

Transcript of OZAH Hearing

Date: December 12, 2022 **Case:** Tzeng and Lai, In Re:

Planet Depos

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Transcript of OZAH Hearing December 12, 2022

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OFFICE OF ZONING AND ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
                                                                                  APEARANCES
                 FOR MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
                         ADO 23-01
                                                                     5 MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF ZONING AND
                                                                         ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
   License Application of Tzeng and Lai
                                                                        100 Maryland Avenue
                                                                        County Office Building, Room 200
                                                                         Rockville, Maryland 20850
        HEARING BEFORE HEARING EXAMINER KATHLEEN F. BYRNE
                                                                        240-777-6660
                      Conducted Virtually
12
                    Monday, December 12, 2022
                                                                     12
13
                         9:28 a.m. EST
                                                                     14 Also present:
15
                                                                     15
                                                                               Joe Lorete, PD tech
16
17
                                                                     17
                                                                               Bertrand Tzeng
                                                                               Kathleen Byrne
19
                                                                     19
                                                                               Dave Johnson
20
                                                                     20
                                                                               Clifton Bouma
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22
                                                                     22
  Job No: 472688
24 Pages: 1 - 40
                                                                     24
25 Transcribed by: Nicole Mastrosimone
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                                                                                     PROCEEDINGS
             Hearing, conducted virtually.
                                                                     2
                                                                         Whereupon,
                                                                     3
                                                                               MS. BYRNE: Joe Lorete is here. He is recording
                                                                         and will be transcribing this hearing on behalf of the
                                                                        Office. So one of the most important things is that we
                                                                         enunciate clearly, we don't speak over each other. I'm at
                                                                         fault for that just as much as the next guy. So what I'll
                                                                         do is, when we get started, I'll have everybody go ahead and
                                                                         state their name, spell their first and last name so
            Before Joe Lorete Notary Public in and for the
                                                                     10 Mr. Lorete has all of that, and we'll go from there.
   State of Maryland.
                                                                               So I'm going to get started with my little spiel
                                                                     11
12
                                                                     12 here before we jump in and talk about the appeal. So this
13
                                                                     13 is a public hearing, and this is an appeal of a denial of a
14
                                                                     14 accessory dwelling unit apartment, and the code sections
15
                                                                     15 that are pertinent here today include Section 2919 of the
                                                                     16 Montgomery County Code, as well as 2926 of the code.
17
                                                                     17 Specifically, the appeal comes from Section
                                                                     18 59.3.3.3A.2.Ciii. When you look at the code, it's a series
19
                                                                     19 of dots, right? So 59 is the zoning code. So 59 is
                                                                     20 incorporated into the licensing section. So when you apply
22
                                                                     21 for a license, the permit and licensing section has to look
                                                                     22 to see that you are compliant with the zoning portion of it.
24
                                                                     23 So that 59.3.3.3 A.2Ciii, that's the zoning portion of it
25
                                                                     24 that folds into the licensing.
                                                                     25
                                                                               So specifically, you disagree with the decision.
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The decision stated that your square footage was too large.

So we'll get into that in a moment.

3

So the first thing that I'd like to do is have the parties identify themselves. So, Ms. Lai and Mr. Tzeng, could you identify yourselves and spell your first and last names?

MS. LAI: My name is Gena Lai. First name is spelled G-E-N-A. Last name is spelled L-A-I.

MR. TZENG: And my name is Bertrand Tzeng. 10 Spelled B-E-R-T-R-A-N-D. Last name is spelled T-Z-E-N-G.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. I don't think we have any 12 additional opposition or support. Mr. Johnson?

13 MR. JOHNSON: Yes. Good morning. Dave Johnson.

14 I'm an inspector with Montgomery County Department of

15 Housing and Community Affairs, and it's D-A-V-I-D

16 J-O-H-N-S-O-N. Thank you.

MS. BYRNE: Thank you. So just a few little Teams

18 issues. Since it's just a small little group, it seems like

19 everybody is on. We're fine. So if you're not speaking,

20 you can go ahead and mute. We don't have to worry about the

21 telephone callers. I will be recording this, but this

22 recording is simply for the transcription services. So in

23 the event they need to go back and see something and hear

24 something that they didn't capture, that's the sole reason

25 for recording it. So while we're talking about that, I'm

going to hit the start record button. I do not want transcription. I need to change that setting. Hold on one

moment. There we go.

Since it is such a small group, normally what I would say is, if you have an issue, put it in chat. If not,

we can just use the raise your hand function, or we can 7 politely interrupt each other. But I think the way that the

8 flow normally goes is the applicant, or the objector in this

9 situation, Mr. Tzeng and Ms. Lai, you will go first.

10 Mr. Johnson will then explain why the decision was, what the

11 decision was. I can ask questions of all of you in order to

12 get a better understanding of what's happening. If there

13 are documents that you want to share -- so Ms. Johnson in

14 our office put up the exhibits. There are seven exhibits,

15 including your objection, acceptance of the accessory

16 apartment application, denial, supplemental objection form,

17 the hearing notice, and then the e-mail exchanges back and

18 forth that we've had recently. So all of that is online.

19 So if there's anything that you want me to pull up and us

20 look at together, just let me know, and I will go ahead and

21 do that and share screen with everyone.

22 Okav. Let's see what else as far as our little

23 housekeeping goes before we jump in. So since it's small,

24 you can have an opening statement, if you want. You can

25 have a closing statement, if you want. It's kind of up to

that. You can ask questions of Mr. Johnson. Let's see.

And then we'll have preliminary matters as well. The way

that this will normally work is I swear in all of the

witnesses, and we discuss what exhibits are going to be

submitted, if you wish any additional exhibits to be

submitted. And then you could have a closing statement or

an ending statement.

8 All right. So without any further ado, if you don't mind, let's swear everybody in at the same time right 10 now so we don't have to worry about it.

11 (The parties were sworn.)

12 MS. BYRNE: Awesome. Thank you. Perfect. That's

13 all I need. There's nothing worse than getting halfway

14 through the hearing and realizing you didn't swear everybody

15 in, so I try to do that right from the very, very beginning.

But the first thing that we need to discuss is the 16

17 preliminary matter of filing. So in an e-mail that I had

18 sent to you previously, Mr. Tzeng and Ms. Lai, is that the

19 code says that you have 30 days after the denial of the

20 director's decision in order to object or in order to appeal

21 that. And that decision was dated on June 16, 2022. We

22 didn't receive your objection until November. So could you

23 please explain the entire process from when you received the

24 decision, and what your efforts were in order to resolve and

25 appeal that before we go further?

MR. TZENG: Yeah. Absolutely. And thank you,

Kathy. And thank you for being here and your time to

consider this matter. I think the timing came from our

efforts to determine the best course of action after working

with Dave and his office with the inspection and the finding

about our proposed ADU, in particular the square footage

requirement. I don't think the facts are in contest.

There's some background facts that we would have liked to

have been considered as part of the ADU permit review

10 process. And leading to the timing, I think there's some

11 question, certainly on our part, about what venue or what

12 approach was the proper one to consider that. And so when

13 we were in discussions with Dave and his office, DHCA,

14 regarding their finding and their determination, there was

15 also discussed additional opportunities to present our case

16 to consider a waiver, or consider some kind of equitable

17 review of our application, given that the square footage

18 requirement, as we understand it, was the sole issue with

19 the apartment, and that, even by that benchmark, the

20 apartment was not grossly over. It was 1,300 square feet.

MS. BYRNE: Right. So before we go down the road

22 of merit, right, because that's where you are, you're

23 saying, you know, was it -- is it really 1,300 square feet;

24 is that such a big deal, right? So that talks to the merit,

25 right? That talks to the element. So what I want to know

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is you got the letter, right?

2 MR. TZENG: Right.

MS. BYRNE: What did you do next? Right? Give me dates. Give me times. Give me who did you reach out to, how did you -- what did you determine your next steps were?

Because, if I'm being perfectly honest, June to November,

that's a really long time. Right? I mean, the code is very

clear that you have 30 days. And the code is also very

clear on the limited scope of review that OZA has. Right? 10 So let's talk first about what you did next.

11 MR. TZENG: Sure.

12 MS. LAI: If I could just intercede --

13 MS. BYRNE: Sure.

MS. LAI: -- briefly, the language of the code, I 15 understand that the intent is that filing should be made 16 within 30 days after the director's report is issued. I did

17 read this after we decided, okay, let's go ahead and file an

18 appeal with OZA. The language does say that if the filing

19 is delivered by mail, the postmark on the letter must be no

20 later than 30 days. That's for mail. It doesn't talk about

21 delivery in person. It says time for filing requests for

22 waivers or objections will be accepted for filing within 30

23 days after the director's report is issued, and it says OZA

24 will not accept requests for waivers or objections before

25 the director issues his report. I understand the intent,

but the language does not prohibit filings after 30 days if made by means other than mail. 2

MS. BYRNE: Well, the way that the -- I understand 4 that that's your interpretation, but that's actually

incorrect. Right? There are deadlines given for times for

filing. And what it does say is that you can file it. It

7 must be postmarked, or it can be hand-delivered in person

within that 30-day timeframe. That's the time limit within

9 which you are supposed to deliver it. So if you're telling

10 me there are reasons why you couldn't deliver it within 30

11 days, then that's what I want to hear. Now, with COVID,

12 like, our phone number has been up on the website the whole

13 time. We have arranged to meet people here to drop off and

14 pick up. There's someone in the office every Tuesday and

15 Thursday. And then you would have been given directions in

16 order to send it by mail as well as e-mail it. So tell

17 me -- so what your statement to me is that, the way you read

18 it, it didn't restrict you from filing later? Is that what

19 you're saying?

20 MS. LAI: That is one piece of the story, but the 21 other piece, and obviously the more important part of story 22 is what my husband was starting to talk about, which is his

23 research into what is the correct next step. And we did

24 spend some time trying to figure this out. He did a lot of

25 research. And so it wasn't clear to us that we were

supposed to -- it wasn't clear to us that the appeal to OZA was the right way to go.

MS. BYRNE: And you should definitely talk more about that.

MR. TZENG: Yeah.

MS. BYRNE: But before we get into that, so you -so I've just heard from you that the way you read it you didn't have to file within 30 days. But tell me what steps you took after you got the director's decision to determine

10 what your next options were --

MR. TZENG: Yeah. 11

12 MS. BYRNE: -- and like who you talked to, when 13 you talked to someone, like all of that? Because if you 14 talked to someone in July and then you didn't pick it back 15 up until October, right, like there has to be some urgency 16 here in order to resolve that. So I want to hear from you 17 what steps you took.

18 MR. TZENG: Yeah. So in the weeks after we got 19 the decision, I went onto both websites, the OZA website and 20 the Board of Appeals website, because those are two avenues 21 that had been mentioned in our discussions with DHCA in 22 terms of next steps. And so I spent a lot of time looking 23 at the two processes, or the processes for this appeal that

24 we're doing now, as well as the process of applying to the 25 Board of Appeals, and I also spent a significant amount of

time going -- checking the last three years' worth of

decisions that have been issued by each body. All this was

in an effort to determine, you know, since we were -- our

situation was less one of saying, arguing that our apartment

complied with the literal letter of especially the square

footage requirement, but instead looking to more of an

equity type of review, trying to determine which path would

do that. And, you know, that took a significant amount of

9 time, and it's still led to a fair amount of uncertainty on

10 our part. You know, for instance, the -- I'm not saying

11 this as a pointing-fingers way. It was just -- it was very 12 difficult for us to get a sense of clarity about, given our

13 circumstances, which seems to be unique in the context of 14 ADU applications where we're just talking about the square

15 footage, as opposed to a parking space type of matter, or in

16 the context of the Board of Appeals variance process, most

17 of which having to do with attached garages versus accessory

18 apartments. We weren't left with a lot of clarity about

19 which path was the correct one. And so we had --

20 MS. LAI: We also consulted -- tried to consult 21 with --

MR. TZENG: And so, yeah, the next step was to try 23 to reach out to legal counsel to try to advise us, and I

24 reached out to a number of attorneys through some contacts 25 and acquaintances. And I spent the next couple of weeks

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1 after that, you know, making followup calls. But, to be

- 2 honest, we did not get any response. You know, we didn't
- 3 get people returning our calls to consult with us on the
- 4 zoning matter. I can't tell you why that is. I can
- 5 speculate that, you know, perhaps they felt it wasn't worth
- 6 their time. But, needless to say, Kathy, we spent the
- 7 intervening weeks trying to find a path and trying to
- 8 determine what was the best way forward. And we did -- we
- didn't get any certainty. And, you know, after a certain
- 10 point in time into the summer, you know, it did fall off our 11 radar.
- 12 MS. LAI: And so we did realize that we needed to
- 13 continue to pursue the matter, and put forth the filing when
- 14 we did. And so, recognizing that that wasn't ideal and
- 15 probably wasn't within the intent of the procedural
- 16 requirements, again hoping that we can all work on a way
- 17 forward that's most sensible and reasonable and efficient
- 18 for everyone, because this -- these facts do seem to fall
- 19 outside of what's been done before.
- MS. BYRNE: Right. I'm going to -- so David or
- 21 Cliff, maybe one of you guys can answer this. So when
- 22 someone gets denied an application and they get the letter
- 23 and you get the followup call, what's the normal protocol in 24 your office?
- 25 MR. JOHNSON: Dave Johnson here. Yeah. The
- 1 normal protocol is when I conducted the inspection -- in
- 2 this case, the inspection was conducted, according to my
- 3 records, on March 16 of this year -- I write up a
- 4 preliminary inspection report. And that outlines the items
- 5 that will need to be complied with in order to conduct the
- 6 reinspection, and then we look forward to having an
- 7 approval, and then I returned that to Mr. Bouma in
- 8 licensing, and then they arranged to have that license
- 9 issued or denied based on my findings.
- 10 In this case, on the 16th of March during the
- 11 inspection, which was primarily trying to get that square
- 12 footage, I communicated to the applicant that, you know, the
- 13 case didn't look as if it would immediately allow me to pass
- 14 it, because it was over that 1,200 square feet. However, we
- 15 were going to work with them to get them put in the right
- 16 direction so that they could file an appeal, should they
- 17 wish to do so. And later that day I sent an e-mail to the
- 18 applicant explaining the method to move forward with, you
- 19 know, appealing our decision, and asked him to reach out to
- 20 Mr. Bouma in licensing and also my supervisor to, you know,
- 21 request the hearing be set and to give him the guidance the
- 22 applicants required to appeal that decision.
- MS. BYRNE: Okay. And so, Mr. Bouma, when people
- 24 reach out to licensing to appeal -- because I have the
- 25 director's letter, and there's no language in the director's

- 1 letter about appealing. Right? So I knew that there had to
- be a step two, and so Mr. Johnson explained that, you know,
- when someone gets that what the next steps are. So what
- happens in your office?
- MR. BOUMA: Right. So I sent over that letter,
- and then I also sent over -- I spoke to somebody at OZA and
- also to the supervisor, Mr. Eloisa, about what to do,
- because it's a new procedure for myself as well.
- MS. BYRNE: Okay.
- 10 MR. BOUMA: But I sent over the information about
- 11 how to appeal along with the letter and the information for
- 12 OZA.
- 13 MS. BYRNE: So there's a specific handout that's
- 14 sent that says, if you don't agree, can do X, Y and Z, or --
- MR. BOUMA: I typed up an e-mail and sent all the 16 information.
- 17 MS. BYRNE: Okay. So there was an e-mail from
- 18 your office?
- 19 MR. BOUMA: Yes, I sent an e-mail.
- 20 MS. LAI: So with all due respect, the e-mail
- 21 pointed us to OZA's website. OZA's website specifies a
- 22 number of different procedures, and it was not entirely
- 23 clear which we were supposed to use. And so, ultimately, we
- 24 did pick one, but that was another reason for the delay.
- 25 MS. BYRNE: All right.
 - MR. TZENG: I think there's also a lack of
- clarity, and I think understandable on all sides because
- it -- like I said, when I was looking at the cases both for
- OZA and for Board of Appeals, I couldn't find a case that
- fit our specific facts, especially an ADU that had a
- square-footage concern. And so it wasn't clear to me that
- the -- you know, which venue was the one to apply to to seek
- relief. And, you know, I understand, you know, even with
- the communications we received about the OZA process, a lot
- 10 of the guidance we received, understandably, was about the
- 11 process of preparing an appeal. And I'm not -- not that
- 12 anyone can answer this particular question, because it just
- 13 wasn't there in the decision record, but just a lot of open
- 14 questions about whether that appeals process was one that
- 15 could resolve the question about the square footage, the
- 16 question of finding equitable relief or resolution.
- MS. BYRNE: Okay. All right. So that's helpful.
- 18 All right. So I'm going to hold off making a decision on
- 19 whether or not the late filing is fatal to your appeal. All
- 20 right? So let's just get into the merits, and then we'll
- 21 talk about where -- let's just go ahead and get into the 22 merits.
- All right. So tell me, Ms. Lai and Mr. Tzeng, why
- 24 you think that -- well, just, I guess, tell me. Tell me --25 tell me why you're appealing and what it is that OZA can do

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for you. For all those reasons, you know, we feel that the 2 MR. TZENG: Thank you, Kathy. So we recognize apartment meets the spirit of what the ADU requires. You 3 that this apartment is unique among apartments that go know, we've complied in every other aspect. And I think the through the ADU process, and there are some unique records will show, you know, ever since we started working circumstances through which, you know, we came to acquire it with DHCA we have proactively, you know, paid licensing 6 that we hope will be considered. So first of all -- and I'm fees, you know, with -- regardless of its ultimate posture not sure to what extent this has been submitted into the or formal status at that moment, but we have paid the 8 record. We certainly don't have the files. But when we licensing fees and we continue to, you know, intend to 9 bought the ADU and the house to which it's attached from 10 the -- the seller had built the ADU, and originally it had 11 been built for different purposes, specifically to serve as 11 burden and effort and expense to all sides. 12 a registered living unit for the seller's parents. And so, 12 MS. BYRNE: Okay. 13 again, we don't have access to the records, so we can't tell 13 14 you too specifically about the nature of the disposition. 15 What we understand is that when the seller built it, he 16 followed the steps I believe it was DHCA, and it was 17 registered as an RLU and met the requirements for the RLU as 18 built, square footage included. And so when we bought the 19 house and the apartment, it was -- one of the factors was 20 our intent to eventually do the same. That seemed like the 20 way. 21 perfect opportunity to use that apartment for either Gena's 21 22 mom or my parents in the future. In the meantime, we 23 thought it made sense to rent it out and then found out 23 owned the property, or when did you buy it? 24 later about the ADU requirements. And at the time the 24 25 timing was such that the zoning I think it was ZTA 1901 was 25 18 1 still being considered by the council. There was some 2 question about what the ultimate law would look like, and sellers' parents? what kind of square footage requirement it would have. And 3 MR. TZENG: Yes. Absolutely. 4 I think it was around that time that the RLU requirements 4 MS. BYRNE: Okay. 5

comply with licensing as long as we can get it licensed. 10 And we're just looking to do so in a way that minimizes MS. LAI: And you may be aware, Ms. Byrne, that 14 the ADU application process already involves a posting of 15 the sign. We posted it for more than 30 days and received 16 no complaints, and so it's pretty clear that within our 17 neighborhood there's no nuisance factor. And so, from a 18 policy standpoint, it's really a technical lack of 19 compliance with the code, but there is no public harm in any MS. BYRNE: Okay. Anything else you guys wanted 22 to tell me about your history in the -- how long have you MS. LAI: We bought it in -- we moved in in 2013. MS. BYRNE: Okay. And so, to your knowledge, 20 before you owned it, it was occupied by the previous

5 were going away. 6 Long story short, we bought an apartment that was 7 built and registered as an RLU. We had every intent of putting it to a useful purpose either as an RLU eventually, 9 or as now an ADU. We have not modified the property. So in 10 order to change it would involve a fair amount of effort, 11 expense and construction in order to fit it within the 12 confines of, you know, what the requirements say now square 13 footage wise. You know, to my recollection, with the 14 inspection that Dave conducted, you know, we also have been 15 working with DHCA on this licensing for some time, and I 16 don't believe there's a concern with any other aspect of the 17 ADU, its fitness, its suitability, its quality, its 18 location, other requirements. It's pretty rare in that 19 there aren't many two-plus bedroom apartments available in 20 this area at this price range. And so it's a very appealing 21 one, especially one for a young family or a married couple

22 just starting out in their careers, you know, all of which,

23 I think, fit the profile of the kind of people who want to

24 rent it in this location, being very close to, you know,

25 Walter Reed and the NIH.

MS. LAI: And if at some point in the future our parents should need our assistance, then we would have them move into the unit. 8 MR. TZENG: Yeah. 9 MS. BYRNE: Yeah. So it's been empty since or --10 MS. LAI: No. We have been renting it out to a 11 couple who work at Walter Reed. They're young doctors just 12 starting out. MR. TZENG: Their medical residency. 13 14 MS. LAI: Yes. 15 MR. TZENG: I would also add -- sorry. 16 MS. BYRNE: It's okay. 17 MR. TZENG: -- that I think one of the reasons the 18 apartment is the way it is and, quite frankly, why it's at 19 the square footage it is is that the seller built it for his

20 parents. They had originally -- they had originally owned

21 the house, the property. And so what we understand from the

22 history was, you know, he took over the house, and he built

23 this house that we now occupy. And in order to keep his

24 parents with him, you know, he built a very generously

25 sized -- again, it's a two-plus bedroom -- apartment for

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2.1 them. And then for other circumstances, they couldn't -they had to put it on the market. That's where we came in. MS. BYRNE: Okay. Anything else you guys want to tell me about the history or the property? MR. TZENG: I think those are the basics. MS. BYRNE: Okay. All right. Thank you. Mr. Johnson, can you tell me soup to nuts, application, inspection? MR. JOHNSON: Yes, ma'am. So I've received the 10 application for the ADU from licensing, Mr. Bouma's office. 11 And when I received those applications, I then reached out 12 to the property owner to schedule preliminary inspection 13 where we go out at the property and check for compliance. I 14 met with the property owner at the property on March 16th of 14 15 this year. Then we took a walk through the property, and I 15 16 inspected it, and it needed -- it met -- looking at my 17 notes, it met all our requirements. The exception was the 18 square footage. My understanding was an inspector had been 19 to that site previous to my inspection and found the square 20 footage was over, and my purpose was then to remeasure and 21 see if we could come up with a measurement that put us 21 footage --22 within that 1,200 square feet. We were unable to do so and 2.2. 23 resolved that we were at 1,300 square feet, 100 square feet 23 24 over the 1,200 limit outlined in the zoning legislation. So 24 25 I wrote up a preliminary inspection report. And at the time 25 22 across the square footage issue? 1

to approve them if they're over that 1,200 square feet. MS. BYRNE: Question. I guess is square footage -- how often is square footage an issue for you? MR. JOHNSON: It is I would say rarely an issue. It's usually worked out during the initial preliminary inspection. We don't often already have renters in there. We don't often have a property that was prepared in such a way that would be a possible conversion to an ADU. So square footage is typically discussed between our office --10 and it could be, and I would defer to licensing that square 11 footage may be something that they encounter quite often, 12 and then I do not receive the application for the 13 preliminary inspection. MS. BYRNE: Got it. MR. JOHNSON: When I receive the application and I 16 meet with the applicants, it's typically in discussion how 17 they want to lay out the property. They know the limits of 18 the square footage. A great deal of our applications are 19 for basements, and in which case there is no limit. As long 20 as the ADU is limited to the basement, there's no square MS. BYRNE: Okay. That's helpful. Okay, Mr. Bouma? MR. BOUMA: Yes. MS. BYRNE: So, I guess, how often do you run

1 really at the end of the inspection, I communicated to the 2 applicant that, you know, in these situations, we have limited ability to just provide a waiver and say it's okay 4 and move forward. The process for this is he would need to 5 file an appeal, and he would need to reach out to -- I do 6 not handle those. Although I'm familiar with the process, I don't handle those. I direct our applicants to reach out to licensing, who will follow up with the applicant to get them 9 put in the right direction in the way of filing that appeal. 10 So, upon concluding the inspection, I issued a 11 preliminary inspection report. That inspection report was 12 issued that day. And then I followed up with the applicant 13 by e-mail instructing the applicant that, you know, because 14 of the square footage, if the applicants wish to move 15 forward with having that property licensed as an ADU in 16 Montgomery County, they would, you know, want to consider 17 filing an appeal, and then, you know, that we have some 18 resolution through that, and that I couldn't provide the 19 specifics. However, I directed them both to Mr. Bouma 20 within licensing, and my supervisor, should they have any 21 questions regarding the process and that sort of thing. And 22 you know, ultimately, you know, we just -- just to speak to 23 the square footage, we have no real objection between a 24 1,200 square foot and a 1,300 square foot ADU. It met our 25 requirements otherwise, and it's just we're simply not able

MR. BOUMA: So not especially often. Generally speaking, if that's the case, we inform the owners that the application cannot be accepted. I've been out on leave, but I was looking at the property record this morning, and it looks like there's been a little bit of a history with this property. I myself have only been working with the owners since May of 2021, but it appears that a previous owner did have an accessory dwelling unit -- or sorry. Pardon me --10 registered living unit, and so that is correct. But I 11 cannot speak to what the registered living unit requirements 12 were, or what the measurements were. But it looks like the 13 Office of Landlord Tenant received a complaint in 2016 from 14 the tenants, and at that point we became aware that the 15 property had sold and communication was sent. And then it 16 looks like -- again, I'm going off the case notes here. I 17 was not involved until a later date. It looks like the 18 owners were informed early that the property was too large 19 as far back as 2018, and that they could possibly modify the 20 unit to apply again. So they did apply in 2021. And after 21 speaking with the supervisor, Mr. Eloisa, he said that we 22 could allow the inspection to proceed to verify the size of 23 the apartment, and then they could appeal the denial at that 24 point, if they wish to. So that was what we did.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. Mr. Tzeng, Ms. Lai, do you have

25

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any questions for Mr. Johnson or Mr. Bouma, or anything additional that you want to add after hearing that?

3 MR. TZENG: No.

MS. LAI: No.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. All right. So just for

everybody's education and information --

MS. LAI: I'm sorry, Ms. Byrne.

8 MS. BYRNE: Sure. Go ahead.

MS. LAI: I was not aware of a complaint.

10 MR. TZENG: Oh, I can speak to that. There was a

11 complaint. It was a former tenant with the deposit, the

12 security deposit.

13 MS. LAI: Oh.

14 MR. TZENG: He moved out.

15 MS. LAI: Okay.

16 MR. TZENG: Yeah.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. All right. So you guys are

18 going to be landlords here potentially, for, you know, the

19 foreseeable future. Things that you need to know and things

20 that you need to understand. You have to act timely. You

21 really a hundred percent do. And when there's a deadline in

22 there, there's no modification to that. Building codes,

23 housing codes, they're pretty straightforward. They're

24 pretty strict. So when Mr. Johnson said he could not grant

25 you a waiver, he's a hundred percent right on that. And

26

1 when Mr. Bouma talks about, like, the history and what the

2 law might have been then and what the law is now, it's --

3 because I know you guys say -- you talk about equity, and

4 that just doesn't seem right, it just doesn't seem fair,

5 right, that this was built this way, it was an RLU, it

6 doesn't really impact -- you know, Mr. Johnson's like it

doesn't matter to them whether it's a hundred square feet or

not, but the code is what the code is. Right?

One of the reasons why I e-mailed you is because 10 what OZA -- what I'm looking for in order to determine your

11 objection is what, if anything, did housing and licensing do

12 incorrectly. Right? So your objection would be that they

13 were wrong, or there's something there, but that's not

14 necessarily the case. Right?

15 So your path -- and sometimes the best way to

16 explain how codes are set up is to think about -- and it's

17 the holidays, right? Are you familiar with Russian nesting

18 dolls? Right? You have the -- how like all the dolls are

19 inside, and you can have like a blue set, a red set, and a

20 green set. Right? And then as you go down, you go down

21 three or four layers of each one of those dolls, then, you

22 know, you could go up to the almost second small one, and

23 they would connect in some way. Right? So when we look at 23 when I look at the code, OZA can't grant you a waiver. OZA

24 the housing code, right, and it says that you can have an

25 accessory dwelling unit if you meet X, and it incorporates

that 59.3.3.3A2Ciii, that 59 takes you from that accessory

dwelling unit in the housing code and puts you into the

zoning code. There's a section in the zoning code, Section

7.3.2 variance, and what it says is the Board of Appeals may

grant a variance from any requirements of this chapter. The

square footage requirement for the ADO comes from the zoning

code. Right? Because Mr. Johnson has his code. And then

it says go to the red Russian nesting doll. Right? He's

the blue Russian nesting doll. Go to this section in the

10 red Russian nesting doll, match it up, right, make sure that

11 it works. So the Board of Appeals has the ability to grant

12 you a variance to square footage. So when you talk about

13 history, equity, uniqueness, that's a variance factor.

14 That's not a factor of me looking at what Mr. Johnson did,

15 looking at what Mr. Bourna did, looking at the facts and the

16 history to see did housing and licensing not connect the

17 dots correctly, or, you know, is your objection valid

18 because of something that happened on their end. Right?

19 What you have, or what you've explained to me is a unique

20 circumstance in that this property was built prior to your

21 ownership and was a previously-licensed RLU.

But you heard from Mr. Bourna that his records

23 reflect back in 2018 that you guys were, like, well, you

24 could modify it to slice off 100 square feet, that -- if

25 there was a way around that, that would not be considered

the accessory dwelling living space. And then you would

apply that way. Right? That's one way to reduce it. And

then you fit, right? You fit in the existing doll. If you

want the 1,300 square feet, OZA can't give that to you.

5 Right?

6 So I'm the hearing officer, and I can't give you 7 legal advice. Mr. Johnson can't give you any kind of legal

advice. Mr. Bouma can't give you any kind of legal advice.

They can tell you in their bucket what they look at and how

10 it impacts you. Okay? So one of the reasons why I asked if

11 you had applied to the Board of Appeals for a variance is

12 because, if you get that variance, then Mr. Johnson can look

13 at that and say, okay, this is the one thing that will get

14 me around this requirement. Right? So if the BMZA comes

15 back and provides to Mr. Bouma a variance, right, he's still

16 going to -- Mr. Johnson's still going to go out and is going

17 to measure it at 1,300 square feet. If the Board of Appeals

18 grants you relief from the 1,200 square-foot requirement,

19 that's a factor into whether or not you get your license.

20 Right? Because now there is something outside the letter of

21 the law. So when Mr. Johnson said I can't grant you a

22 waiver and Mr. Bouma said I can't grant you a waiver, well,

24 can grant you a parking waiver. Right? That's very clear

25 in the code. But any -- only the Board of Appeals can grant

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29

a variance to any condition in Chapter 59, right, the red Russian nesting doll. Right? That's where your square

footage comes in. Okay?

So things that for me were problematic is that it took you guys a long time to do this, right, that you did let it drop off of your radar. And I get it, things get

7 busy. But you have to understand that Mr. Johnson is very

- 8 confined in what he can do. Mr. Bouma is very confined in
- 9 what he can do. Right? There is no such thing as equity or
- 10 waiver for them. All right? And like I don't know -- I
- 11 don't even think equity is the right term. It's uniqueness.
- 12 Right? They have to look -- you have to fit in the box.
- 13 Right? And if you don't fit in the box, they can't help you
- 14 get there. There's another way to do that.
- So, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Bouma, does that -- what I 16 just explained, does that make sense to you both, or like,
- 17 you know, do you agree with me a hundred percent here? 18 MR. JOHNSON: Dave here. Yes, that rings true
- 19 with me. And from my perspective in this case, it certainly 20 has for sure. Thank you.
- 21 MS. BYRNE: All right.
- MR. BOUMA: This is Mr. Bouma. Yes. I would just
- 23 say that that's true. There's only so much that I can or
- 24 can't do. I have to do what, you know, the regulations
- 25 allow or don't allow.

1 is form and documentation. They may or may not tell you

- 2 that you need certain things or not. A lot of people get
- 3 variances -- and Mr. Johnson and Mr. Bouma probably see this
- 4 all the time -- for dwellings outside. Right? So the
- 5 typical variance would be if you were to build this addition
- 6 today and, say, you got too close to your lot line. Right?
- 7 You would need a variance to allow the construction of the
- 8 addition, and you would have to show why you deserve that
- 9 variance, what's unique about this particular property,
- 10 what's justified about this or that. So what you explained
- 11 to me today as to why you asked for the relief from the
- 12 objection was the history of your property, the uniqueness
- 13 in the construction, how it was created, how it was
- 14 originally licensed as an RLU. All of that is relevant to
- 15 whether or not 1,300 square feet is a big deal. Right?
- 16 That 100 square foot variance, are you entitled to that 100
- 17 square-foot variance. So what I heard Mr. Bourna say was, if
- 18 you shaved a hundred feet off, somehow, somewhere, blocked
- 19 it off, if you have like, a laundry room that's there, you
- 20 know, like -- you know, what's worth it to -- like what's
- 21 the path of least resistance for you, because right now the
- 22 only thing standing in your way of this license is a hundred
- 23 square feet. So if you want to keep it exactly the same,
- 24 you're going to have to ask for a variance from the Board of
- 25 Appeals, and you are going to have to follow their lead.

30

MS. BYRNE: Right. And so that's where -- those

- 2 guys are operating within their function. And it's
- 3 probably -- I think the hard part here is there's no bright
- 4 line that connects you, right, and that you would ordinarily
- 5 come here. But please know anything that comes into Chapter
- 6 59 that you need some kind of variance to, or you need a
- 7 number altered so to speak, other than for parking for ADU,
- 8 that falls within the Board of Appeals. So can you tell me
- 9 where you are, if anywhere, in your application for the
- 10 Board of Appeals for a variance to square footage?
- MS. LAI: Yeah. I mean, we've begun to pull
- 12 together the required documentation. It's a challenge
- 13 because not all of the things seem to apply. For example,
- 14 there's a certification relating to the surrounding parcels.
- 15 And I think that hopefully we can get in touch with someone
- 16 there to walk through what they need and what they don't. A
- 17 lot of these things just don't apply to our situation, and
- 18 so it's really -- it's a little bit daunting because it's
- 19 not clear whether they will be able to help us and direct us 20 in the right direction.
- 21 MS. BYRNE: Well, they will. They will be able to
- 22 tell you, because I'm reading directly from the code. So
- 23 it's Chapter 59.7.3.2 variance. A, the Board of Appeals may
- 24 grant a variance from any requirement of this chapter.
- 25 Right? And then B gets into application requirements, which

- Now Barbara Jay is the executive director. She's got staff over there as well. The Board of Appeals was copied on
- 3 those e-mails. You can e-mail them directly and say I see
- 4 all of these things, this is what we're asking; do you
 - really need all of these things. Right?

So, you know, I would hop on that as soon as

- possible, because what I'm going to do, I'm going to leave
- 8 this open. All right? I'm going to leave this whole appeal
- 9 open, because right now I've just explained to you that I
- 10 can't grant you the relief that you're seeking. Right? I
- 11 don't have the ability to grant you a variance to square
- 12 footage. I'm limited in did housing or licensing make some
- 13 kind of error. Right? But I think we've all agreed that
- 14 they haven't made an error. I'm not even going to go into,
- 15 you know, the first thing that could be the fatal flaw,
- 16 which is the fact that it took you so many months to
- 17 actually file your appeal. So what I'm going to do is I'm
- 18 just going to leave this open. I'm not going to make a
- 19 decision. I'm not going to close the record. All right?
- 20 And I want you to apply -- you either need to apply to the
- 21 board. You can withdraw your appeal and shave 100 feet
- 22 off -- and Mr. Bouma and Mr. Johnson, please tell me if I'm
- 23 saying anything incorrectly with your application process.
- 24 So if they were to shave 100 feet off, would they reapply,
- 25 or ask for a reinspection? Like how does that work.

36

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MR. JOHNSON: I would defer to Mr. Bouma on that. My anticipation is that it would simply be a reinspection at

this point, at least from my perspective.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. Mr. Bouma?

5 MR. BOUMA: To be completely honest with you, I am not sure. I would have to look. I believe they might have

to reapply at this point because I believe we did issue a

formal denial of the application.

MS. BYRNE: Okay. That makes sense to me from 10 flow purposes, that you would have to reapply. What I want

11 to see is -- Mr. Bouma, is there any waiting period at all

12 for anything like that, or can you apply as many times as

13 you want and get accepted or rejected as many times as you

14 want without penalty?

MR. BOUMA: To my knowledge, there is no waiting 15 16 period. There's just the filing fee that, you know, would

17 not be refunded if it's denied.

18 MS. BYRNE: Okay. All right. So then I think no

19 matter what, from what I'm hearing from Mr. Bouma, is you're

20 going to have to reapply because you've gotten a denial.

21 I've just explained to you that I actually can't provide you

22 the relief that you're seeking. So whether you decide to

23 shave off 100 feet, or whether you decide to get a variance

24 from the Board of Appeals and then go back and reapply with

25 this, the Board said I could have this 100 square feet, you

1 know, then that impacts what Mr. Bouma can do and that

2 impacts what Mr. Johnson, you know, what he's --

3 Mr. Johnson's still going to see 1,300 square feet if he

4 goes out there and you make no changes. Right? But if the

5 Board grants you this 100 square-foot variance, then that

6 impacts what Mr. Bouma can do. Right?

So what I'm going to do is I'm going to leave this

8 open, this record open for 30 days. Okay? You guys need to

9 move it, right, and make some decisions here in the next

10 couple of weeks. If you haven't applied to the BMZA or to

11 the Board, or you haven't withdrawn your application to us,

12 right, for this appeal, then I will render a decision.

13 Okay? If you have applied to the Board, then I will extend

14 my decision until after the Board renders theirs. Does that

15 make sense.

MR. TZENG: Absolutely. 16

17 MS. LAI: Yeah.

MS. BYRNE: Yeah. Go ahead. 18

MR. TZENG: As a followup, if we get a variance

20 from the Board of Appeals and this hearing is still open,

21 what impact does that have on the process you mentioned

22 earlier about reapplying to Mr. Bouma for -- we still have

23 to do that?

24 MS. BYRNE: You would 100 percent still have to do

25 that. So if the Board grants the variance, there's like --

1 there's no reopening the old process. Right? So what I --

really at the end of the day what I would end up doing is

saying -- is redirecting you back to them through my opinion

to grant that, or, you know, to review the application if

the Board granted that 100 square --

MR. TZENG: Sure.

MS. BYRNE: I mean, it's -- the hard part is I'm

really, really limited in what I can do here.

MR. TZENG: Right. Do you anticipate our having a

10 followup hearing in order to close out that step?

MS. BYRNE: No, because what I'll do is I'll leave 11

12 it open. I'll leave the record open 30 days for you to make

13 this decision, whether you're going to appeal to the Board

14 or whether you're going to shave 100 square feet off and

15 reapply. Right? If you make a decision to appeal to the

16 Board, I will leave it open until the decision of the Board

17 is rendered, and that will be an exhibit you can submit to

18 me.

19 MR. TZENG: Okay. And the stakes involved there

20 are whether your decision is a redirect for us to reapply,

21 or --

4

2.2. MS. BYRNE: Correct.

23 MR. TZENG: -- rejection, I guess?

24 MS. BYRNE: Right. Right. So if the

25 Board says no, then it's a hard no. If the board says yes,

34

then I will redirect you to apply, given this instance. So

at the end of the day, one's a denial and one's a redirect.

3 MR. TZENG: Got it.

MS. BYRNE: That's where you are. So you have

some choices to make here in the next few days. But if I

don't see an application within 30 days to the Board, I'll

just go ahead and write my decision based on the information

that I have. All right? But, again, this does not impact

you for reapplying in the future based on what you decide to

10 do at the Board, or whether or not you decide to shave 100

11 feet off.

12 MR. TZENG: Great.

13 MS. BYRNE: All right. Anything else anybody

14 would like to say?

15 MR. TZENG: Well, we really appreciate everyone's

16 time. And thank you, Ms. Byrne, your explanation was

17 immensely helpful about the different paths.

MS. LAI: Yeah. Thank you very much to everyone.

19 This has been an educational process.

20 MS. BYRNE: Yeah. Just, you know, Mr. Bouma is

21 super helpful. Mr. Johnson's super helpful. They know what

22 they're doing. You know, and as a landlord, there's so much

23 out there that you just have to be on the lookout for. But

24 if I can give you one piece of advice, if there's a day that

25 you have to do something by, please do it. Don't like --

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December 12, 2022 39 that -- you know, they put the days in there for a reason, CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER - NOTARY PUBLIC and it's usually to do something by. And, yeah, just --I, Joe Lorete, the officer before whom the those things are fatal. Like sometimes you don't even get foregoing deposition was taken, do hereby certify that said to make your argument if you don't hit the date. Okay? proceedings were electronically recorded by me; and that I MS. LAI: We appreciate your understanding. am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of MR. TZENG: Yeah. We appreciate it. 6 the parties to this case and have no interest, financial or MS. BYRNE: Sure. All right. Well, I appreciate otherwise, in its outcome. 8 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my that. Mr. Lorete, before we jump off, did you get all hand and affixed my notarial seal this 19th day of December, 10 the spellings that you needed? 10 THE REPORTER: Yes. I'm pretty much good on 11 11 12 spelling. 12 Joe Lorete 13 MS. BYRNE: Excellent. All right. All right. I 13 14 appreciate everyone's time. Like I said, I will leave this 14 Joe Lorete, Notary Public 15 record open. So 30 days from today would technically be 15 For the State of Maryland 16 the -- we don't count today, so it would be the -- there's 16 17 31 days in December, so it will be Thursday, January --17 18 we'll just do Thursday, January 12 because we start counting 18 19 the next day, and there's 31 days. Right? Yeah. 19 MR. TZENG: And they're calendar days, not 20 21 business days? 21 MS. BYRNE: Right. Calendar days. Always 22 23 calendar days. All right. So you have my e-mail. So 23 24 please e-mail me, you know, by the 12th to verify if you put 24 25 the application in, or if you wish to withdraw your 25 40 1 objection to this body because if you -- like I said, if you CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER 1 2 choose to shave off 100 square feet somehow, then you're I, Nicole Mastrosimone, do hereby certify that just starting over with a new square footage. Okay? So the foregoing transcript is a true and correct record of the 4 those are the two things I'll be looking for, either the recorded proceedings; that said proceedings were transcribed appeal, or a withdrawal. And then, if I get nothing, then to the best of my ability from the audio recording and I'm going to write the decision. supporting information; and that I am neither counsel for, MR. TZENG: Understood. Thank you. related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this case 8 MS. BYRNE: All right. Sounds good. Thank you and have no interest, financial or otherwise, in its 9 all. 9 outcome. 10 10 MS. LAI: Thank you very much. (The hearing concluded at 10:24 a.m.) 11 11 12 Nicole Mastrosimone 13 13 14 14 15 15 Nicole Mastrosimone 16 December 19, 2022 16 17 17 18 18 19 19 20 20 21 21 22 22 23 23 24 24 25 25

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