

DATE OF DECISION: 6/28/2024

DATE OF MAILING: 6/28/2024

**BEFORE THE NEW BRITAIN TOWNSHIP
ZONING HEARING BOARD**

**RE: APPLICATION OF KATHRYN FRIEL FOR THE
PROPERTY LOCATED AT 110 BRITTANY DRIVE, NEW
BRITAIN TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA,
FURTHER IDENTIFIED AS TAX MAP PARCEL NO. 26-8-61**

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. On Thursday, May 16, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. at the New Britain Township Building, 207 Park Avenue, Chalfont, New Britain Township, the New Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board (“Board”) opened a duly noticed hearing on the application of Kathryn Friel (the “Applicant”).

2. The Applicant and Dennis Friel (“Dennis”) are the record co-owners of the property located at 110 Brittany Drive, New Britain Township, also known as Bucks County Tax Map Parcel No. 26-8-61 (the “Property”). The Property is the subject of the instant application.

3. Notice of the May 16, 2024, hearing was published in advance of the hearing in the Thursday, May 2, 2024, and Thursday, May 9, 2024, editions of The Intelligencer, a newspaper publication of general circulation in New Britain Township. *See* Exhibit B-5.

4. Notice of the May 16, 2024, hearing was sent by first class mail on May 9, 2024, by David Conroy (“Conroy”), the New Britain Township Director of Planning and Zoning, to (a) all record owners of properties in New Britain Township that are within 500 feet the Property; and (b) to the adjoining municipality for any surrounding properties that are located in that municipality. *See* Exhibit B-7.

5. Conroy posted notice of the May 16, 2024, hearing on the Property on May 9, 2024, at 11:49 a.m. *See* Exhibit B-8.

6. As a record co-owner of the Property, the Applicant has the requisite standing to prosecute this zoning hearing board application.

7. The Property is located in the RR, Residential, zoning district under the New Britain Township Zoning Ordinance (the “Zoning Ordinance”).

8. The Property is improved with a single-family detached residential dwelling (use B1). Such use and structure are permitted by right in the RR zoning district. *See* Zoning Ordinance §27-901.a.

9. The Applicant proposes an attached garage addition to the existing dwelling. To permit the addition, the Applicant seeks variances from the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance:

- a. From §27-902.b to permit a front yard setback along Brittany Drive of 29 feet from the curb line, where the required minimum front yard setback permitted is 50 feet; and
- b. From §27-902.b to permit a rear yard setback of 13¹ feet, where the required minimum rear yard setback is 75 feet.

10. Introduced as exhibits at the zoning hearing(s) are the documents identified on Schedule A attached to this decision. Schedule A is incorporated by reference as though fully set forth herein at length.

11. The Applicant testified in support of the application at the hearing. No other individuals appeared at the hearing to request party status, register a position, or comment or ask questions on the application before the Board. New Britain Township took no position on the application and did not participate in the hearing.

12. The Applicant and Dennis acquired the Property in July 2019. The Property is lot 108 in Section A of the Brittany Farms residential subdivision. *See* Exhibit B-9, Assessment Record.

13. The house is a split-level style dwelling that was constructed in or around 1958. The dwelling has approximately 1,500 square feet of living space. It is served by public water and public sewer systems. *See* Exhibit B-9, Assessment Record.

14. The Property is oddly shaped. Its base site area is approximately 0.386 acres (16,814 square feet). The Property is a corner lot, having frontage along both Brittany Drive and Dolly Lane. *See* Exhibits B-2, Plan; and B-9, Assessment Records and Viewer.

15. Per the Zoning Ordinance, with a corner lot, the yards adjoining the streets are both considered front yards. The owner of a corner lot has the option of choosing which of the 2 side lot lines that are not street lines is to be considered a rear lot line. *See* Zoning Ordinance §27-201.

16. The dwelling's front wall and door are oriented at an angle to Dolly Lane. The driveway serving the dwelling accesses Dolly Lane.² The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that the yard behind the house's rear wall is treated as a rear yard. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

17. The Property has 85.58 feet of frontage along the right-of-way line of Brittany Drive and 99.04 feet of frontage along the right-of-way line of Dolly Lane. At the intersection of these 2 streets, the Property's curvilinear frontage is 30.5 feet. *See* Exhibit B-9, Viewer.

18. The side lot line is 134.88 feet long. The Property is 171.6 feet wide along the lot line that functions as the rear lot line. *See* Exhibit B-9, Viewer.

¹ The public notice contains a typographical error identifying this dimension as 23 rather than 13 feet. This error is harmless.

² The Applicant noted the odd circumstance of the Property nevertheless bearing a Brittany Drive street address.

19. The dwelling is located in the center of the Property. The dwelling's front wall is set back more than 29 but less than 50 feet from the curb along Brittany Drive. The dwelling's rear wall is 23 feet from the rear lot line at its closest point. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

20. The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that the existing dwelling has a very small 1 car attached garage. The dwelling also has limited storage areas due to its small size. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

21. The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that the garage addition will attach to the dwelling's side wall facing Brittany Drive. The addition will be 1 story. It will have bays for 2 vehicles and an overhead storage area. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

22. The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that the garage addition will be 20 feet wide and 30 feet in depth, for a footprint of 600 square feet. At its closest point, the addition will be set back 29 feet from the Brittany Drive curblines and 13 feet from the rear lot line. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

23. The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that no existing improvements or vegetation in the Brittany Drive front yard will be affected by the addition. The new addition will not impact any drainage features that are along the rear lot line. *See* Exhibit B-1.1, Plan.

24. The Applicant stated, and the Board finds, that the existing driveway connecting the front of the dwelling to Dolly Lane will be expanded and lengthened to reach the garage addition. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

25. The Applicant stated that New Britain Township is presently reviewing her submission for compliance with the applicable impervious surface regulations for both the driveway expansion and the addition. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

26. Upon questioning from the Board, the Applicant confirmed that no commercial vehicles or operations will be stored or conducted in the new garage.

27. The surrounding properties consist of similar style residences and lots. The Applicant stated that no nearby residents have raised any objection to the proposed garage addition and its location.

28. Due to the Property being a corner lot with dwelling that lacks a modern garage, the Property contains unique characteristics that support relief for the proposed garage addition to have a setback of 29 feet from the Brittany Drive curblines and 13 feet from the rear lot line. *See* Exhibit B-2, Plan.

29. The Zoning Ordinance's dimensional limitations impose a hardship on the Property and the Applicant in that these regulations prevent a reasonably sized 2 car garage addition in connection with an older residential dwelling on an undersized lot.

30. Subject to the conditions imposed herein, the proposed garage addition, its size and location, are harmonious with the Property's size and consistent with uses of other properties in the surrounding neighborhood.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. Required public notice of the date, time and location of the May 16, 2024, hearing was made by sufficient advanced publication, posting and mailing to affected property owners.

2. In order to show entitlement to a variance, use or dimensional, an applicant must demonstrate all the following elements:

- a. an unnecessary hardship stemming from unique physical characteristics or conditions will result if the variance is denied;
- b. because of such physical circumstances or conditions, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the provisions of the zoning ordinance and a variance is necessary to enable the reasonable use of the property;
- c. the hardship has not been created by the applicant;
- d. granting the variance will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood nor be detrimental to the public welfare; and
- e. the variance sought is the minimum that will afford relief.

3. The Board finds that the requested front yard and rear yard setback variances are dimensional variances. A dimensional variance involves a request to adjust or vary a zoning ordinance provision by degree to be able to otherwise use a property consistent with the regulations. *See Dunn v. Middletown Township Zoning Hearing Board*, 143 A.3d 494 (Pa. Commw. 2015); *see also Constantino v. ZHB of Forest Hills Borough*, 636 A.2d 1266 (Pa. Commw. 1994).

4. An applicant can demonstrate “unnecessary hardship” for a use or dimensional variance by showing that: (a) a property’s physical characteristics are such that the property cannot be used for any permitted use or purpose; (b) the property can only conform to a permitted use or purpose at prohibitive expense; or (c) that the property has either no value or only distress value for any permitted purpose. *See Nowicki v. Zoning Hearing Board of Monaca Borough*, 91 A.3d 287 (Pa. 2014).

5. A dimensional variance is subject to a lesser standard of proof to establish unnecessary hardship than a use variance. *See Hertzberg v. Zoning Board of Adjustment of City of Pittsburgh*, 721 A.2d 43 (Pa. 1998) (when seeking a dimensional variance within a permitted use, the owner is asking only for a *reasonable adjustment* of the zoning regulations. The grant of a dimensional variance is of lesser moment than the grant of a use variance, since the latter involves a proposal to use the property in a manner that is wholly outside the zoning regulation).

6. When deciding whether a hardship has been established in dimensional variance cases, the *Hertzberg* rationale authorizes the Board to consider multiple factors, including (a) the economic detriment to the applicant if relief is denied; (b) the financial hardship created by any work necessary to bring the proposed improvements into strict compliance with the zoning

requirements; and (c) the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhood. *See Hertzberg, supra*, at 47, 50.

7. Nevertheless, the reasons for granting a variance must be substantial, serious and compelling. The party seeking the variance bears the burden of proving that (a) unnecessary hardship will result if the variance is denied; and (b) the proposed use will not be contrary to the public interest. *See Wilson v. Plumstead Township Zoning Hearing Board*, 936 A.2d 1061 (Pa. 2007).

8. The Board concludes that as a corner lot, the Property's yard along Brittany Drive, while legislatively classified as a front yard, functions as a side yard and a partial rear yard. The Zoning Ordinance imposes stricter setback requirements on a front yard than on a side yard. *See Zoning Ordinance §27-902.b*.

9. The Board concludes that the fact that the Property is an undersized corner lot, as well as the lack of a modern-size garage serving the existing dwelling, establish a hardship under the *Hertzberg* standard sufficient to justify the variances requested.

10. Based on the credible testimony presented, the Board concludes that the Property's only logical open area to locate the garage addition is along the dwelling's side wall in the front yard facing Brittany Drive. *See Exhibit B-2, Plan*.

11. Critical to the Board's conclusion is that the Applicant secure all necessary approvals, including variance relief if required, for the new impervious surfaces proposed for the Property in connection with the driveway and garage addition. *See Zoning Ordinance §27-2303.a*.

12. Provided the Applicant complies with the reasonable conditions attached to the relief granted herein, the Applicant has met the Zoning Ordinance and Pennsylvania law requirements for the variance, including hardship, to construct and install the proposed garage addition as shown on the definitive plan (Exhibit B-2).

13. The approved variances will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood in which the Property is located nor substantially impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent properties.

14. The approved variances will not be detrimental to the public welfare.

15. The conditions and circumstances imposing a hardship upon the Property for the approved variances are not of the Applicant's own doing.

16. The approved variances represent the minimum variances that will afford relief and represent the least modification of the zoning regulations under the circumstances.

DECISION

AND NOW, this 28th day of June, 2024, upon consideration of the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the New Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board hereby **GRANTS** the Applicant's request for variances from the Zoning Ordinance as follows:


- a. A variance is granted from §27-902.b to permit a front yard setback along Brittany Drive of 29 feet from the curb line; and
- b. A variance is granted from §27-902.b to permit a rear yard setback of 13 feet at its closest point.

The relief granted above is subject to the following conditions:

1. The proposed attached garage addition, its dimensions, size, location and appearance, shall be in accordance with the definitive plan (identified as Exhibit B-2), evidence, representations, exhibits and credible testimony made and submitted at the hearings.

2. This decision does not waive any requirements of any other applicable New Britain Township Ordinance(s); and the proposed improvement(s) and/or use(s) must meet all other applicable federal, state, county and New Britain Township regulations and codes.

The signatures of the New Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board members that appear on the following page attached hereto and incorporated herein confirm the Board’s decision and order.

By:  _____
 David Conroy
 New Britain Township
 Director of Planning and Zoning

Date: 6/28/2024

Thomas J. Walsh III, Esquire
 Solicitor, New Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board
 3655 Route 202, Suite 105
 Doylestown, PA 18902

Note to Applicant: This Decision is NOT an authorization to build. Zoning and building permits must be obtained from New Britain Township prior to the commencement of any construction.

DECISION.Friel.2024-05-16 hearing

SCHEDULE A – TABLE OF EXHIBITS


Exhibit	Description
B-1	Zoning Hearing Board application. Attachments to Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of property owners within 500 feet• Deed dated 7/8/2019
B-2	Aerial Site Plan with addition and dimensions
B-3	Letter to The Intelligencer dated 4/29/24 forwarding notice of 5/16/24 hearing for publication
B-4	Public Notice of the hearing on 5/16/24
B-5	Proof of publication of public notice in 5/2/24 and 5/9/24 editions of The Intelligencer
B-6	Township list of the record owners of all properties within 500 feet of the Property
B-7	Affidavit of mailing to property owners – notice mailed on 5/9/24
B-8	Affidavit of posting of public notice at property – notice posted on 5/9/24 at 11:49 a.m.
B-9	Bucks County Board of Assessment and Floodplain Viewer records

New Britain Township
Zoning Hearing Board

Signature Page

Re: Kathryn Friel
110 Brittany Drive
TMP No. 26-8-61


Chuck Coxhead, Chair

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Scott Fischer, Vice Chair

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Dawn Farver, Member

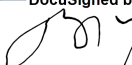
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Robert Byrne, Member


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Terry Young, Member

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Ryan Wantz, Alternate Member

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