

February 13, 2018
City of Erie, Pennsylvania
ZONING HEARING BOARD
1:00 P.M.

The regular meeting of the Zoning Hearing Board was held Tuesday, February 13, 2018 at 1:00 P.M. in City Council Chambers, City of Erie Municipal Building, 626 State Street, Erie, PA.

-- MINUTES --

THE FOLLOWING APPEAL WAS HEARD:

Appeal No. 12,182 by the Erie County Historical Society (4011-119) concerning property located at 356 West 6th Street in an RLB district. The appellant is seeking a dimensional variance for a 6,000 SF addition to a 30,000 SF museum. Per Section 305.29 of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance, the total floor area of a museum cannot exceed 7,000 SF in an RLB district.

Findings of Fact

1. Appearing in support of the appellant was Mr. Jeff Kidder, co-owner of the architecture firm that is designing the appellant's new project. Mr. Kidder provided the Board with an informational packet, including a site plan and renderings of the entire museum complex, which he used when he was describing the proposed addition.
2. Mr. Kidder provided a brief history of the Erie County Historical Society, and in particular the museum itself. Several years ago, the E.C.H.S. consolidated the several structures they owned, fronting on West 5th and West 6th Streets, into one property, zoned RLB. As part of that renovation project, in 2014 the Zoning Hearing Board granted two variances to the appellants: one for a setback for the Archives Building on 5th Street, and the other increasing the total building area to 30,000 square feet, to allow for the new Archives Building. [The 30,000 number comes from the combination of square footage of the several buildings of the E.C.H.S. combined properties, plus the Carriage House.]
3. The majority of space in the new E.C.H.S. properties is utilized for archival material. The proposed new Exhibit Building, on the other hand, will be a two-story structure that will show exhibits, in the form of a time-line of Erie history.
4. According to Mr. Kidder, the requested variance is only for the new Exhibit Building, which will constitute a two story structure, with 3,000 square feet on each floor – 6,000 square feet total. He pointed out that the variance that was approved in 2014 expanded the total square footage of the museum complex to 30,000 square feet, of which 10,000 is for archival storage. The new proposal will increase the square footage to 36,000, with the additional 6,000 square feet used exclusively for actual exhibits to the museum.

Conclusions

1. The appellants are seeking a dimensional variance to expand the existing museum complex to 36,000 square feet. The appellants previously received a variance in 2014 that permitted them to expand the complex to a total of 30,000 square feet.
2. According to Section 305.29 of the Erie City Zoning Ordinance, the total floor area of a museum in an RLB district cannot exceed 7,000 square feet.
3. The previous variance that permitted the appellants to expand to 30,000 square feet included 10,000 feet of archival storage. The new proposed 6,000 foot variance will be for a new exhibit building, and will be used exclusively for an exhibit on Erie history.
4. The proposal will not alter the character of the neighborhood; it will be an addition to the significant expansion that took place several years ago, and will be on the same property.

Decision

By a unanimous vote, the Board approved the request for the dimensional variance. Member Mike Hornyak, speaking for the Board, said that the proposal is a good idea, only adding some additional square footage to a complex that has been approved for expansion in the past. Board members Selena King, Jeffrey Johnson, Edward Dawson and Jaqueline Spry all agreed, and voted to approve the variance request.

It is So Ordered.
