New York State Review Criteria

What must be proven in order to be granted a use variance?

If requesting a use variance, that is, permission to establish a use of property not otherwise permitted in the zoning district, the applicant must prove "unnecessary hardship." To prove this, State law requires the applicant to show *all* of the following:

1. that the property is incapable of earning a reasonable return on initial investment if used for any of the allowed uses in the district (actual "dollars and cents" proof must be submitted);
2. that the property is being affected by unique, or at least highly uncommon circumstances; that the variance, if granted, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood; and
3. that the hardship is not self-created.

If *any one or more* of the above factors is not proven, State law requires that the ZBA must deny the variance.

What must be proven in order to be granted an area variance?

If requesting an area variance, that is, permission to build in an otherwise restricted portion of the property (such as in the required front, side or rear yards, or above the required building height, or in excess of the lot coverage regulations), then State law requires the applicant to show that the benefit the applicant stands to receive from the variance will outweigh any burden to health, safety and welfare that may be suffered by the community. State law requires the ZBA to take the following factors into consideration in making its determination:

1. whether an undesirable change will be produced in the character of the neighborhood, or a detriment to nearby properties will be created by the granting of the area variance;
2. whether the benefit sought by the applicant can be achieved by some method which will be feasible for the applicant to pursue but would not require a variance;
3. whether the requested area variance is substantial;
4. whether the proposed variance will have an adverse effect or impact on the physical or environmental conditions in the neighborhood or district; and
5. whether an alleged difficulty is self-created.

Unlike the use variance test, the ZBA need not find in favor of the applicant on every one of the above questions. Rather, the ZBA must merely take each one of the factors into account. The ZBA may also decide that a lesser variance than the one requested would be appropriate, or may decide that there are alternatives available to the applicant which would not require a variance.