



HOUSTON COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Solid Waste ● Recycling ● Zoning
304 South Marshall Street – Room 209, Caledonia, MN 55921
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How to Apply for a Variance Permit

Getting Started

Go to [Beacon](#). Select Houston County, Minnesota from the drop-down menu. Click “Property Search” and search by your name, address, or Parcel ID. Your Parcel ID is a nine-digit number with separating periods. Click the Parcel ID concerning the project. If you are unsure which Parcel ID is correct, click “Map” in the burgundy-colored task list at the top of the page and select the correct location.

Click “Apply for Permit” in the burgundy-colored task list at the top of the page. If you are using a smart phone you may need to click the “More” tab to find the “Apply for Permit” option. Select “Variance Permit Application”. Click “Start Application” and search for your parcel by entering your Parcel ID, property owner name, property address, or by using the map tool to choose your parcel.

Creating an Account

New users should create an account by selecting “Sign Up”. To create an account, you will need to create a username and enter a valid email address. You should receive an email containing a link to verify your account. The “Verify Account” link should take you to a login page. Enter your username and password and click “Sign In”. Please keep record of your username and password.

In the top right corner click “My Dashboard”. Click on the colored link under “Application Number” to continue your application. Make sure to save the application regularly by clicking “Save” in the bottom right corner. Saving the application regularly will help avoid losing any progress.

Variance Introduction

A brief description of a Variance will be shown. You will be notified of the fees involved in the Variance process and advised to speak with Zoning staff prior to applying. Click “Next”.

Applicant Information

Review the prefilled information and fill in the remaining boxes (phone number, address, zip code, township, etc.). If you are applying as a representative of the property owner be sure to use the property owner’s address in the boxes.

Personal representatives should upload documentation proving they have been given authority through written consent or a signed contract. This documentation can be uploaded by clicking on the “Select Files” button and selecting the document you wish to upload.

Click the box stating that you understand that you are required to inform the township of your application. The elected township official’s contact information should be visible on the application. Click “Next” to continue.

For additional assistance, please contact Houston County Environmental Services at 507-725-5800 or email zoning@hocomn.gov.

Variance Request

Describe your requested Variance in the box provided.

To find the citation of Ordinance section for your Variance request you will have to click on the blue highlighted link at the top of the page to view the Houston County Zoning Ordinance. There is a glossary at the beginning of the Ordinance that can help direct you. You will need to find your district type (Agricultural, Residential, etc.). Under each district will be a list of standards – height standards, front yard setback standards, etc. Find the standards that best explains the variance(s) needed and fill in the citations of Ordinance section (Ordinance Example: 29.17 subdivision 2), the requested dimension, and explain why a variance from these standards is necessary.

If you have any supporting documents to upload click on the “Select File” button and select the document you wish to upload. Click “Next”.

Variance Finding of Facts

Explain why your request is needed by answering the following 6 finding statements. **If you answer “No” to any of these your request will not advance as you will not have proven that the Variance Permit is necessary. At a minimum, please provide a single sentence explanation for each relevant finding.**

1. The Variance request is in harmony with the intent and purpose of official controls.

Explain that your request will not alter or cause disruption to the district. Remember that some hardship in complying with official controls must exist. Official controls refer to the Houston County Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Does your proposal coincide with these goals?

2. There are practical difficulties in complying with the official controls, and the proposed use of the property is reasonable. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.

Explain the difficulties caused by limited size of the property, characteristics of the property, or by neighboring parcels that are permitted for uses requiring a setback (i.e. feedlot or mine setbacks). Cost can be a factor but should not be the primary consideration.

3. The Variance request is due to special conditions or circumstances unique to the property and not created by the property owner.

Explain how the property’s landscape, shape, or size create unique challenges that make it necessary to apply for a Variance from official controls.

4. The Variance cannot be alleviated by a reasonable method other than a Variance and the minimum variance which would alleviate the practical difficulty is sought.

Explain options you have considered to avoid applying for a Variance such as modifying the location, size, and shape or even removal of existing obstacles and why those methods are not favorable.

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- 5. The Variance will not alter the essential character of the locality nor substantially impair property values, or the public health, safety, or welfare in the vicinity.**

Explain that your Variance request will not damage your neighbor's property value, their ability to enjoy their property or endanger anyone's health or welfare.

- 6. The request is not a Use Variance and shall not have the effect of allowing any use that is not allowed in the zoning district, permit a lower degree of flood protection than the regulatory flood protection elevation or permit standards lower than those required by State Law.**

Explain that your Variance request will not cause any environmental issues or affect floodplain. Is it a request that can be made by reducing a setback amount? If it is not, please contact the Zoning Office to determine if your request is truly an Area Variance.

Click "Next".

Site Plan Information

Upload a drawing of your site by using the "Select File" box or use the tools on this page to draw your site plan. You may need to zoom in to view your parcel and find the proposed location for your structure. This can be done by clicking on the "+" or "-" buttons. By hovering over each item on the tool bar, it will show the function. To add a box or square to the map select "Draw a Rectangle" or "Draw a Line". Leave site comments in the box provided, if any. Click "Next".

Application Submittal

Check the boxes to acknowledge and agree that you understand the proposed conditions. Type your name and draw your signature in the box at the bottom of the page. Click "Submit".

You will again be notified of the fees due. These can be mailed or dropped off at the Environmental Services Department located at 304 South Marshall Street – Room 209, Caledonia, Minnesota 55921. If you are unable to stop during business hours (8:00am – 4:30pm) there is a drop box near the front door of the courthouse. If using the drop box, please be sure the payment is in an envelope clearly labeled Environmental Services or Zoning.

If your Variance includes a building project you will need to apply for a building permit. Your building permit application can be submitted prior to the public hearing, but it will not be approved until the Board of Adjustment approves your Variance request.

COMMON VARIANCE APPLICATIONS

- Property line setback
- Road setback
- New dwelling from an existing feedlot
- New feedlot or expansion of an existing feedlot from an existing dwelling

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