



ARDEN HILLS
MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 7, 2021

PC Agenda Item **3.D**

TO: Planning Commission Chair and Commissioners

FROM: Corrin Bemis, Planning Consultant

SUBJECT: Planning Case #21-006 – No Public Hearing Required

Applicant: Robert Kunze

Property Location: 4073 Valentine Court

Request: Variance

Requested Action

Robert Kunze (“Applicant”) has requested a variance to decrease the required side yard setback of their single-family detached dwelling for a proposed garage addition located at 4073 Valentine Court (“Subject Property”), ordinance requires a forty (40) foot side yard setback on corner lots.

Background

1. Overview of Request

The Applicant is requesting a variance to decrease the required side yard setback of his single-family detached dwelling on the Subject Property from 40 feet to 7.82 feet for a proposed garage addition. The Subject Property is zoned R-1, Single Family Residential District, and is guided as Low Density Residential in the land use plan. Section 1320.06 of the Arden Hills City Code requires a side yard setback of 40 feet on corner lots.

According to the Applicant’s narrative submitted as a part of his application, the Subject Property includes unique circumstances due to its nontraditional shape. The front of the property includes one curved section and three straight sections that make it difficult for the applicant to conform to current setback regulations. The Subject Property is a legal non-conforming lot, as the required side yard setback for corner lots was ten (10) feet when the property was built in 1953. The Applicant is requesting the proposed garage addition to allow for more storage space for his vehicles and additional space to store woodworking equipment. The proposed garage addition would meet applicable building codes and all other regulations in the R-1 District. The applicant would not be able to construct the proposed garage addition without a variance.

The Planning Commission is being asked to determine if a variance request for flexibility with the side yard setback of a corner lot should be approved. The sketches that have been submitted show the location of the proposed garage addition and the proposed driveway addition. The evaluation

The proposed garage addition would be setback 7.82 feet from the Northwest side yard property line. According to the applicant's application, the proposed addition would be setback approximately twenty-seven (27) feet from the existing curb line. The proposed garage addition would conform to front and rear setback requirements.

According to the Applicant, this request for a decreased side yard setback minimum would have no impact on the neighborhood character because the existing neighborhood includes a number of garage additions and has a variety of different garage and housing styles. In their application, they cite the challenges of building the proposed garage addition on a non-traditionally shaped lot as a practical difficulty and argue that the decreased side yard setback will be used in a reasonable manner consistent with the purposed and intent of the City Code.

2. Variance Review

The role of the Planning Commission is to determine and consider how the facts presented to them compare with the city's articulated standards. The Commission should base their decision on the facts presented and then apply those facts to the legal standards contained in city ordinances and relevant state law. Neighborhood opinion alone is not a valid basis for granting or denying a variance request. While the Planning Commission may feel their decision should reflect the overall will of the residents, the task in considering a variance request is limited to evaluating how the variance application meets the statutory practical difficulties factors. Residents can often provide important facts that may help in addressing these factors, however, unsubstantiated opinions and reactions to a request do not form a legitimate basis for a variance decision.

The Planning Commission may impose conditions when granting variances as long as the conditions are directly related and bear a rough proportionality to the impact created by the variance. For instance, if a variance is granted to exceed the front setback limit, any conditions attached should presumably relate to mitigating the effect of the encroachment.

3. Variance Requirements – Section 1355.04, Subd. 4

The Applicant requests a variance to construct a third stall addition to the side of their existing garage that would impede on the require side yard setback on a corner lot in the R-1 Residential District. The Planning Commission will need to make a determination utilizing the following variance findings and criteria on whether there are practical difficulties with complying with the zoning regulations. If the applicant does not meet all the factors of the statutory test, then a variance should not be granted. Variances are only permitted when they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.

1. Purpose and Intent. The variance request shall comply with the purpose and intent of the provisions of the City's Zoning Regulations and with the policies of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The variance request for 4073 Valentine Court is consistent with the purpose and intent of the R-1 Zoning District and with the policies within the City's Comprehensive Plan;

2. Practical Difficulties. The Applicant for a variance shall establish that there are practical difficulties in complying with the provisions of the Arden Hills Zoning Regulations. The term “Practical Difficulties” as used in the granting of a variance means:

a. *Reasonable Use.* The property owner proposes to use the property in a reasonable manner not permitted by the Zoning Ordinance.

According to the Applicant’s application, a third car garage stall for a single family home is a reasonable use of the Subject Property in the R-1 Zoning District;

b. *Unique Circumstances.* The plight of the property owner is due to circumstances unique to the property not created by the landowner.

According to the Applicant’s application, the lot has a very odd shape. In the front of the house, along the road, there is one curved section and 3 straight sections. The structure is currently nonconforming as to setbacks. The setback requirements were different when the house was built in 1953. On the side, the closest distance from the curb to the proposed garage addition is approximately 27 feet. It is unlikely the city would want to make use of that property. There are significant small screening trees in that area, partly blocking the view from the street. Other areas on the property were considered for a freestanding garage. Any of the other areas in the front yard, or anywhere close to the house in the rear, would involve cutting down big 100+ year old Oaks. Adding behind the existing garage would involve significant drainage issues and would require major regrading under the drip line of some of the 100+ year old oaks.;

c. *Character of Neighborhood.* The variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood.

According to the Applicant’s application, the existing neighborhood has homes with a variety of different garages and housing styles. The proposed variance will not alter the character of the neighborhood. Many garages have been added to the road side of existing homes in the neighborhood. The topography and odd lot shapes make the neighborhood quite varied. The homes are not in straight lines, all the same distance from the road or each other.

3. Economic Consideration. Economic consideration alone does not constitute a practical difficulty.

The proposed variance is not based on economic consideration.

4. Access to Sunlight. Inadequate access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems shall be considered a practical difficulty.

A solar energy system is not proposed.

Findings of Fact

The Planning Commission must make a finding as to whether or not the proposed application would adversely affect the surrounding neighborhood or the community as a whole based on the aforementioned factors. Staff offers the following findings for consideration:

General Findings:

1. City Staff received a land use application for a variance request to decrease the minimum side yard setback on a single family dwelling at the Subject Property 4073 Valentine Court.
2. A single-family detached dwelling is a permitted use in the R-1 district.
3. The Subject Property is non-conforming with the R-1 district's standards for minimum side yard setbacks on a corner lot.
4. The proposed garage addition would be located 7.82 feet from the Northwest side yard property line.
5. The proposed garage addition of the subject parcel would conform to all other requirements and standards of the R-1 district.
6. A variance may be granted if enforcement of a provision in the zoning ordinance would cause the landowner practical difficulties.
7. Variances are only permitted when they are in harmony with the general purposes and intent of the ordinance.

Options and Motion Language

Staff has provided the following options and motion language for this case. The Planning Commission should consider providing additional findings of fact as part of the motion to support their recommendation for approval or denial.

- **Recommend Approval with Conditions:** Motion to recommend *approval* of Planning Case 21-006 for a Variance at 4073 Valentine Court, based on the findings of fact and the submitted plans, as amended by the conditions below:
 1. A Building Permit shall be issued prior to commencement of construction.
 2. The proposed building shall conform to all other standards and regulations in the City Code.
- **Recommend Approval as Submitted:** Motion to recommend *approval* of Planning Case 21-006 for a Variance at 4073 Valentine Court, based on the findings of fact and the submitted materials.
- **Recommend Denial:** Motion to recommend *denial* Planning Case 21-006 for a Variance at 4073 Valentine Court, based on the following findings: *findings to deny should specifically reference the reasons for denial and why those reasons cannot be mitigated.*
- **Table:** Motion to *table* Planning Case 21-006 for a Variance at 4073 Valentine Court: *a specific reason and information request should be included with a motion to table.*

Notice

Although a variance does not require a public hearing, a public meeting notice was prepared by the City and mailed to properties within 500 feet of the Subject Property. Minnesota statute does not clearly require a public hearing before a variance is granted or denied, however, after consulting with the City Attorney, staff agree that the best practice is to allow public forum on all variance requests. A public forum allows the city to establish a record and elicit facts to help determine if the application meets the practical difficulties factors.

Public Comments

Staff have not received written or verbal comments in regards to this proposal as of April 1, 2021.

Deadline for Agency Actions

The City of Arden Hills received the completed application for this request on March 25, 2021. Pursuant to Minnesota State Statute, the City must act on this request by May 24, 2021 (60 days), unless the City provides the petitioner with written reasons for an additional 60-day review period. With consent of the Applicant, the City may extend the review period beyond the initial 120 days.

Attachments

- A. Land Use Application
- B. Location Map
- C. Variance Request Letter
- D. Site Survey