Zoning Boards of Adjustment

"It is a big responsibility to be the last resort for property owners on zoning variance issues without them having to enter the North Carolina court system, and all of the Board members take this responsibility and their position on the Board very seriously to make conscientious decisions." - Rick Sanderson, Chair of Charlotte Zoning Commission

Responsibilities of the Board

Zoning Boards of Adjustment serve as quasi-judicial bodies and interpret zoning regulations, unlike Planning Boards, which create these regulations. They hear appeals of decisions made by zoning administrators, interpret unclear provisions in the zoning ordinance, and judge applications by landowners requesting variance from zoning ordinances.

Joining the Board

Members are private citizens appointed by city or town councils. Boards must have at least five members. There are no requirements, but members generally have a background in planning or other aspects of local government.

Boards Across the State

The activity of these boards varies greatly throughout the state. The Board of Adjustment in Jackson County has not met in five years, whereas the Board of Adjustment in Charlotte meets frequently and requires a much greater time committment from members.

Collaboration & Community

Boards of Adjustment work to resolve issues that community members are experiencing with zoning regulations, and tend to have more direct relationship with the people of their community than some other boards may. People who want to do something with their property that otherwise wouldn't be permitted can take their case to the board, and interact directly with board members. Boards hold public meetings, in which members of the community can provide valuable input on the issues taken up by the boards.

Relevance to the Local Food System

If an individual or an organization wanted to expand a foodbank or construct a community garden, but these actions would violate the zoning ordinance, the Board of Adjustment could grant a variance that would allow them to do so.

Terms of Service

Members of the board are appointed for three-year terms. Some boards have restrictions on how many terms a member may serve, while other boards do not.

Rick Sanderson:

"The best part is that the Board doesn't know what to expect each month when we meet. Some months we think our meeting will be short with only recommendation agenda items, and then one of those items goes sideways and we have 20 people show up who are against the variance and the meeting last all day. We just never know."