

8/14/2019

City of Racine Zoning Board of Appeals

Testimony Requesting a Variance to Build a 12x12 Sunroom Addition at 1435 Spring Valley Drive- Bob Bagley

Good afternoon- I'm Bob Bagley. My wife Judy and I have owned this home for the past 26 years. We like our home, our neighborhood and our neighbors. When we retired- we chose to stay in Racine- in large part because we remain active and invested in this community.

My wife and I are 76 years old. My wife has several conditions which affect her mobility and activity. These include: having a pacemaker, polymyalgia rheumatic, two knee replacements, and osteoarthritis. I have some arthritis as well. My wife would be here tonight but she has just started to take prednisone once again- and that medication makes her nervous.

As we age in our home, we are seeking ways to reduce the chance of injury. For example: we have installed a raised stoop with railing in front of our front porch to make it easier to get into the house. We are exploring options for replacing a conventional tub in the bathroom with a walk-in shower. We have several nightlights in every room.

Currently the only way for us to get to our backyard is to climb down 6 exterior steps, walk across our patio and up an additional 3 steps. I personally do this a minimum of 4 times a day- every day of the year. That's because our dog will not go down steps without someone to help her. Not much of a problem for me most of the time. But in winter it's different. Last January- I fell 8 times- 3 times in the same day. I was bruised each time- but fortunately didn't break anything. But my wife can have problems negotiating these steps any season of the year- depending on how she's feeling on any given day.

So we began to explore ways to get to the backyard directly from the house without using the steps. I needed a dry enclosed place to put on and take off boots, outerwear, gloves, mittens, and at night a flashlight- to take the dog out.

We found a contractor who installs a quality product- a sunroom that can be assembled on site in about two weeks- with minimum disturbance to neighbors and neighborhood. The contractor approached the City Development staff about getting a permit for this property. He was told that staff could not issue a permit because of a 35 foot setback requirement for this lot. Only by successfully appealing to the Zoning Board of Appeals would we be able to build the room.

The setback requirement was put into effect forty years ago, when Jimmy Carter was president. Our home is in the development originally called Country Club Acres. I was told that having these setbacks helped to give the illusion of a common park in the back of the homes in this block- because it was all open. When we moved into our home in 1993 my now-deceased next door neighbor used to lament about how much the neighborhood was changing as people put up fences, added trees and planted hedges. Today there is no common area in this block. If we were able to build the subject addition it would almost invisible from the street. A sixty foot line of arborvitae trees completely blocks my view of my neighbor's house on Harrington. The neighborhood has matured.

We showed plans for the sunroom to each of our neighbors with whom we share a lot line. All three said it looked great. We asked them if they could support our petition. Each signed a statement to that effect. I have copies. Two asked if we needed them tonight- I said I thought we'd be ok.

City Development staff and I met in my backyard on Monday and they agreed, having seen the proposed site, that building the room sort of on top our existing patio room isn't a viable option. We would not build the room at that location because it would infringe on the privacy of our neighbor and be a construction nightmare.

Many existing properties do not meet the setback requirements- which for most other lots is actually 40 feet. For example: 3923 Frances (24.5 feet), 3901 Frances (29.9 feet) and 3900 Vista (24.68 feet). One property in our neighborhood has 11 feet between the dwelling wall and the property line (1214 Harrington). The two above homes on Frances (29.9 + 24.5) are actually 3 feet closer (29.9 +24.5) than our home and our neighbor to the east (20.4 +37.1) would be if the project were built.

Because of:

- (1) Growing safety concerns as we age in our home
- (2) Inconsistencies and variabilities in setback requirements for other homes in our neighborhood
- (3) Our neighbors support for a project that would not harm their esthetic or property values
- (4) Our willingness to contribute, in some small way, to the City of Racine property tax base.

Judy and I petition the appeals board that we be allowed to build this project.