



City of Charleston

Historic Variance Guidance and Hardship Letter Template

This document contains guidance on how qualifying historic buildings apply for a variance from flood design and construction requirements, including Substantial Improvement/Damage, in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA).

First, contact City of Charleston [floodplain management](#) and [Board of Architectural Review \(BAR\)](#) staff to initiate conversations regarding flood design and historic preservation considerations for a specific property and project. Historic variance procedures are outlined in the City of Charleston [Flood Hazard Prevention and Control](#) Code of Ordinances. City of Charleston BAR staff will coordinate with the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to verify the historic significance of the property.

Next, visit the [Building Code Board of Appeals \(BCBOA\) website](#) to download the application and view the board schedule and location specifics. Submit the BCBOA application and supporting documentation to the Building Inspections Division (inspections@charleston-sc.gov). Once materials are received and processed, you will be prompted for payment. Upon receipt of all necessary materials, the variance request will be added to the Building Code Board of Appeals (BCBOA) schedule.

The following are required to present the variance request to the Building Code Board of Appeals:

1. The BCBOA Application and respective BCBOA Fee (\$100)
2. The SHPO Letter and respective BAR Fee (\$100)
3. Description of Proposed Scope of Work and Associated Building Permit Number
4. Hardship Letter – A justification of why the project is seeking a variance based on “hardship” as defined within the City of Charleston [Flood Hazard Prevention and Control](#) Code of Ordinances

Variances shall only be issued based on the determination that they are the minimum necessary to afford relief, considering the flood hazard, and that the variance is the minimum necessary so as not to destroy the historic character and design of the building. If the variance is approved, the following conditions shall apply:

- Treated lumber and water-resistant sheetrock below the Design Flood Elevation (DFE)
- Electrical above DFE or circuits on GFCI
- HVAC above DFE or flood resistant materials below DFE
- Backflow preventer on plumbing systems below DFE
- Flood resistant materials below DFE and
- Submittal of a new elevation certificate for approval prior to scheduling final building inspections

Variances shall not be issued within any designated floodway if any increase in flood levels during the base flood discharge would result. Development allowed by a variance may affect flood risk and flood insurance premiums at the property in question.

Historic Variance Hardship Letter

Please provide a justification of why the project is seeking a variance based on “hardship” as defined within the City of Charleston [Flood Hazard Prevention and Control](#) Code of Ordinances.

Project Location:

Associated Permit Number(s):

Description of Proposed Scope of Work:

What would the scope of work be to make the building fully conform to current flood design requirements? Attach an existing elevation certificate, if available, to help show the elements of the building that are currently non-conforming.

How will flood design and construction measures that do not destroy the historic character of the building be incorporated into the project? These items must be completed as part of the proposed project in addition to any conditional approvals. Historical flood depths, storm damages and flood insurance claims may be taken into consideration.

Which items from the scope of work to make the building fully conform to current flood design requirements would destroy the historic character of the building? This is the scope of the requested variance. You may attach additional supporting documentation.

How would failure to grant the requested variance result in an exceptional hardship to the applicant or to the use of the property? Hardships are site specific and may not be based on self-imposed circumstances, such as the proposed construction of a voluntary renovation, or the personal circumstances of the applicant, such as finances.

Name:

Signature:

Date: