



City of Charleston FEMA Variance Request Process

Local, State, and Federal regulations require any structure in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) undergoing a Substantial Improvement/Damage costing 50% or more of the building's value to comply with all current floodplain requirements. The 50% figure is calculated from the cost of the building alone, not including the land, and is based on the assessed value from the Charleston County tax records, unless a certified valuation from a licensed appraiser is provided.

Buildings may apply for a historic variance from the floodplain regulations if they meet any of the following¹:

1. Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or are preliminarily determined as meeting the requirements for individual listing on the National Register;
2. Certified or preliminarily determined as contributing to the historical significance of a registered historic district;
3. Individually listed on a state inventory of historic places; or
4. Individually listed on a local inventory of historic places

(See below map of Charleston National Register Historic District and Expansion Area for reference.)

To obtain a variance from floodplain compliance, variance approval must be granted by the Building Code Board of Appeals (BCBOA). (Please note that this is different from the two Boards of Zoning Appeals, which are administered through the Zoning Division of the Department of Planning, Preservation & Sustainability.)

The following is the process for requesting a variance:

1. Email bar@charleston-sc.gov to request a FEMA Variance letter be drafted. Include the address of the request property.
2. Preservation Division staff will compile documentation on the property and send a letter requesting certification of National Register status to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). (Note: There is a \$100 BAR fee for the letter).
3. The SHPO will certify that the building is a historically significant structure and send back a signed letter via email.
4. Once received, apply for a Building Code Board of Appeals (BCBOA) meeting. The BCBOA meets at 4:30PM on the second Monday of each month.
 - a. You will need to submit to inspections@charleston-sc.gov:
 - i. A [BCBOA application](#)
 - ii. Pay the BCBOA fee (\$100)
 - iii. The SHPO letter and proof of payment of the BAR fee

¹ FEMA, "Historic Structure," <https://www.fema.gov/about/glossary/historic-structure>.

- iv. Description of proposed scope of work and the associated Building permit number
 - v. Hardship letter – justification of why the project is seeking a variance based on “hardship” as defined with the [City of Charleston Flood Hazard Prevention and Control](#) Code of Ordinances – see [Historic Variance Guidance and Hardship Letter Template](#) for more information
5. Once the variance request is complete, where applicable, submit plans to the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) or its staff for approval and obtain applicable building permits.

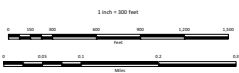
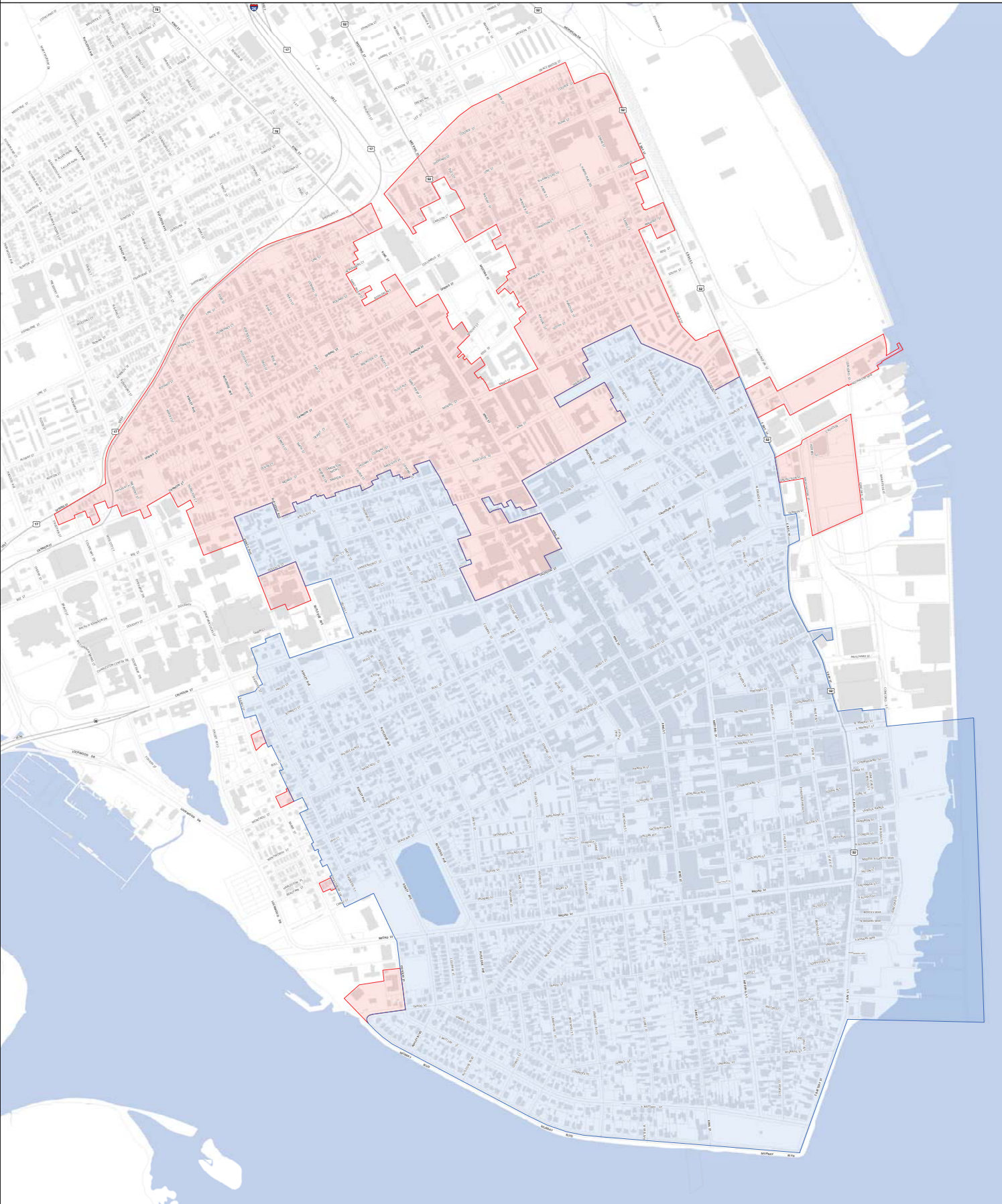
Please note: Plans for the work must be approved by the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) or its staff (where applicable). SHPO certification must be received prior to BAR approval.

Once the above steps are complete, the variance request will be heard at the next available Building Code Board of Appeals meeting. The following deadlines will apply:

- Materials submitted to Preservation Division – three (3) weeks prior to BAR meeting, or if no BAR approval is required, three (3) weeks prior to the desired BCBOA meeting date
- BCBOA Application package & fee to Building Inspections Division – by one week prior to the desired meeting date

If you have questions concerning the variance process, please contact inspections@charleston-sc.gov or floodplain-info@charleston-sc.gov. For questions concerning the certification process, please contact bar@charleston-sc.gov.

For more information, you can also visit the [Board of Architectural Review website](#), the [Floodplain Management website](#), and the [Building Code of Appeals](#) website.



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