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YOUR TOOLBOX FOR SUCCESS

## ENERGY RETROFITS

New codes make energy efficiency a part of every remodeling project. Here's what you need to know to get started

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# YOUR PROJECTS

## Staying in Character

Working with a historical review board

WHEN A FORMER client asked Orfield Design & Construction, in Minnetonka, Minn., to remodel her kitchen, the choice to include a small bump-out to expand the footprint required approval from the historical review board.

The house — one part of a building containing three residences — is located in several blocks of houses dating back to the late 1800s. Some are rowhouses, while others are situated close together on narrow lots and resemble rowhouses, so the board wanted assurance that the addition would not affect the structural integrity of the building or the look of the entire group of houses.

### FILE TO ADD

Though the cantilevered kitchen addition measures just 2 feet by 5 feet, designer Laura Orfield-Skrivseth and the homeowner agreed it was worth filing for Minneapolis' certificate of appropriateness to gain that additional space to expand the tiny kitchen.

Orfield Design & Construction is familiar with filing for setback variances, but this is the first time it had filed for a certificate of appropriateness through the historical committee. **Though homeowners can choose to file variances on their own, most authorize their remodelers and builders to file and process the paperwork.**

Orfield-Skrivseth had to provide plans beyond those for a standard kitchen project, including sight lines from the street from the north, south, east, and west. She also had to include a structural engineering report for the beam support and footing on the small shed roof addition because instead of a cantilever, the committee asked her to use two footings as support. She had to notify neighbors within 350 feet, post public notices for the hearing on all sides of the block, and notify the neighborhood committee and city council members. —*Nina Patel*



### Perfect Blend

The small shed addition had to be compatible with the 1800s building, so Orfield Design & Construction reused some of the existing siding, and installed new boards to match. The company's carpenter made the exterior storm/screen and framing around the new window to match the others on the building. The addition provided much-needed space in the kitchen.

## Tips for Filing Historical Variances

- **Explore the options:** Due to the complexity and time involved, explore all your design options to make sure that filing a variance is the best solution. "We could not get everything we needed into the existing confines," designer Laura Orfield-Skrivseth says. "It was well worth going down the path of getting a historical variance."
- **Prepare for delays:** Make sure your client is aware of the delays and extra expenses involved with filing the variance. "It can delay construction up to a few months," the designer says. Bill the client for your time and fees for any special reports or processes.
- **Be patient:** "[The board] is only doing its job. There is nothing you can do to make it go faster — just turn around everything as fast as you can and give them complete paperwork. If you approach it defensively or antagonistically, it's a lot harder," Orfield-Skrivseth says. Put the bureaucracy in perspective and view it as a learning experience.
- **Attend the public hearing:** Even if you're tasked with processing the variance, recommend that the homeowner attend the public hearing. Orfield-Skrivseth says that if the homeowner attends, "it shows they care and they are serious about the application."
- **Provide detail:** With standard variances, the designer says, less is more, and she doesn't provide extra information not required by the building department. However, the opposite is true for historical boards. Most members are interested in the building's smallest detail.
- **Focus on facts:** Don't get emotional about neighbors' comments about the design or their concern about losing a view. Your client will also come at this process from an emotional place. Make sure you both stick to addressing the board's specific questions. "I usually end up repeating what is written," Orfield-Skrivseth says. "That's safest."