## BY: VIEWPOINT \& HAND DELIVERY

September 26, 2023
City of Portsmouth
Attn: Stefanie Casella, Planner
Zoning Board of Adjustment
1 Junkins Avenue
Portsmouth, NH 03801

## RE: Variance Application of Sean and Andrea Creeley, Trustees of the Creeley Family Trust 337 Richards Avenue, Tax Map 130, Lot 2

Dear Stefanie,
Our Office represents Sean and Andrea Creeley, owners of the property located at 337 Richards Avenue, Portsmouth. Enclosed herewith, please find the following materials relative to the variance application submitted to the Board of Adjustment on behalf of the Creeleys through Viewpoint:

1) Landowner Letter of Authorization;
2) Narrative to Variance Application;
3) Existing and Proposed Conditions Plans;
4) Existing and Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations;
5) Photographs;

A copy of the above application materials is being delivered to the Planning Department. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the enclosed application materials, do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,


Derek R. Durbin, Esq.

## Conclusion

The Creeleys have demonstrated that their application meets the criteria for granting the variance request. As such, they respectfully request the Board's approval of the same.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dated: September 26, 2023
Sean and Andrea Creeley, Trustees


By: Derek R. Durbin, Esq.
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# CITY OF PORTSMOUTH ZONING APPLICATION NARRATIVE 

Sean W. and Andrea T. Creeley, Trustees<br>Creeley Family Trust<br>(Owner/Applicant)<br>Tax Map 130, Lot 2<br>337 Richards Avenue<br>Portsmouth, NH 03801

## Introduction

Sean and Andrea Creeley are the owners of property located at 337 Richards Avenue in Portsmouth (the "Property"). The Property is a corner lot, situated at the intersection of Richards Avenue and Lincoln Avenue. It is located in the General Residence A ("GRA") zoning district. The Property contains a relatively small, narrow two-story, single-family home built in 1900 that serves at the Creeleys residence. There is also a non-conforming detached garage and chicken coop on the Property situated along the easterly boundary that is accessed. The Creeley's driveway runs along the easterly boundary and is accessed from Lincoln Avenue. Lincoln Avenue serves as the primary access to the Property.

The detached garage is quite small. It has a footprint of approximately $300 \mathrm{sq} . \mathrm{ft}$. The garage has fallen into disrepair and shows signs of weather damage and rot throughout. It is generally in poor condition and suffers from physical and functional obsolescence. The garage has primarily served as storage for outdoor furniture, bikes and their children's belongings. It is too small to fit a modern car and given its condition, it is not suitable for vehicular use.

## Proposed Improvements \& Required Variance Relief

In conjunction with a larger renovation and addition to their home, the Creeleys are proposing the demolition of the existing garage and chicken coop that encroach into the rear yard setback and the construction of a new single-vehicle garage with bedroom space above. A portion of the new garage structure would be situated within the rear yard setback. Due to the fact that the Property is a corner lot with frontage on two streets and has a Richards Avenue address, the easterly boundary is considered to be the rear yard rather than a side yard. This is significant given the 10' difference in setback requirements. It is also significant since the City of Portsmouth has not taken a consistent approach in how it interprets what constitutes a side yard versus a rear yard with respect to corner lots. On several past applications similar to the Creeleys' application, the City has determined that there is no rear yard on a corner lot property.

## Variance Relief Sought

In order to construct the new garage in the proposed location, a variance is required from Section 10.521 to allow for a 12.5' - 14.8' rear yard setback where 20' is the minimum required and 1.4'- 2.6' exists.

## August Denial \& Fisher v. City of Dover

On August 15, 2023, the Board denied a request for a 1.7 ' rear yard setback variance in connection with a proposed two-vehicle garage with bedroom space above.

Under the standards set forth by the New Hampshire Supreme Court in the case of Fisher v. City of Dover, unless a "material change of circumstances affecting the merits of the application has [] occurred" or the application is "materially differs in nature and degree from its predecessor," the Board may not reach the merits of a subsequent application. $\underline{120 \text { N.H. 187, } 190 \text { (1980). }}$

The current variance request clearly meets the Fisher v. City of Dover standard to the extent that the Board feels compelled to discuss it before proceeding with the public hearing on Creeleys' application. The proposed garage is approximately half the size of what was previously proposed when the Board voted to deny the rear yard setback request in August. Moreover, the setback of the proposed garage is now $12.5^{\prime}-14.8^{\prime}$ to the easterly boundary whereas $1.7^{\prime}-2.6^{\prime}$ was previously proposed. For these reasons, the current request being considered by the Board is materially different in nature and degree than the application that was denied in August.

## Variance Criteria

## Granting the variance will not be contrary to the spirit and intent of the Zoning Ordinance or the public interest.

In the case of Chester Rod \& Gun Club, Inc. v. Town of Chester, the Court noted that since the provisions of all ordinances represent a declaration of public interest, any variance will, in some measure, be contrary to the ordinance, but to be contrary to the public interest or injurious to public rights of others, "the variance must 'unduly, and in a marked degree' conflict with the ordinance such that it violates the ordinance's 'basic zoning objectives." "Id. The Court observed that " $[t]$ here are two methods of ascertaining whether granting a variance would violate an ordinance's basic zoning objectives: (1) examining whether granting the variance would alter the essential character of the neighborhood or, in the alternative; and (2) examining whether granting the variance would threaten the public health, safety, or welfare." Id.

The proposed garage is designed to align architecturally with the existing house and mudroom/living room addition. It will be the minimum width necessary to accommodate one (1) modern vehicle and to provide some much-needed bedroom space above. From the outside, the existing home looks larger than it actually is due to the turret (tower) design element, expansive wraparound porch, bay window features and ornate exterior detailing. The reality is that the existing home is relatively narrow in width ( $20^{\prime}-6^{\prime \prime}$ ) side to side) and the living space is compartmentalized into rooms that are relatively small by current standards. The kitchen is $11^{\prime}$ $\mathrm{x} 9^{\prime}$, the dining room is $11 \times 10^{\prime}$, the living room is $13^{\prime}-10^{\prime \prime} \times 12^{\prime} 3$ ", and the bedrooms are $9^{\prime} \mathrm{x}$ 12 ". There is no true primary bedroom in the home.

In considering whether granting the variance is consistent with the public interest and spirit of the Ordinance, it is important to consider the purpose(s) of the 20 ' rear setback restriction. All building setback restrictions are intended to prevent homes and other structures from getting too close to each other and to preserve the light, air and space of abutting properties. However, rear yard setback requirements are often more stringent in residential zones than front or side yard setback requirements because they are intended to encourage usable back yard areas and open space corridors in the middle of neighborhood blocks.

With respect to the Creeley property, the area that is considered the rear yard is really the right side yard despite its legal designation. This side of the Property is also immediately adjacent to the right side yard of 192 Lincoln Avenue, thus there is no connection anyone else's back yard. The area of the Property that constitutes the right side yard is the Creeley's rear (back) yard as a result of the driveway and primary access to the home being off of Lincoln Avenue. The Creeley's proposed garage will be setback 12.5' $\quad$ - $\quad 14.8^{\prime}$ from the easterly (rear) property boundary. It would compliant if this area of the Property was considered to be the right side yard. The existing garage is only 1.4 ' $-2.6^{\prime}$ from the rear boundary and would not be compliant regardless of yard orientation.

Approving the variance will result in an increase in the light, air and space of the abutting property at 192 Lincoln Avenue and an overall improvement from the existing conditions of the Property. It is important to point out that there is a 17' wide driveway on the property at 192 Lincoln Avenue immediately adjacent to the proposed garage that acts as an additional open space buffer between the properties. The separation distance between the proposed garage and the nearest structure on 192 Lincoln Avenue is greater than 30'.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, granting the variance will observe the purpose that the setback requirements were intended to serve while not negatively altering the essential character of the neighborhood or having an impact upon the public.

## Substantial Justice will be done in granting the variance.

To determine whether substantial justice is done, the Board must balance the equities between the rights of a private landowner and the public interest in deciding whether to grant or deny a variance request. The "only guiding rule is that any loss to the individual that is not outweighed by a gain to the general public is an injustice." New Hampshire Office of State Planning, The Board of Adjustment in New Hampshire, A Handbook for Local Officials (1997); Malachy Glen Assocs., Inc. v. Town of Chichester, 155 N.H. 102 (2007).

There would be no gain to the general public by denying the variance request. The only property that is potentially impacted by the variance request is 192 Lincoln Avenue. The owner of that property supports the Creeleys' application. Granting the variance will result in a more functional garage and some needed additional bedroom space without having any negative impact upon the abutting property. It will also bring the Property into much greater compliance with the rear yard setback requirement. It would be injustice to deny the relief sought given the unique conditions of the Property. The loss to the Creeleys in denying the variance request outweighs any potential gain to the public.

## Surrounding property values will not be diminished by granting the variance.

The Board is justified in relying upon its own knowledge and expertise to reach the conclusion that surrounding property values will either remain the same or improve if the variance request is granted. The existing garage is obsolete and sits almost directly on the common boundary with 192 Lincoln Avenue. This garage, along with the chicken coop that is also situated along the boundary with 192 Lincoln Avenue, will be demolished to make way for the new garage. The new garage will be setback 12.5 ' - $14.8^{\prime}$ from the boundary with 192 Lincoln Avenue. The increased setback can only add value to that property, not take away from it.

Architecturally, the proposed garage will tie in naturally with the existing home and other improvements being made to it. Landscaping is also being added between the proposed garage and the property at 192 Lincoln Avenue to provide a vegetated buffer that does not presently exist. The garage has been designed to the minimum width necessary to support its intended use. The abutter's support of the proposed garage is further evidence that surrounding values will not be negatively impacted by granting the variance.

## Literal enforcement of the Ordinance would result in an any unnecessary hardship.

The Property is a corner lot containing a single-family home, driveway and detached garage that were constructed before current zoning regulations were adopted. While the Property has a Richards Avenue address, access and other features of the Property is achieved from Lincoln Avenue. The area of the Property defined as the rear yard functions as a side yard while the area that is defined as the right side yard serves as the back yard. If the Property had a Lincoln Avenue address, the rear yard would be the left side yard and would be subject to a 10 ' setback versus a 20' setback. Under this scenario, no variance would be required for the proposed garage since it will have a $12.5^{\prime}-14.8^{\prime}$ setback from the boundary. The primary purpose the more restrictive rear yard setback requirement was intended to serve cannot be met with the Creeley property due to the fact that the rear yard lines up with the right side yard of the abutting property at 192 Lincoln Avenue. There is no natural connection on this side of the Property to anyone else's rear yard.
These unique conditions of the Property make it such that there is no fair and substantial relationship between the purpose the rear yard setback restriction was intended to serve and its relation to the Property.

The proposed use of the Property will remain the same and is permitted by right under Section 10.440 of the Ordinance. Therefore, the proposed use is reasonable.




## LANDOWNER LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION

Sean W. Creeley and Andrea T. Creeley, Trustees of the Creeley Family Trust, record owners of the property located at 337 Richards Avenue, Tax Map 130, Lot 2, Portsmouth, NH (the "Property"), hereby authorize Durbin Law Offices, PLLC, Altus Engineering, Inc., and Somma Studios, to file any zoning, planning or other municipal permit applications with the City of Portsmouth for said Property and to appear before its land use boards. This Letter of Authorization shall be valid until expressly revoked in writing.


Andrea T. Creeley, Trustee

July 18, 2023

July 18, 2023



NORTHEAST ELEVATION

$\frac{\text { SOUTHWEST ELEVATION }}{\text { (RICHARDS AVENUE) }}$
(RICHARDS AVENUE)


OCTOBER 17, 2023
$\frac{3}{16}=11^{\prime \prime}-0^{\prime \prime}$

SECOND FLOOR
ZपIIIIII ExISTING FRAMING


FIRST FLOOR
VIUIUIT ExIStING FRAMING
ew framing

BASEMENT
ZIIIIIII, Existing framing
new framing





Front View of Property (Richards Ave)


Front - Left View of Property (Intersection of Richards \& Lincoln Ave)


Left Side Yard View of Property (Lincoln Ave)


Left Side Yard View of Property \& Garage (Lincoln Ave)


Left Side Yard of Property (Lincoln Ave)


Rear View of Property, Garage \& Driveway (Lincoln Ave)


Front Right View of Property (Richards Ave)

