



Dear Board,

Prior to us purchasing the house in 2005 the deck was built by the previous owners without a permit. Since that time, it has been added as an improvement to the property and taxes have been paid on it every year (See Appendix A). In the process of building the deck and wheelchair ramp, the previous owners completely destroyed the concrete cap on the existing porch and damaged a significant part of the foundation. A home inspection was done in 2012 that verified the damage to the foundation.

My wife and I have been unable to grow our family through traditional means, so we have chosen to adopt two wonderful children. Since that time our heart for adoption has grown, and we would like to pursue it again in the near future. However, we have been informed by our agency's social worker that we would not pass a home study this time due to the state of the deck being a "significant safety concern" (See Appendix B). The previous deck was severely splintered and the ramp was an ice hazard in the winter months. Three parts of the railings were starting to lean and were close to falling off of the deck, and were well beyond repair (I have repaired several parts of the deck over the years). We actually had to remove a hanging flower pot from the railing because the weight of it was close to pulling the railing off of the deck. The only remedy to fix the safety hazard was to replace all deck boards, replace all railings, replace any damaged joists and eliminate the ramp. Unfortunately, the deck was built without a permit originally and did not meet the setback requirements established in the Sycamore Township Resolution. (Note: during construction, only (1) joist needed to be replaced. However, all brackets were replaced due to the old brackets having rusted).

Prior to replacement of the deck, raccoons began to find their way into the attic of the property. As you can imagine, this was not the most pleasant experience. After contacting professionals to take care of the problem, it was determined that they were coming in underneath the old deck and through the damaged foundation. They would then make their way up the HVAC system and into the attic. The same company was ultimately hired to eliminate this problem, but after weeks of trying they could not accomplish this goal and refunded me my full amount (See Appendix C). So I, as the homeowner, began trapping and disposing of raccoons at an alarming rate. And in spite of my best efforts, just could not get rid of them as fast as they were showing up. So out of concern for the safety of my young children (who wanted to feed and pet them), the replacement deck was extended in order to properly cover the openings to the crawl space. (Note: the foundation was repaired at this time as well).

We also received a rather humbling and embarrassing letter from an anonymous neighbor requesting, or perhaps strongly recommending, that we replace the deck due to the condition that it was in at the time (See Appendix D).

I believe that my request for variance does satisfy all of the criteria required:

- It is a unique physical condition
- The problem was not self created
 - We did not build the prior deck
 - We did not leave trash out for the raccoons
- Would deny a right to personal safety
- Is not a simply a special privilege
- Is certainly in harmony with the principal of the Township Resolution of repairing blight property conditions and conserving/protecting property values, and;
- Would not increase or create an additional burden on the surrounding properties or the Township

I would like a variance to replace the safety hazard that once was a deck and for the 8 foot extension to eliminate the raccoon problem that we were having. At the very minimum, please allow a variance to rebuild the old deck to the same dimensions and with steps instead of a wheelchair ramp. The only solution without a variance will be to rebuild a concrete stoop as a significant cost to us, the homeowners. Not to mention, it will continue to decrease the value of a home and surrounding homes in a neighbor that has already experienced a 15% to 20% decline.

Thank you very much for the time and careful consideration.

Best regards,

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