

Narrative Statement

Property: 714–718 Pawnee Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Applicants/Owners: St. John AME Congregation

Zoning District: RT – High Density Residential District

The subject property, located at 714–718 Pawnee Street, consists of two existing structures — a church building and an adjoining parsonage — situated on a single deeded parcel. The Applicant, St. John AME Congregation, seeks to subdivide the property into two separate lots in order to convey the parsonage residence to new ownership while retaining the church building under church ownership. Under the proposed Minor Subdivision Plan, the church will be located on proposed Lot 1, and the parsonage will be located on proposed Lot 2.

Both lots are located within the RT – High Density Residential District. In connection with the proposed subdivision, the following dimensional variances are required:

Lot 2 – Parsonage (Residential Dwelling):

1. Lot Area: §1306.01(a)4 requires a minimum lot area of 4,000 square feet; proposed lot area is 2,477 square feet.
2. Lot Width: §1306.01(a)4 requires a minimum lot width of 40 feet; proposed lot width is 25 feet.
3. Side Yard Setback: §1306.01(a)4 requires a minimum side yard setback of 4 feet; proposed setback is 2.9 feet, which reflects the existing nonconforming condition of the parsonage.

Lot 1 – Church Building:

1. Side Yard Setback: §1306.01(a)4 requires a minimum side yard setback of 4 feet; proposed setback is 3 feet, which reflects the existing nonconforming condition of the church building.

The requested variances are minimal and dimensional in nature and arise from the existing configuration of the property and structures, both of which have been in place for over 100 years. The subdivision is intended solely to separate the residential parsonage from the church property for future conveyance; no new construction or physical alteration is proposed.

Strict compliance with current lot area, width, and side-yard standards would result in unnecessary hardship, as the existing structures would need to be removed or significantly altered to meet dimensional requirements, which is neither feasible nor consistent with the neighborhood character.

The proposed subdivision maintains existing building footprints and setbacks, preserves the long-established residential and institutional uses, does not increase the degree of existing nonconformity, and is consistent with the surrounding lot sizes and urban fabric of the neighborhood.

The requested relief will enable lawful subdivision of the property consistent with its historic use and physical conditions, without detriment to the public health, safety, or welfare, and in harmony with the intent of the Bethlehem Zoning Ordinance.