

**HAGERSTOWN BOARD OF ZONING APPEALS**  
**RULES OF PROCEDURE**  
**Adopted August 18, 2021**

**General Governing Rules**

The Board of Zoning Appeals shall be governed by the provisions of all applicable State statutes, local laws, ordinances and these Rules. These Rules have been adopted and promulgated pursuant to Land Management Code, Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8, Chapter 140 of the Hagerstown City Code).

**Officers and Duties**

1. Chairperson and Acting Chairperson.

At the regular January hearing the Board shall elect from its members by a majority vote a chairperson, who may be elected to succeed himself/herself. The chairperson, or in his/her absence or incapacity an acting chairperson, shall decide on all points of order or procedure and may administer oaths and compel the attendance of witnesses. Each member shall have the discretion to visit each property which is the subject of an appeal to the Board. However, members shall not visit said properties in sufficient numbers to constitute a quorum when on-site and members shall not discuss the merits or elements of the case with other Board members, the applicant or members of the public during such site visit or at any time outside of the hearing.

2. Secretary.

The Board shall have a secretary in attendance at all meetings. The secretary shall make a recording of all proceedings and shall keep records of all its official actions, all of which shall be immediately filed in the office of the Board and shall be a public record. The secretary shall keep a record of the proceedings of each meeting and each hearing which shall include the vote of each member on each question, or, if absent or failing to vote, indicating such fact; the names and addresses of all witnesses, a summary of the facts on which the Decision and Order is based, and the decision rendered, and other actions of the Board.

**Meetings**

1. Quorum.

A quorum shall consist of three (3) members of the Board. To constitute quorum, participation by members of the Board shall be in-person, or via an on-line meeting platform where members attending by remote connection have both video and audio connection to the proceedings.

2. Time of Meeting.

- a. Regular meetings shall be held at least once a month in accordance with the adopted meeting schedule or at such other hour as the Chairperson may designate, unless no appeals or applications are received (see Subsection 4, below). The first regular meeting in January shall constitute the annual organizational meeting of the board.

b. Special meetings may be called by the Chairperson at any time provided that at least forty-eight (48) hours' notice shall be given each member before a special meeting is held. The Chairperson shall call a special meeting within ten (10) days of receipt of a written request from any two (2) members of the Board. Special meetings are not meant to be held for an appeal or application filed by an appellant or applicant.

3. Meetings Are Public and May Be Broadcast, Video Recorded and Archived.

All meetings of the Board shall be open to the public. The Board may close a meeting to the public in order to conduct an executive session only when addressing issues that are authorized to be addressed in private in accordance with applicable State law.

In accordance with City policy and the availability of technology and necessary staff, Board of Zoning Appeals meetings may be broadcast live via the internet, may be video recorded and the recordings may be made available in an on-line archive available to the public. However, nothing in law requires such broadcast, recording or archival storage. Should the technology fail or staff is otherwise unable to broadcast, record or archive the proceedings, failure to do so is not a violation of these Rules of Procedure nor grounds for appeal of any decision by this Board.

4. Use of On-Line Meeting Platforms.

An online meeting platform may be made available for participants in Commission meetings. Commission members may participate via an on-line meeting platform at their discretion. For a member to be considered a participant of a meeting as defined by this Article, such member must have, at a minimum, an audio and video connection to the proceedings via the digital meeting platform.

With the approval of the Chair for cause, applicants, supporters and opponents to applications may participate via the on-line meeting platform. However, applicants are advised that, due to the potential for miscommunication inherent in on-line platform meetings, it is generally expected that the applicant shall appear in person and participate in the meeting in person, barring extenuating circumstances. Applicants shall have, at a minimum, a video and audio connection when participating via an on-line meeting platform. Supporters, opponents and other interested parties must have, at a minimum, an audio connection.

5. Cancellation of Meetings.

Whenever there are no appeals, applications for special exceptions or variance or other pertinent business to be considered at a regular meeting, the secretary may dispense with such meeting by so notifying each member at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to the time set forth for such meeting.

6. Order of Business.

The order of business shall be:

a. Roll call and Preliminary Matters.

- b. Public Hearings.
    - (1) Continued Cases.
    - (2) New Cases In Order Filed.
    - (3) End of Public Hearings; Announcement that Public is Welcome to Stay.
  - c. Action on Continued Cases.
  - d. Action on New Cases.
  - e. Other Business.
  - f. Adjournment.
7. Voting and Disqualification of Members.

All matters shall be decided by roll call vote. Decisions on appeals alleging error in administrative enforcement; or on matters requiring public hearings (special exceptions, change in nonconforming uses, and variances) shall require the affirmative vote by a majority of the Board members present and voting. No member of the Board shall sit in hearing nor vote on any matter in which he/she shall be personally or financially interested, nor shall he/she vote on the determination of any appeal unless he/she shall have attended the public hearing thereon.

**Public Hearings.**

1. Matters Requiring Public Hearings.

A public hearing shall be required in all appeals from any Order, requirement, decision or determination made by an administrative official whose duty is to enforce the Zoning Ordinance and for applications for special exceptions, expansions and changes to nonconforming uses and variances as authorized by the Zoning Ordinance (Article 4 of the Land Management Code) and for variances to the Floodplain Management Ordinance (Article 6 of the Land Management Code).

2. Notice of Hearings.

No appeal or application shall be decided until after due notice has been given and a public hearing has been held thereon. Due notice of a hearing shall be as follows:

- a. By publication of a notice thereof shall be advertised, two (2) times in a newspaper having general circulation in the City. The first insertion shall appear in such newspaper at least fourteen (14) days prior to such hearing.
- b. By posting conspicuously a zoning notice on the property which is the subject of the application or appeal. The zoning notice shall be posted on the property at least ten (10) days prior to the date of the hearing.
- c. The owner of the property, or his agent, shall be notified at the time of the advertisement, by mail of the date, time, and place of the public hearing.

- d. The Board shall also, insofar as practicable, mail notices of the hearing of an appeal or application to all property owners which adjoin or are across a public street or alley right-of-way from the subject property, as said names and addresses appear on the latest tax rolls of the County. Compliance with this sub-paragraph shall not be a condition precedent to proper legal notice and no hearing or action taken thereon shall be deemed invalid or illegal because of any failure to mail the notices provided for in this sub-paragraph.

3. Continuances.

The Board may continue a hearing at another time and/or date once such hearing has been started; however, the Board shall announce the date and hour of continuance of such hearing while in session.

4. Postponement of Hearing.

Whenever possible, requests for postponement of a scheduled hearing shall be filed with the secretary as soon as possible after discovering the need for the requested postponement, citing the reason or need for postponement. The granting of such request shall be at the discretion of the Board.

5. Conduct of Public Hearings.

- a. Appearance of Applicant. Any person may appear in person or by agent or attorney at any public hearing. In the case of administrative appeal, if an appellant fails to appear either in person or by agent or attorney, his appeal shall automatically be denied. In the case of an application for special exception, variance, nonconforming use or similar action, if an applicant fails to appear either in person or by agent or attorney, his application shall be dismissed and the applicant may re-file the application if they so choose.

- b. Order of Proceeding. The order of proceeding in the hearing of each case at a public hearing shall be as follows:

- (1) Reading of the public notice for the hearing by the Chairperson.
- (2) Introduction of the case by the Zoning Administrator (or his designated representative), at the discretion of the Board.
- (3) Reading of written comments or reports concerning the appeal or application, at the discretion of the Board.
- (4) Sworn testimony of witnesses in favor of the appeal.
- (5) Sworn testimony of witnesses in opposition to the appeal.
- (6) Sworn testimony in rebuttal, if desirable at the discretion of the Board. The right to rebut and explain adverse testimony shall be allowed at the discretion of the Board.

- c. Time Limitations. Reasonable time limitations may be imposed on persons testifying at a hearing. Where time limitations are imposed, the record shall be kept open for seven (7) days to receive written comments and reports.
- d. Evidence. The Board shall determine matters of relevancy in its discretion. Property owners, as well as affected parties and the general public, are encouraged to provide the maximum input of relevant evidence into the hearing, without the requirement of adherence to strict judicial principles pertaining to the rules of evidence. Hearsay evidence is admissible if credible and of sufficient probative force. It may even be the sole basis for a decision.
- e. Conclusions of Board Members. Conclusions of Board members shall be based upon the evidence and not upon the opinions of individual Board members.

**Decisions.**

1. Form of Decisions.

All decisions of the Board of Zoning Appeals shall be by written “Decision and Order” completed in a uniform format and prepared by one (1) or more Board members. The Board, at its discretion, may delegate the creation of an initial draft of Decisions and Orders to the Board’s staff in cases not involving an administrative appeal. However, the Chairperson shall not affix his or her signature to the decision until the members of the Board concur on its final form and content. Since staff is a party to proceedings in the case of administrative appeals, staff shall not participate in the drafting of a decision and order in those cases.

The basis for the determination of each appeal or application and a detailed summary of the facts (“Findings of Fact”) upon which the determination is made shall be recorded in the decision and shall constitute a part of the record thereof. In the cases of variances, floodplain variances, special exceptions, nonconforming use issues and similar applications, a section entitled “Conclusions of Law” shall individually address all general and specific criteria as set forth in the Zoning or Floodplain Management Ordinance (as applicable, and as periodically updated and amended by the Mayor and City Council) under which the Board is charged with determining compliance in order for the relief to be granted. In the case of administrative appeal, the “Conclusions of Law” section shall explain the Board’s reasoning for its decision in the case.

2. Time of Decision.

Article 4 (Zoning), Section U.4 of the Land Management Code requires that the Board render its decision within forty-five (45) days after completion of the hearings.

3. Notice of Decision.

A written copy of the Decision and Order of the Board shall be mailed to the appellant or applicant or his attorney or agent by certified mail, return receipt requested, upon its completion and within forty-five (45) days of the decision where the applicant is denied or where specific conditions are imposed. Decisions that do not involve denials or conditions of approval shall be mailed by standard first class U.S. Mail.

**Amendments**

These rules may be amended at any regular meeting by an affirmative vote of not less than a majority of the members present at a meeting of which a quorum is met, provided that such amendment has been presented in writing to each member of the Board at least forty-eight (48) hours preceding the meeting at which the vote is taken.

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James Stouffer, Jr. Chairperson

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Amy Haught, Recording Secretary

**Order of Procedure**

**Introduction**

- All Board members
- Board secretary/recorder and other staff.

**Function of Board**

- The decisions in cases heard tonight are based on general and specific criteria as enumerated in the Land Management Code.

**This is an Administrative Proceeding**

- As such it will be conducted just as if it were a court of law, except that we will not follow as strictly the rules of evidence.
- Everyone who wishes to be heard on a particular case will be.
- Each of the cases will be heard in the order filed with the Board.

**Procedure**

- First hear applicant
- Then all witnesses for
- Then all witnesses in opposition
- Then (if necessary) final remarks from applicant
- We will then take the case under advisement and give you a decision within forty-five (45) days. You are welcome to stay after your hearing and listen to the deliberations, but discussion is limited to the Board members.

**Right to Appeal**

- Within thirty (30) days of the date of the written Decision and Order provided by the Board.
- Any party who participated in the hearing and is aggrieved by the decision may appeal to Circuit Court – this is the thirty (30) days after the date of the Decision and Order opinion, not the date of the hearing.

**Rules**

- We have two rules which we will all participants must follow:
  - Only remarks that we will consider are those given from the witness chair under oath;  
and
  - Ask that you confine remarks to things pertinent.

**Call Case**

- State:
  - Applicant
  - Request
  - Present Zoning
  - Incorporate file into the record

**Oath to Witness**

- Raise your right hand.
- DO YOU (and each of you) SOLEMNLY PROMISE DECLARE UNDER THE PENALTIES OF PERJURY THAT THE TESTIMONY YOU ARE ABOUT TO GIVE THIS BOARD, SHALL BE THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH?

**Please be seated.**