laundry room. Also, outside the kitchen is a patio and walkway.
 - Off the side & back of the kitchen is a small mudroom that we added in 2018. At the same time, we installed a paver patio and walkway just outside of the mudroom. Any attempt to build in that area would require deconstructing the new mudroom, patio, paver walkway and fencing. It would also require a setback variance on that side of the house. (Please see attached plot plan.)
- On the side of the house opposite the proposed location (i.e., the right side) is the parking area at the top of the driveway, and the garage, with no room for an addition.
- Converting the existing garage is not an option:
 - The garage is already being fully utilized (not for cars, but for bikes, scooters, toys, wagons, tools, etc.)
 - It would be much too small for our needs
 - Because the garage is on a slab, significant destruction of the floor would be needed for the sewer and water pipes.

Therefore, building the addition on the left-hand side of our house is our only viable option for this improvement – a single-story addition for a ground floor, handicap-accessible, bedroom, bath and closets.

“Circumstances”: Since our home is the smallest model in the development (the “Vernon” model), but is still on the typical half-acre lot, the footprint of the house, with the addition, would be similar to the lot coverage for most of the other homes in the neighborhood.

6d. *Provide reasons for granting the variance in accordance with Municipal Use Law (the purposes of the Municipal Land Use . . . would be advanced by a deviation . . . and the benefits of the deviation would substantially outweigh any detriment.)*

The addition would be tastefully designed such that the home would still be harmonious with the residential character of the neighborhood. In fact, it should increase the beauty of the home and the neighborhood and therefore increase the value of our home and other homes in the neighborhood. Our home would have a fifth bedroom (one being ground level) and a third full bath, adding to its market appeal.

The addition will give our home an appealing, symmetrical look. [Please refer to the picture below and the elevations included with this application.] Currently, on the right side is the garage, with two windows and shutters that resemble those on the rest of the first floor.



The addition would be on the left side of the house (see arrow) and would be designed to be a smaller version of the right side (a width of 17 feet vs. 21.5 feet for the garage).

- The addition would still have two front windows (with shutters) of the same size and style - resembling the other first-floor windows, to maintain the symmetrical look.
- The design, materials and color of the windows, shutters, vinyl siding, and roof of the addition would resemble the rest of the home, with the goal of an observer not being able to tell it's an addition.
- In fact, when the addition is built we plan to also replace the shingles and shutters on the main structure so that the home has an attractive, consistent, harmonious look.

Below are pictures of three other Vernon-model homes near us in Lawrenceville Green that have an addition on the same side of the house as our proposed site. These pictures show that a tastefully done addition can enhance the home's appeal, be harmonious with the neighborhood, and not look bulky or out of place.

21 Lawrencia Dr.



6 Winthrop Rd.



18 Winthrop Rd
(2-story addition)



In Summary

We are not requesting a variance for a “nice to have” additional space (e.g., to expand a family room or to add a sunroom or “man cave.” Rather, we feel that a first-floor bedroom & bath is a near-future “must have” improvement - for us to be able to safely remain in our home with our daughter and three grandchildren as we age.

The addition would be pleasing to the eye and would enhance (at least certainly not detract from) the beauty of the neighborhood.

The only viable place to put this addition is on the unused left side of the house, which would require a side-setback variance of 7 feet. We’ve tried to think of every way to eliminate or at least minimize any downside for our neighbors and neighborhood. In fact, our goal is for this improvement to enhance the status quo by building a nice, attractive addition and by planning to hide the utility connections and HVAC units from our neighbor’s view. Also, the improvement will enhance the appeal and value and our home and therefore, as trends show, also the homes near us.

We truly appreciate the Zoning Board considering our variance application. We’d be glad to answer any questions and provide any further information that you’d find useful.

Sincerely,

Roy & Kathie Baldassari