



Bella Vista Town Watch, Inc.
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Bella Vista Town Watch, Inc.
is an independent, non-profit
neighborhood organization.

Our mission is crime prevention
through police support, education,
awareness and a street presence.

Our goal is to improve the
quality of life for all residents
of Bella Vista.

BVTW Zoning Committee Protocols

Scheduling of Bella Vista Neighborhood Zoning Meetings

BVTW's Zoning Committee, a standing committee established by the BVTW Board, holds monthly meetings to discuss all applications for variance (a variance is required by the city whenever the proposed size or use of a property does not conform with the standard zoning and building codes). Zoning applicants can contact BVTW at zoning@bvtw.org or 215-627-0057.

Before putting applicants on its meeting agendas, BVTW asks all applicants to deliver to the Chair of the Zoning Committee (or another designated Committee member), one month before the date of the meeting, copies of the same documents that must be presented at City of Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustment hearings, namely:

- deed or agreement of sale
- plans/blueprints showing all proposed construction and uses
- site plan showing relationship of application site to neighboring properties and structures
- photos of the site (relevant facings)
- zoning refusal, listing number and type of proposed variances
- application for variance
- date of scheduled ZBA hearing

BVTW strongly encourages prospective zoning applicants to contact BVTW as early as possible in order to minimize continuances. Applicants in the process of receiving their initial refusal (thus triggering the application for variance) may, at the Chair's discretion, have their cases placed on the next BVTW meeting agenda, with the understanding that BVTW receive the refusal prior to the meeting date.

If there is insufficient time to put an application on the next BVTW meeting prior to the ZBA hearing, BVTW will ask the applicant to get a continuance from the ZBA by letter with copy to BVTW. If an applicant refuses or cannot be contacted, BVTW will ask for a continuance directly from the ZBA stating that fact and the need for a meeting. The date of the next meeting will, if possible, be supplied to the ZBA in an effort to minimize the length of the continuance.

Meeting Notice

Meeting posters stating the addresses of application sites, the requested variances, and the date, time and place of the meeting will be posted in the vicinity of each application site. Special effort will be made to ensure that meeting is prominently posted in locations that could be affected most by the variance (e.g., on small street behind application site where rear addition is proposed). In addition, the same meeting information will be sent to all members of the BVTW email list (which includes zoning chairs from adjacent neighborhood groups).

Individual residents, including those with a specific viewpoint on a case, are not to be discouraged from asking their neighbors to attend; however, BVTW will not solicit attendance based on a viewpoint.

Applicants must also post the official ZBA hearing notice (a big orange sticker) at the property at least 12 days before the ZBA hearing.

Meeting Procedures

The Chair will open the meeting by explaining that the results of this meeting are not the final outcome. The City of Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustment makes the final decision with respect to zoning variances.

An attendance sheet will be distributed. All attendees, including committee members and applicants, will be asked to put their names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses on the attendance sheet. All follow-up contact by BVTW (to announce a second meeting on a case, a changed hearing date, etc.) will be based on this information.

The order in which applications will be heard at the meeting will be decided by the Chair, normally based on the expected length of time needed for adequate discussion, from shortest to longest.

The Chair will introduce each applicant, read aloud the refusal explaining the variances sought, and ask the applicant to give a brief description of the proposal. At least one owner of the property must attend the meeting if a final agreement is to be reached. Owner is encouraged to bring an architect and attorney when applicable.

Questions and comments from the floor will be encouraged, moderated by the chair. Efforts will be made to solicit opinions from the neighbors closest to the application. Committee members may offer their own opinions on the requested variances, in order to enable neighbors to understand the zoning issues involved.

BVTW Board members and/or zoning committee members may comment on applications directly concerning them; in those cases, their opinions will weigh no more nor less heavily than any other neighbor's.

Meeting Outcomes

Every effort will be made to come to a general agreement between the applicant and the neighbors. Provisos (special limitations specific to a case) may be proposed by the Chair from suggestions from the floor. If an agreement is reached, a letter will be written by the Chair directly to the ZBA chair, copying the applicant and the district councilman, stating

BVTW's non-opposition to the application and including any provisos.

If the general consensus of neighbors is that no agreement can be reached, the Chair will inform the applicant that BVTW opposes the application; the Chair will write a letter to the ZBA stating this opposition with reasons.

If no consensus on provisos can be reached at the meeting but there is clear willingness on all parties to continue discussion, the Chair will ask the applicant to return to the next BVTW zoning meeting and get a continuance from the ZBA if needed.

Members of the BVTW Zoning Committee may appear at any ZBA hearings to reinforce BVTW's position on applications. In addition, all neighbors are advised that they have the right to appear at the ZBA hearing to speak for or against any application, whether or not a consensus agreement is reached at the BVTW meeting.

At all times the goal of BVTW's neighborhood meetings will be to inform both neighbors and applicants of the zoning issues involved, their rights, and the potential consequences of reaching agreement or not doing so.