

THE ZONING HEARING BOARD – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



What is the role of the Swarthmore Zoning Hearing Board?

The Zoning Hearing Board is a quasi-judicial body appointed by Borough Council. The Board hears requests for variances from requirements of the Swarthmore Borough Zoning Code as well as other types of zoning appeals. The ZHB also hears requests for Special Exceptions.

How will I know if I need to go before the Zoning Hearing Board?

All building permit applications are reviewed by the Zoning Officer upon submittal to the Borough office. You will be notified if your proposed project does not comply with the Zoning Code or needs a Special Exception for approval.

What is the difference between a variance and a special exception?

A variance is needed when a proposed project or use does not comply with the Zoning Code. Variances can be either dimensional variances (e.g. the proposed building does not meet required setbacks or exceeds allowable lot coverage) or use variances (e.g. converting a house in a residentially zoned district to an office building). To obtain a variance, you must demonstrate to the ZHB that you have a hardship that prevents you from making reasonable use of your property. The criteria the ZHB will use for granting a variance are set by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and are included in the ZHB application packet.

A special exception is a use allowed by the Zoning Code that has specific conditions attached that must be reviewed by the ZHB (e.g. operating a family home day care or Bed and Breakfast in your residence). You will not be asked to demonstrate hardship for a Special Exception, but you will be asked to verify that you have complied with all terms for the proposed use set out in the Borough Zoning Code.

Is there a fee to apply to the ZHB?

The current fee for residential properties is \$500. The fee for non-residential properties is \$1,000.

How often does the Board meet?

The ZHB meets the 4th Tuesday of the month on an as-needed basis. Applications must be turned in to the Borough office by the 2nd Wednesday of the month prior to the month you would like to appear before the Board.

Where can I find the application and detailed instructions?

Go to “Forms and Permits” on the home page of the Borough website (www.swarthmorepa.org) or come by the Borough Office during regular business hours.