1. CALL TO ORDER.

Chairman Ott called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Members present: Chairman Ott, Vice-Chairman Willm, and members Courtney, Lauer, Lanham, and Murdock. Member Watson was absent. A quorum was present. Others present: Town Clerk Herrmann; Building, Planning & Zoning Director Morris, and Executive Assistant Messall.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

Chairman Ott led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL.

Mr. Lanham moved to approve the agenda. Mr. Willm seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

4. MINUTES APPROVAL.

Ms. Lauer moved to approve the October 22, 2015 minutes as submitted. Mr. Willm seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

5. APPEALS.

A. Appeal #ZA2015-06 (Deferred October 22, 2015 for further information.) Robert Gutterman requests a variance for §17-330 Yard Setbacks to allow for a handicap lift within the 20-foot yard setback, requesting a variance of 5-feet.

i. Hearing (Verbatim)

Chairman Ott: I don’t believe we need to go back through the recitals, unless staff wants to. You know we went through it. It was in our packet under the minutes approval, and where we were at that time, we were looking for approval of a variance and what we did was referred it back, because there is a request to put a stipulation on this variance that the handicapped lift be removed, if the said handicapped person no longer owns that property, and the request was if it was legal for us to do that, and I’ll ask the, the zoning director if she would read the information that she found on this. I’m going to swear you in, Ms. Morris. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?


a. Appellant Recitals. Neither Mr. Gutterman nor any representative were present.

b. Staff Recitals.

Ms. Morris: We did contact, Mr. Gutterman actually asked that I contact Amber Fagin with the Fair Housing Accessibility, which I did. They’re actually a part of the Federal Fair Housing Act through the Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. So, the variance request to allow for a handicap lift to encroach into the front yard setback at 1203 Seabridge Court was deferred during the October 22nd, 2015 BZA meeting. The board deferred the item to gather additional information regarding placing conditions on the approval. I spoke with Ms. Amber Fagin with the Fair Housing Accessibility. She said she had spoken to Mr. Gutterman, and she, and that there are cases for reasonable accommodations, but wasn’t sure if it applied to this case, since it usually involves condos,
multi-family, et cetera. She also stated she had informed Mr. Gutterman that she was not an attorney and could not give legal advice. So staff contacted the town’s legal counsel. We requested and received a legal opinion from the town’s legal counsel in regards to the matter. Mike Battle, attorney for the town, stated the board has a right to place conditions on variance approvals. In this case, the approval is to accommodate for the current owner. If the property owner decides to sell the property to someone that is handicapped, a variance should be sought from the new owner, otherwise the board can require the lift be removed.

Chairman Ott: Thank you, Ms. Morris. I’ll also add that during that hearing it was brought up, you can see in your graphs on Line 807 to 809 that the person that has this lift, it changes their height limits on their, for their flood insurance, and it works from the bottom floor to the finished floor, which would create a higher cost for flood insurance. So, for this reason also, if somebody bought the property, they need to know this, so they don’t have a surprise that they’re paying extra insurance. This property is right at the beach, too. At this time I’m gonna ask the board for a motion to, where we were, a motion to approve this variance with a stipulation to have written into the, what is that, the deed, it’ll be written on to the deed that we would ask to have this apparatus removed, if there is nobody, if there, if somebody comes in and buys the property, and they are handicapped, all they would have to do is go to the zoning department to get the variance reapproved. But, if not, we’re gonna have, we would like to have it removed. Do I have a motion on this?

iii. Q&A with Sworn Individuals. There were no questions.

ii. BUSINESS – MOTION ON APPEAL #ZA2015-06.

Ms. Lauer moved to approve the variance with a condition that the lift apparatus be removed upon sale of the property, unless the new owner is handicapped; said new owner shall seek a variance through the zoning department. Mr. Courtney seconded. Chairman Ott noted that the concrete pad could remain, only the lift mechanism would have to be removed. All voted in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Chairman Ott asked how this condition would be written onto the deed. Ms. Morris said the variance order would be recorded at the Horry County Register of Deeds office.

B. Appeal #ZA2015-07 Joseph and Robin Littleton request a variance from §17-408 under exceptions (3) of the zoning ordinance to allow for the encroachment of a garage in the rear and side yard requirements. Requesting a rear yard variance of 11-feet allowing the rear yard to be 9-feet from the required 20-foot setback and side yard variance of 2-feet allowing the side yard to be 8-feet from the required 10-foot setback.

i. Hearing (Verbatim)

Chairman Ott: Alright, at this time I’ll open up the Appeal Number ZA2015-07 Joseph and Robin Littleton requests a variance from Section 17-408 under the exceptions of number 3 of the zoning ordinance to allow for the encroachment of a garage into the rear and side yard requirements. Requesting a rear yard variance of 11-feet allowing the rear yard to be 9-feet from the required 20-foot setback and side yard variance of 2-feet allowing the side yard to be 8-feet from the required 10-foot setback.

Ms. Littleton: Sure, Robin Littleton, 412 9th Avenue South, Surfside Beach.
Chairman Ott: Would you raise your right hand, please. Do you swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?
Ms. Littleton: Yes.
Chairman Ott: Thank you very much.

Mr. Littleton: I’m Joseph Littleton, also known as Joe, 412 9th Avenue South, Surfside Beach.
Chairman Ott: Thank you very much. If you are gonna recite, I need to swear you in, too.
Mr. Littleton: I'll swear in.
Chairman Ott: Okay. Do you swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?
Mr. Littleton: I do.

a. Appellant Recitals.

Ms. Littleton: Good evening. We're here tonight to request a setback variance on our property located at 412 9th Avenue South as shown, I believe, on the paperwork that you have. Our home was constructed in 1979 to ordinances that were in place at that time and is now considered to be nonconforming. Homes built during that period were allowed to be constructed deep to the back of the property leaving a large front yard area, in our case a very small back yard area. Even with our 11,690-nine, square foot lot this manner of construction accompanied with today's ordinances makes our need for updating our home and increasing the storage and square footage very difficult. Our ultimate goal is to add the two car garage and a screen, to screen an existing deck as seen on the proposed survey, update the interior of the home and convert the attached garage to living and storage space. Our first step would be to construct a two car garage to adequately store our current vehicles and household items. So, I'll just go ahead and start answering these questions we were supposed to answer. (Note: Mr. Littleton distributed photographs to the board.) Our property is shaped in a narrow rectangle as recorded on the original subdivision plat in 1979. With current site setbacks this allows for approximately 55-feet between the side setbacks to work with. The current 20-foot rear setback, along with the placement of the dwelling allows us little to no area behind our home to place a standard size two car garage that would not interfere with the aesthetics of the property or be detrimental to the surrounding neighbors and the community. The shape of the lot and the placement of the dwelling are beyond our control as the land was platted and the dwelling built 30-years ago. The dwelling was constructed to guidelines and ordinances in place at that time leaving no consideration for expansions, additions or future changes to the ordinances, which are now in place that help to make the dwelling a nonconforming home. Most of the homes that are in close vicinity to us and that are lived in year round have two car garages or large protected parking areas to protect the owners' vehicles and other items from physical sources and from weather. Most of the surrounding homes have increased heated square footage allowing space needed for active living and storage. Our home is placed farther to the rear of the property than the other homes providing less rear yard area than the others, therefore not allowing space for additions or expansions with the current setbacks. As stated and as shown on the provided survey, the new garage would sit in the footprint of the storage building, the current storage building constructed in 1979 with the difference being the length and the width. It will not require additional encroachment upon the setbacks that are currently shown. Approval of a variance will allow us the maximum development potential on the lot without having a negative impact on the front yard area that is viewed by our neighbors, community and the passing public. It will also allow us the same reasonable consistency in size and nature as detached garages and homes in the same vicinity and zone. With, without a variance we will be prevented from updating our home to maintain a reasonable property value. With the recent downfall of the housing market we are now in steep competition to maintain property values with newly constructed homes built to modern standards and the current ordinances. In addition, we will be unable to increase our current living and storage space to that which are in line with today's family needs. Our attached garage is not wide enough to hold a small SUV [sports utility vehicle.] Currently, it holds our motorcycle. Our other vehicles are unprotected from the elements and other physical entities that could do them harm. Since 2000 when we moved in, we've had the paint on one car blister across the roof and the hood due to the constant sun damage. The dash in our truck is cracked in five places due to the sun and heat damage and must be replaced. In 2004 we had a vehicle stolen from our driveway when intruders walked into our home while we were sleeping. Our storage capacity is not enough to sustain the needs of our household. We rent a basic 10 by 20 storage unit for $172 each month to hold our household items, including bikes, seasonal decorations, and custom hurricane boards. This expense itself is an unnecessary hardship. The cost for this unit increases each year. Our home was constructed with the washer and dryer hookups in the garage. We have replaced the washer and dryer three times since 2000 due to the damage from the elements, particularly the rust in the drums. We need to add space to bring these machines that we use almost daily into our home where they are protected. Today's electronics offer us large televisions that hang on walls, cable and satellite dishes that require receivers,
sound systems with multiple speakers, DVR’s and DVD players, and game systems with different users’ parts and controllers, all of which require space. Refrigerators and other appliances have more space, more features, and more efficient, and are more efficient [sic], yet they are larger. Blenders, juicer, juicers, Magic Bullets, mixers, Keurig coffee makers, things that were not fathomable in 1979 are now a way of life and require additional space. This home can no longer be safely and enjoy, enjoyably inhabited with today’s modern standards, just as the ordinance currently in place deemed the dwelling non-conforming. We’re not just a household of two people. In our 1,470 approximate square feet, of heated square feet, we raised, finished raising our seven children, and we have nine grandchildren. All of which [sic] love to come to the beach and visit granny and grandpa. We have beach toys, bicycles, buckets, all kinds of stuff that we have to keep almost a mile and a half away in a locked storage unit. The decision not to build toward the front of the lot, which answers the last question, was made so that the aesthetic value along with the look of the surrounding properties would be similar. There are similar garages. There are similar setbacks. But, the fronts of the homes have large front yards. It is our belief that building a garage to the front of the yard would be unseemly and a detriment to the property values around us. The garage is being placed in the same footprint as the existing building, with the difference being the size. This building would be behind the existing dwelling and would not be viewed as out of place or be a detriment to the property values of our neighbors.

Mr. Joseph Littleton made comments from in front of the projector screen without using a microphone that were not recorded clearly and were unintelligible. He showed the board members the general layout of the property and where the proposed garage would be placed. (Comments from clerk’s notes; not verbatim.) He said they would use porous concrete so as not impact stormwater drainage. The proposal is for a screen porch to be placed where the deck currently exists. The only way to allow for proper ingress and egress was to place the garage in the proposed location. The current garage would be turned into living space. Best utilization of the property is the plan submitted by Walton Builders. They like living here and are not asking for anything enormous, but if the variance cannot be granted, they will have to move.

b. Staff Recitals

Director Morris: Okay, you all do have a copy of the plat. I actually on the next slide, as you saw before, I blew it up and then took the section of the back portion of the lot where they’re wanting to put the proposed garage. If you look at the plat, the setback requirements in R1, the property is currently zoned R1 and has been zoned R1 as far back as we can find. Private garages are permitted, provided they meet the minimum setback requirements, and the setback requirements for the district is 25-feet from the front property line, 10 on each side, unless it’s a corner lot, and 20-foot on the rear, and if you look at the plat, the house is pretty close to meeting those setback requirements, except on the side. One of the sides is 9.1, 9.8 and then the other side is 9.8. I’m not sure how they measured back whenever this house was built. That was ‘79. But, it does come pretty close to meeting the setback requirements. We did check with Horry County tax records, and it did show that the current owner purchased the property in 2000, and the setback requirements for garages have not been changed since that time. This is the plat that you have in front of you, the survey. The hatched area is an existing storage building. It’s gonna be removed, and they’re gonna, and they’re proposing to place the 572 square foot garage in that area. The garage according to the code has to meet the requirements of 10-feet off the side and 20-feet off the rear. We did, it was discussed whether they wanted to add to the structure, and of course, they just acknowledged that they really did not want to do that. They want to put it in the rear. I do have, I gave you a copy in your packet of the ordinance section where it does show that the garages have to meet the setback requirements. That’s under exceptions number 3, and of course, they can’t exceed a square footage of 850 square feet or 50-percent of the footprint of the building. This does not exceed that so the size would meet. It’s the setbacks that have the problem.

Chairman Ott: Thank you, Ms. Morris. Does the applicant have any rebuttal to the town’s recital? The appellants indicated from the audience that they had no rebuttal.

c. Q&A with Sworn Individuals
Chairman Ott: Then, I'll open the floor to any resident or anybody who's present that would like to make a statement. We will say that there's nobody at this time. At this time, I'll close the hearing portion and open the business portion.

B. Business

Mr. Lanham asked if the setback requirements now are the same as when the property was purchased in 2000. Ms. Morris said yes.

Chairman Ott said since the package was received, he had asked people he thought had influence on what the setbacks were and how enforcement was done. He found the same information. The R1 setbacks have remained the same for as long as everybody can remember. It was R2 and R3 that were changed, because they changed the density, and allowed the separation lots in R3.

Mr. Littleton said the home in back of him was built in 2001 by Chris Burroughs and its garage is 6-feet 8-inches from the property line. If the setbacks were the same since 2000, then that house did not meet the setbacks. Because of that, we assumed it would be okay to have our garage closer to the lot line.

Chairman Ott agreed with Mr. Littleton's comment, and said there were quite a few houses in town that were nonconforming, and he suspected there was no permit issued to build that garage.

Ms. Littleton said when they purchased the home they did not foresee changes that would necessitate changes to the home to keep it modern and livable. Had they known in 2000 what the setbacks were, (**).

Mr. Murdock said just about everywhere in the country, the setback is 10-feet.

Chairman Ott said the appeals board is charged to uphold the ordinances and try to help residents as long as they are upheld. He asked if they had considered placing the garage to another location. There was a lengthy discussion about options for garage placement. Ms. Littleton said they want to keep the back structure of the house as it exists, and that is the only place the garage would work to enable them to remodel.

Mr. Murdock said sometimes this is not a “fun” position to be in, because the board does in a sense pass judgment on our neighbors. In looking at the application of the ordinance requirements for exemptions, in particular, A, B, C, and D, he drew a distinction between somebody who bought the property in 1979 when the ordinance was not in place and the house was built, but somebody who bought the property after the ordinance was already in place, and the house was already built. It is a buyer beware situation. Mr. Murdock moved to deny the variance. Mr. Lanham seconded. All voted in favor.

MOTION CARRIED TO DENY THE VARIANCE.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS – GENERAL COMMENTS.

There were no public comments.

7. BOARD COMMENTS.

Mr. Murdock appreciated that several board members reached out to him after his father passed last month, and did the council, as well. I miss him terribly, but I do appreciate the kind comments and sentiments from my fellow board members.

Mr. Willm said regarding the Littleton’s request that the property was bought after the setbacks were established. The family, unfortunately, outgrew the home. The board cannot set variances for that kind of reason, nor can the board grant variances for increasing the property value. The four criteria make it very hard when you want to help somebody improve their home. It is a zoning issue than a feel
good issue. Setbacks are established for a reason. It is not the board’s job to dictate whether they are right or wrong. The determination has to be based on whether there are exception circumstances that would allow the board to grant a variance. Mr. Willm said he appreciated everybody on the board and what they do. The members are united and understand how things are supposed to be done, although it is an unfortunate decision sometimes.

Mr. Courtney said thank you to everybody and Happy Holidays. The board members have said it all. It is hard to be on the board and make decisions like this. He was all for improving the community, but when it comes down to it, we are governed by the standards.

Mr. Lanham wished everybody a good holiday. He said all of his relatives were coming, and he did not have enough room. (Laughter) They had to rent a house.

Chairman Ott said he wanted the board to meet in January to have a round table training session. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Thank you very much.

8. ADJOURNMENT.

Ms. Lauer moved to adjourn at 7:11 p.m. Mr. Murdock seconded. All voted in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Prepared and submitted by,

______________________________, 2016
Debra E. Herrmann, CMC, Town Clerk

Approved: _________________, 2016

_______________________________________  _______________________________________
Ron Ott, Chairman  Darrell Willm, Vice Chairman  Timothy Courtney, Board Member

_______________________________________  _______________________________________
Terri Lauer, Board Member  Guy Lanham, Board Member

_______________________________________  _______________________________________
Phil Murdock, Board Member  Holly Watson, Board Member

Note: Be advised that these minutes represent a summary of items with a verbatim transcript of the hearing section insofar as can be determined by the recording thereof and are not intended to represent a full transcript of the meeting. The audio recording of the meeting is available upon request; please provide a flash drive on which to copy the audio file. An agenda of this meeting was published pursuant to FOIA §30-4-80(a) including publishing on the town website; sent to the town’s email subscription service, and the agenda was posted outside Council Chambers. Meeting notice was also posted on the town marquee.