



# HOUSTON COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Solid Waste ● Recycling ● Zoning  
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## How to Apply for a Variance Permit

Go to [www.beacon.schneidercorp.com](http://www.beacon.schneidercorp.com). Select Houston County, MN from the drop-down menus. Click “Property Search” and search by your name, address or Parcel ID. Click the Parcel ID concerning the project. If you are unsure which Parcel ID is correct, click “map” and select the correct location.

Click “Apply for Permit” in the burgundy colored task list at the top of the page. If you are using a smart phone you may need to click the “More” tab to find the “Apply for Permit” option. Click on [“Click Here”](#) to access the Geo Permits online applications”.

Click “Start Application” under the appropriate application. Search for your parcel by entering your Parcel ID, Property Owner, Property Address or by using the map tab to choose your parcel. New users should click “Sign up” and fill in their info to register. You’ll need to check your email for a link to verify your account before you are able to login. The “Verify Account” link should take you to a Login page. Enter your User Name and Password and click “Sign In”. In the top right corner click the words “My Dashboard”. Click the colored link under Application Number to continue with your application. Please keep a record of your username and password and make sure to save regularly to avoid losing your progress.

You will then be notified of the fees involved in the Variance process and advised to speak with Zoning staff prior to applying. Click “Next”.

Review prefilled information and fill in the remaining boxes. Avoid changing the preselected township as it is populated by the Parcel ID connected to the chosen property. If you are applying as a representative (contractor, family member or other) of the property owner be sure to use the property owner’s address in the boxes. Personal representatives should upload documentation proving their given authority (written consent or signed contract) by clicking the “Select Files” button and selecting the document to upload. Click the box stating that you understand that you are required to inform the township of your application and click “next”.

Describe your requested variance in the box provided. Click the highlighted link at the top of the page to view the Houston County Zoning Ordinance. There is a glossary in the front of the Ordinance that will direct you. You will need to find your district type (Agricultural, Residential, etc.) in the glossary. Under each district will be a list of standards (Height Standards, Front Yard Setback Standards, etc.). Find the standards that best explains variances needed and fill in the Citation of Ordinance section (Ordinance Example: 29.17 subdivision 2), the requested dimension and explain why a variance from standards is necessary. If you have any supporting documents to upload you can click the “Select File” button to attach them. Click “next”.

Explain why your request is needed by answering the following 6 questions. Variance requests must identify a hardship in complying with required standards. If you answer “No” to any of these your request will not advance as you will not have proven that your variance permit is necessary. At a minimum, please provide a single sentence explanation for each relevant finding.

**1. The variance request is in harmony with the intent and purpose of official controls.**

Explain that your request will not alter or cause disruption to the district. Remember that some hardship in complying with official controls must exist. Official controls refer to the Houston County Zoning ordinance and Land Use Plan. Does your proposal coincide with those goals?

**2. There are practical difficulties in complying with the official controls, and the proposed use of the property is reasonable. Economic considerations alone do not constitute practical difficulties.**

Explain difficulties caused by limited size of the property, characteristics of the property or by neighboring parcels that are permitted for uses requiring a setback (i.e. feedlot or mine setbacks). Cost can be a factor but should not be the primary consideration.

**3. The variance request is due to special conditions or circumstances unique to the property and not created by the property owner.**

Explain how the property’s landscape, shape or size create unique challenges that make it necessary to apply for a variance from official controls.

**4. The variance cannot be alleviated by a reasonable method other than a variance and the minimum variance which would alleviate the practical difficulty is sought.**

Explain options you have considered to avoid applying for a variance such as modifying the location, size, shape or even removal of existing obstacles and why those methods are not favorable.

**5. The variance will not alter the essential character of the locality nor substantially impair property values, or the public health, safety or welfare in the vicinity.**

Explain that your variance request will not damage your neighbor’s property value, their ability to enjoy their property or endanger anyone’s health or welfare.

**6. The request is not a use variance and shall not have the effect of allowing any use that is not allowed in the zoning district, permit a lower degree of flood protection than the regulatory flood protection elevation or permit standards lower than those required by State Law.**

Explain that your variance request will not cause any environmental issues or affect floodplain. Is it a request that can be made by reducing a setback amount? If it is not please contact the Zoning Office to determine if you request is truly an area variance.

Click “next”. Upload a drawing of your site by using the “Select File” box or use the tools on this page to draw your plan. You may need to zoom in to view your parcel. Leave site plan comments in the box provided and click “next”.

If your variance includes a building project you will also need to apply for a building permit. Your building permit application can be submitted prior to the public hearing, but will not be approved until the Board of Adjustment approves your variance request.

Check the boxes to acknowledge and agree that you understand the conditions. Type your name and draw your signature in the box below. Click "Submit".