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**HOUSE BILL NO. 1849**

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE  
(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Local Government  
on February 17, 2015)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Marshall, D.W.)

A *BILL to amend and reenact §§ 15.2-2201, 15.2-2308, 15.2-2309, and 15.2-2314 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 15.2-2308.1, relating to variances.*

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That §§ 15.2-2201, 15.2-2308, 15.2-2309, and 15.2-2314 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 15.2-2308.1 as follows:**

**§ 15.2-2201. Definitions.**

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Affordable housing" means, as a guideline, housing that is affordable to households with incomes at or below the area median income, provided that the occupant pays no more than thirty percent of his gross income for gross housing costs, including utilities. For the purpose of administering affordable dwelling unit ordinances authorized by this chapter, local governments may establish individual definitions of affordable housing and affordable dwelling units including determination of the appropriate percent of area median income and percent of gross income.

"Conditional zoning" means, as part of classifying land within a locality into areas and districts by legislative action, the allowing of reasonable conditions governing the use of such property, such conditions being in addition to, or modification of the regulations provided for a particular zoning district or zone by the overall zoning ordinance.

"Development" means a tract of land developed or to be developed as a unit under single ownership or unified control which is to be used for any business or industrial purpose or is to contain three or more residential dwelling units. The term "development" shall not be construed to include any tract of land which will be principally devoted to agricultural production.

"Historic area" means an area containing one or more buildings or places in which historic events occurred or having special public value because of notable architectural, archaeological or other features relating to the cultural or artistic heritage of the community, of such significance as to warrant conservation and preservation.

"Incentive zoning" means the use of bonuses in the form of increased project density or other benefits to a developer in return for the developer providing certain features, design elements, uses, services, or amenities desired by the locality, including but not limited to, site design incorporating principles of new urbanism and traditional neighborhood development, environmentally sustainable and energy-efficient building design, affordable housing creation and preservation, and historical preservation, as part of the development.

"Local planning commission" means a municipal planning commission or a county planning commission.

"Military installation" means a base, camp, post, station, yard, center, homeport facility for any ship, or other activity under jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Defense, including any leased facility, or any land or interest in land owned by the Commonwealth and administered by the Adjutant General of Virginia or the Virginia Department of Military Affairs. "Military installation" does not include any facility used primarily for civil works, rivers and harbors projects, or flood control projects.

"Mixed use development" means property that incorporates two or more different uses, and may include a variety of housing types, within a single development.

"Official map" means a map of legally established and proposed public streets, waterways, and public areas adopted by a locality in accordance with the provisions of Article 4 (§ 15.2-2233 et seq.) hereof.

"Planned unit development" means a form of development characterized by unified site design for a variety of housing types and densities, clustering of buildings, common open space, and a mix of building types and land uses in which project planning and density calculation are performed for the entire development rather than on an individual lot basis.

"Planning district commission" means a regional planning agency chartered under the provisions of Chapter 42 (§ 15.2-4200 et seq.) of this title.

"Plat" or "plat of subdivision" means the schematic representation of land divided or to be divided and information in accordance with the provisions of §§ 15.2-2241, 15.2-2242, 15.2-2258, 15.2-2262, and 15.2-2264, and other applicable statutes.

"Preliminary subdivision plat" means the proposed schematic representation of development or

60 subdivision that establishes how the provisions of §§ 15.2-2241 and 15.2-2242, and other applicable  
61 statutes will be achieved.

62 "Resident curator" means a person, firm, or corporation that leases or otherwise contracts to manage,  
63 preserve, maintain, operate, or reside in a historic property in accordance with the provisions of  
64 § 15.2-2306 and other applicable statutes.

65 "Site plan" means the proposal for a development or a subdivision including all covenants, grants or  
66 easements and other conditions relating to use, location and bulk of buildings, density of development,  
67 common open space, public facilities and such other information as required by the subdivision  
68 ordinance to which the proposed development or subdivision is subject.

69 "Special exception" means a special use, that is a use not permitted in a particular district except by  
70 a special use permit granted under the provisions of this chapter and any zoning ordinances adopted  
71 herewith.

72 "Street" means highway, street, avenue, boulevard, road, lane, alley, or any public way.

73 "Subdivision," unless otherwise defined in an ordinance adopted pursuant to § 15.2-2240, means the  
74 division of a parcel of land into three or more lots or parcels of less than five acres each for the purpose  
75 of transfer of ownership or building development, or, if a new street is involved in such division, any  
76 division of a parcel of land. The term includes resubdivision and, when appropriate to the context, shall  
77 relate to the process of subdividing or to the land subdivided and solely for the purpose of recordation  
78 of any single division of land into two lots or parcels, a plat of such division shall be submitted for  
79 approval in accordance with § 15.2-2258.

80 "Variance" means, in the application of a zoning ordinance, a reasonable deviation from those  
81 provisions regulating the *shape*, size, or area of a lot or parcel of land; or the size, *height*, area, bulk, or  
82 location of a building or structure when the strict application of the ordinance would ~~result in~~  
83 ~~unnecessary or unreasonable hardship to the property owner~~ *unreasonably restrict the utilization of the*  
84 *property*, and such need for a variance would not be shared generally by other properties, and provided  
85 such variance is not contrary to the ~~intended spirit and purpose of the ordinance; and would result in~~  
86 ~~substantial justice being done~~. It shall not include a change in use, which change shall be accomplished  
87 by a rezoning or by a conditional zoning.

88 "Zoning" or "to zone" means the process of classifying land within a locality into areas and districts,  
89 such areas and districts being generally referred to as "zones," by legislative action and the prescribing  
90 and application in each area and district of regulations concerning building and structure designs,  
91 building and structure placement and uses to which land, buildings and structures within such designated  
92 areas and districts may be put.

93 **§ 15.2-2308. Boards of zoning appeals to be created; membership, organization, etc.**

94 A. Every locality that has enacted or enacts a zoning ordinance pursuant to this chapter or prior  
95 enabling laws, shall establish a board of zoning appeals that shall consist of either five or seven  
96 residents of the locality, appointed by the circuit court for the locality. Boards of zoning appeals for a  
97 locality within the fifteenth or nineteenth judicial circuit may be appointed by the chief judge or his  
98 designated judge or judges in their respective circuit, upon concurrence of such locality. Their terms of  
99 office shall be for five years each except that original appointments shall be made for such terms that  
100 the term of one member shall expire each year. The secretary of the board shall notify the court at least  
101 thirty days in advance of the expiration of any term of office, and shall also notify the court promptly if  
102 any vacancy occurs. Appointments to fill vacancies shall be only for the unexpired portion of the term.  
103 Members may be reappointed to succeed themselves. Members of the board shall hold no other public  
104 office in the locality except that one may be a member of the local planning commission. A member  
105 whose term expires shall continue to serve until his successor is appointed and qualifies. The circuit  
106 court for the City of Chesapeake and the Circuit Court for the City of Hampton shall appoint at least  
107 one but not more than three alternates to the board of zoning appeals. At the request of the local  
108 governing body, the circuit court for any other locality may appoint not more than three alternates to the  
109 board of zoning appeals. The qualifications, terms and compensation of alternate members shall be the  
110 same as those of regular members. A regular member when he knows he will be absent from or will  
111 have to abstain from any application at a meeting shall notify the chairman twenty-four hours prior to  
112 the meeting of such fact. The chairman shall select an alternate to serve in the absent or abstaining  
113 member's place and the records of the board shall so note. Such alternate member may vote on any  
114 application in which a regular member abstains.

115 B. Localities may, by ordinances enacted in each jurisdiction, create a joint board of zoning appeals  
116 that shall consist of two members appointed from among the residents of each participating jurisdiction  
117 by the circuit court for each county or city, plus one member from the area at large to be appointed by  
118 the circuit court or jointly by such courts if more than one, having jurisdiction in the area. The term of  
119 office of each member shall be five years except that of the two members first appointed from each  
120 jurisdiction, the term of one shall be for two years and of the other, four years. Vacancies shall be filled  
121 for the unexpired terms. In other respects, joint boards of zoning appeals shall be governed by all other

provisions of this article.

C. With the exception of its secretary and the alternates, the board shall elect from its own membership its officers who shall serve annual terms as such and may succeed themselves. The board may elect as its secretary either one of its members or a qualified individual who is not a member of the board, excluding the alternate members. A secretary who is not a member of the board shall not be entitled to vote on matters before the board. *For Notwithstanding any other provision of law, general or special, for the conduct of any hearing, a quorum shall be not less than a majority of all the members of the board and the board shall offer an equal amount of time in a hearing on the case to the applicant, appellant or other person aggrieved under § 15.2-2314, and the staff of the local governing body.* Except for matters governed by § 15.2-2312, no action of the board shall be valid unless authorized by a majority vote of those present and voting. The board may make, alter and rescind rules and forms for its procedures, consistent with ordinances of the locality and general laws of the Commonwealth. The board shall keep a full public record of its proceedings and shall submit a report of its activities to the governing body or bodies at least once each year.

D. Within the limits of funds appropriated by the governing body, the board may employ or contract for secretaries, clerks, legal counsel, consultants, and other technical and clerical services. Members of the board may receive such compensation as may be authorized by the respective governing bodies. Any board member or alternate may be removed for malfeasance, misfeasance or nonfeasance in office, or for other just cause, by the court that appointed him, after a hearing held after at least fifteen days' notice.

E. Notwithstanding any contrary provisions of this section, in the City of Virginia Beach, members of the board shall be appointed by the governing body. The governing body of such city shall also appoint at least one but not more than three alternates to the board.

*§ 15.2-2308.1. Boards of zoning appeals, ex parte communications, proceedings.*

A. *The non-legal staff of the governing body may have ex parte communications with a member of the board prior to the hearing but may not discuss the facts or law relative to a particular case. The applicant, landowner or his agent or attorney may have ex parte communications with a member of the board prior to the hearing but may not discuss the facts or law relative to a particular case. If any ex parte discussion of facts or law in fact occurs, the party engaging in such communication shall inform the other party as soon as practicable and advise the other party of the substance of such communication. For purposes of this section, regardless of whether all parties participate, ex parte communications shall not include (i) discussions as part of a public meeting or (ii) discussions prior to a public meeting to which staff of the governing body, the applicant, landowner or his agent or attorney are all invited.*

B. *Any materials relating to a particular case, including a staff recommendation or report furnished to a member of the board, shall be made available without cost to such applicant, appellant or other person aggrieved under § 15.2-2314, as soon as practicable thereafter, but in no event less than three business days of providing such materials to a member of the board. If the applicant, appellant or other person aggrieved under § 15.2-2314 requests additional documents or materials be provided by the locality other than those materials provided to the board, such request shall be made pursuant to § 2.2-3704. Any such materials furnished to a member of the board shall also be made available for public inspection pursuant to subsection F of § 2.2-3707.*

C. *For the purposes of this section, "non-legal staff of the governing body" means any staff who is not in the office of the attorney for the locality, or for the board, or who is appointed by special law or pursuant to § 15.2-1542. Nothing in this section shall preclude the board from having ex parte communications with any attorney or staff of any attorney where such communication is protected by the attorney-client privilege or other similar privilege or protection of confidentiality.*

D. *This section shall not apply to cases where an application for a special exception has been filed pursuant to subdivision 6 of § 15.2-2309,*

*§ 15.2-2309. Powers and duties of boards of zoning appeals.*

Boards of zoning appeals shall have the following powers and duties:

1. To hear and decide appeals from any order, requirement, decision, or determination made by an administrative officer in the administration or enforcement of this article or of any ordinance adopted pursuant thereto. The decision on such appeal shall be based on the board's judgment of whether the administrative officer was correct. *The determination of the administrative officer shall be presumed to be correct. At a hearing on an appeal, the administrative officer shall explain the basis for his determination after which the appellant has the burden of proof to rebut such presumption of correctness by a preponderance of the evidence. The board shall consider the purpose and intent of any applicable ordinances, laws, and regulations in making its decision. For purposes of this section, determination means any order, requirement, decision or determination made by an administrative officer. Any appeal of a determination to the board shall be in compliance with this section,*

183 notwithstanding any other provision of law, general or special.

184 2. To authorize ~~Notwithstanding any other provision of law, general or special, to grant~~ upon appeal  
185 or original application in specific cases such a variance as defined in § 15.2-2201 ~~from the terms of the~~  
186 ordinance as will not be contrary to the public interest, when, owing to special conditions a literal  
187 enforcement of the provisions will result in unnecessary hardship; provided that the spirit of the  
188 ordinance shall be observed and substantial justice done, as follows: ~~the burden of proof shall be on the~~  
189 applicant for a variance to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that his application meets the  
190 standard for a variance as defined in § 15.2-2201 and the criteria set out in this section.

191 ~~When a property owner can show that his~~ Notwithstanding any other provision of law, general or  
192 special, a variance shall be granted if the evidence shows that the strict application of the terms of the  
193 ordinance would unreasonably restrict the utilization of the property or that the granting of the variance  
194 would alleviate a hardship due to a physical condition relating to the property or improvements thereon  
195 at the time of the effective date of the ordinance, and (i) the property interest for which the variance is  
196 being requested was acquired in good faith and where by reason of the exceptional and any hardship  
197 was not created by the applicant for the variance; ~~narrowness, shallowness, size, or shape of a specific~~  
198 piece of property at the time of the effective date of the ordinance, or where by reason of exceptional  
199 topographic conditions or other extraordinary situation or condition of the piece of property, or of the  
200 condition, situation, or development of property immediately adjacent thereto, the strict application of  
201 the terms of the ordinance would effectively prohibit or unreasonably restrict the utilization of the  
202 property or where the board is satisfied, upon the evidence heard by it, that the granting of the variance  
203 will alleviate a clearly demonstrable hardship, as distinguished from a special privilege or convenience  
204 sought by the applicant, provided that all variances shall be in harmony with the intended spirit and  
205 purpose of the ordinance. (ii) the granting of the variance will not be of substantial detriment to  
206 adjacent property and nearby properties in the proximity of that geographical area; (iii) the condition  
207 or situation of the property concerned is not of so general or recurring a nature as to make reasonably  
208 practicable the formulation of a general regulation to be adopted as an amendment to the ordinance;  
209 (iv) the granting of the variance does not result in a use that is not otherwise permitted on such  
210 property or a change in the zoning classification of the property; and (v) the relief or remedy sought by  
211 the variance application is not available through a special exception process that is authorized in the  
212 ordinance pursuant to subdivision 6 of § 15.2-2309 or the process for modification of a zoning  
213 ordinance pursuant to subdivision A4 of § 15.2-2286 at the time of the filing of the variance application.

214 No such variance shall be authorized by the board unless it finds:

- 215 a. That the strict application of the ordinance would produce undue hardship relating to the property;  
216 b. That the hardship is not shared generally by other properties in the same zoning district and the  
217 same vicinity; and  
218 c. That the authorization of the variance will not be of substantial detriment to adjacent property and  
219 that the character of the district will not be changed by the granting of the variance.

220 No variance shall be authorized ~~considered~~ except after notice and hearing as required by  
221 § 15.2-2204. However, when giving any required notice to the owners, their agents or the occupants of  
222 abutting property and property immediately across the street or road from the property affected, the  
223 board may give such notice by first-class mail rather than by registered or certified mail.

224 No variance shall be authorized unless the board finds that the condition or situation of the property  
225 concerned is not of so general or recurring a nature as to make reasonably practicable the formulation of  
226 a general regulation to be adopted as an amendment to the ordinance.

227 In ~~authorizing~~ granting a variance, the board may impose such conditions regarding the location,  
228 character, and other features of the proposed structure or use as it may deem necessary in the public  
229 interest; and may require a guarantee or bond to ensure that the conditions imposed are being and will  
230 continue to be complied with. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, *general or special*, the  
231 property upon which a property owner has been granted a variance shall be treated as conforming for all  
232 purposes under state law and local ordinance; however, the structure permitted by the variance may not  
233 be expanded unless the expansion is within an area of the site or part of the structure for which no  
234 variance is required under the ordinance. Where the expansion is proposed within an area of the site or  
235 part of the structure for which a variance is required, the approval of an additional variance shall be  
236 required.

237 3. To hear and decide appeals from the decision of the zoning administrator after notice and hearing  
238 as provided by § 15.2-2204. However, when giving any required notice to the owners, their agents or  
239 the occupants of abutting property and property immediately across the street or road from the property  
240 affected, the board may give such notice by first-class mail rather than by registered or certified mail.

241 4. To hear and decide applications for interpretation of the district map where there is any  
242 uncertainty as to the location of a district boundary. After notice to the owners of the property affected  
243 by the question, and after public hearing with notice as required by § 15.2-2204, the board may interpret  
244 the map in such way as to carry out the intent and purpose of the ordinance for the particular section or

district in question. However, when giving any required notice to the owners, their agents or the occupants of abutting property and property immediately across the street or road from the property affected, the board may give such notice by first-class mail rather than by registered or certified mail. The board shall not have the power to change substantially the locations of district boundaries as established by ordinance.

5. No provision of this section shall be construed as granting any board the power to rezone property or to base board decisions on the merits of the purpose and intent of local ordinances duly adopted by the governing body.

6. To hear and decide applications for special exceptions as may be authorized in the ordinance. The board may impose such conditions relating to the use for which a permit is granted as it may deem necessary in the public interest, including limiting the duration of a permit, and may require a guarantee or bond to ensure that the conditions imposed are being and will continue to be complied with.

No special exception may be granted except after notice and hearing as provided by § 15.2-2204. However, when giving any required notice to the owners, their agents or the occupants of abutting property and property immediately across the street or road from the property affected, the board may give such notice by first-class mail rather than by registered or certified mail.

7. To revoke a special exception previously granted by the board of zoning appeals if the board determines that there has not been compliance with the terms or conditions of the permit. No special exception may be revoked except after notice and hearing as provided by § 15.2-2204. However, when giving any required notice to the owners, their agents or the occupants of abutting property and property immediately across the street or road from the property affected, the board may give such notice by first-class mail rather than by registered or certified mail. If a governing body reserves unto itself the right to issue special exceptions pursuant to § 15.2-2286, and, if the governing body determines that there has not been compliance with the terms and conditions of the permit, then it may also revoke special exceptions in the manner provided by this subdivision.

8. The board by resolution may fix a schedule of regular meetings, and may also fix the day or days to which any meeting shall be continued if the chairman, or vice-chairman if the chairman is unable to act, finds and declares that weather or other conditions are such that it is hazardous for members to attend the meeting. Such finding shall be communicated to the members and the press as promptly as possible. All hearings and other matters previously advertised for such meeting in accordance with § 15.2-2312 shall be conducted at the continued meeting and no further advertisement is required.

**§ 15.2-2314. Certiorari to review decision of board.**

Any person or persons jointly or severally aggrieved by any decision of the board of zoning appeals, or any aggrieved taxpayer or any officer, department, board or bureau of the locality, may file with the clerk of the circuit court for the county or city a petition that shall be styled "In Re: [date] Decision of the Board of Zoning Appeals of [locality name]" specifying the grounds on which aggrieved within 30 days after the final decision of the board.

Upon the presentation of such petition, the court shall allow a writ of certiorari to review the decision of the board of zoning appeals and shall prescribe therein the time within which a return thereto must be made and served upon the secretary of the board of zoning appeals or, if no secretary exists, the chair of the board of zoning appeals, which shall not be less than 10 days and may be extended by the court. The allowance of the writ shall not stay proceedings upon the decision appealed from, but the court may, on application, on notice to the board and on due cause shown, grant a restraining order.

Any review of a decision of the board shall not be considered an action against the board and the board shall not be a party to the proceedings; however, the board shall participate in the proceedings to the extent required by this section. The governing body, the landowner, and the applicant before the board of zoning appeals shall be necessary parties to the proceedings *in the circuit court*. The court may permit intervention by any other person or persons jointly or severally aggrieved by any decision of the board of zoning appeals.

The board of zoning appeals shall not be required to return the original papers acted upon by it but it shall be sufficient to return certified or sworn copies thereof or of the portions thereof as may be called for by the writ. The return shall concisely set forth such other facts as may be pertinent and material to show the grounds of the decision appealed from and shall be verified.

If, upon the hearing, it shall appear to the court that testimony is necessary for the proper disposition of the matter, it may take evidence or appoint a commissioner to take evidence as it may direct and report the evidence to the court with his findings of fact and conclusions of law, which shall constitute a part of the proceedings upon which the determination of the court shall be made. The court may reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, or may modify the decision brought up for review.

In the case of an appeal from the board of zoning appeals to the circuit court of an order, requirement, decision or determination of a zoning administrator or other administrative officer in the

306 administration or enforcement of any ordinance or provision of state law, or any modification of zoning  
307 requirements pursuant to § 15.2-2286, the findings and conclusions of the board of zoning appeals on  
308 questions of fact shall be presumed to be correct. The appealing party may rebut that presumption by  
309 proving by a preponderance of the evidence, including the record before the board of zoning appeals,  
310 that the board of zoning appeals erred in its decision. Any party may introduce evidence in the  
311 proceedings in the court. The court shall hear any arguments on questions of law de novo.

312 In the case of an appeal by a person of any decision of the board of zoning appeals that denied or  
313 granted an application for a variance, ~~or application for a special exception,~~ the decision of the board of  
314 zoning appeals shall be presumed to be correct. The petitioner may rebut that presumption by ~~showing~~  
315 ~~to the satisfaction of the court that the board of zoning appeals applied erroneous principles of law, or~~  
316 ~~where the discretion of the board of zoning appeals is involved, the decision of the board of zoning~~  
317 ~~appeals was plainly wrong and in violation of the purpose and intent of the zoning ordinance proving by~~  
318 ~~a preponderance of the evidence, including the record before the board of zoning appeals, that the~~  
319 ~~board of zoning appeals erred in its decision.~~

320 *In the case of an appeal by a person of any decision of the board of zoning appeals that denied or*  
321 *granted application for a special exception, the decision of the board of zoning appeals shall be*  
322 *presumed to be correct. The petitioner may rebut that presumption by showing to the satisfaction of the*  
323 *court that the board of zoning appeals applied erroneous principles of law, or where the discretion of*  
324 *the board of zoning appeals is involved, the decision of the board of zoning appeals was plainly wrong,*  
325 *was in violation of the purpose and intent of the zoning ordinance, and is not fairly debatable.*

326 *In the case of an appeal from the board of zoning appeals to the circuit court of a decision of the*  
327 *board, any party may introduce evidence in the proceedings in the court in accordance with the Rules*  
328 *of Evidence of the Supreme Court of Virginia.*

329 Costs shall not be allowed against the locality, unless it shall appear to the court that it acted in bad  
330 faith or with malice. In the event the decision of the board is affirmed and the court finds that the  
331 appeal was frivolous, the court may order the person or persons who requested the issuance of the writ  
332 of certiorari to pay the costs incurred in making the return of the record pursuant to the writ of  
333 certiorari. If the petition is withdrawn subsequent to the filing of the return, the locality may request that  
334 the court hear the matter on the question of whether the appeal was frivolous.