

# Variances to Setback, Lot Size, and Density Standards

A variance is intended to provide exceptions for unique circumstances where the usual standards may seem unreasonable. This tip sheet applies to variance requests relating to **building setbacks, building location, lot area, lot coverage, lot width, lot frontage, minimum yard space, and minimum density standards.**



## HOW DO I KNOW IF I NEED A VARIANCE?

If you can't meet the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) development requirements, you may need to apply for a variance. Conditions such as topographical constraints (steep slopes), parcel size or shape, location, character of the surrounding uses, or location of easements may warrant a variance.

**A variance may only be granted if the unique conditions that warrant the variance are not the result of actions taken by the property owner.**

If it appears you have unique circumstances that prevent compliance with development standards, the project can be discussed with a Planner by calling (253) 591-5577 or in-person at Planning and Development Services on the

3rd floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street.

## PROCESS

1. Submittal of application materials. A submittal checklist is included on the opposite side of this tip sheet. Part of the application includes a written response to certain criteria that a project needs to meet for approval, which are summarized in this tip sheet as well.
2. Once the application packet is ready, it can be submitted online at [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) or during walk-in hours with the Planning and Development Services Department, located on the 3rd Floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street, between 10:00am - 2:30pm Monday and Friday, 8:00am - 4:30pm Tuesday through Thursday.
3. After submittal, the applicant is notified if additional information is needed. If no additional information is needed, a complete application letter is mailed and the applicant is directed to pick-up a public notice sign and post it at the site.
4. A post card public notice is mailed to neighbors within 100 feet of the property in the form of a yellow postcard. The public notice includes instructions for viewing the submitted application materials on-line. The public is given 14 days to comment on the project.
5. The applicant is provided with a copy of any public comments and given a chance to provide a written response to be included in the report and decision. The report and decision will be based on applicable TMC regulations, policies, and public input.
6. Once the decision is issued, the full report is mailed to the applicant and any neighbors who have provided comments. A summary of the decision in the form of a blue postcard will be mailed to neighbors who have not provided comments.
7. A request for reconsideration or an appeal may be made within 14 days after the decision is issued. If no such request is filed within this time, the variance decision stands.
8. Approval of the variance decision allows the applicant to obtain a building permit within five years of the variance approval date.



*Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.*

*The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.

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## SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST

All application materials must be submitted in electronic PDF format on compact disc (CD) or online at [TacomaPermits.org](http://TacomaPermits.org). See [Tip Sheet G-230](#).

- Application for Land Use Permit, completed and signed
- Site Plan to scale
- Floor Plan(s) to scale
- Building Elevations (exterior view of all sides)
- Written response to criteria
- Application fee

## RESPONSE TO CRITERIA

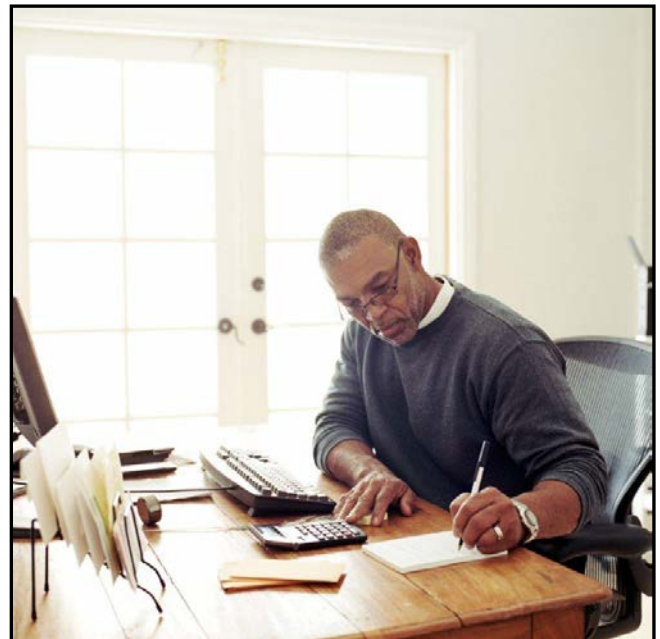
The following questions may be used as guidelines in providing information for response to the review criteria contained in the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) [Section 13.06.645.B.1 – Variance to development regulations \(bulk, area\)](#).

Applicants must describe how the variance request meets each criterion for approval. The applicant is responsible for addressing the criteria as completely as possible, providing details and important background information.

1. What are the hardships on the property, such as size, shape, location, or other conditions that make it difficult to meet zoning standards? How will zoning goals still be met with the request (such as maintaining space between structures to prevent fire hazards and ensuring yard space for neighbor privacy)? The response should clearly describe what the specific hardship is, how the applicant did not create this hardship, and why strict application of the zoning code would be unreasonable due to this hardship.
2. Is the request the minimum necessary to afford relief from the hardship that exists on your property? Explain why each aspect of the project is the minimum needed to afford relief from the code.
3. How does the project allow for a reasonable use of the property? How does the project allow for a more environmentally sensitive property design or construction than would otherwise be allowed? How do the affected neighbors feel about the project? Would approval of the request grant special privilege that is not enjoyed by other properties in the area?
4. How would the project be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan? How would the project improve the character of the neighborhood? Describe specific

aspects of the Comprehensive Plan and neighborhood characteristics that would be consistent with or improved by the project. The Comprehensive Plan is available on-line:

5. How would the project be beneficial to the public interest? Describe specific aspects of the proposal and how it would be beneficial to the public's interest.
6. Is the intent of the variance request to prevent development cost increases? Is the intent of your variance request to allow the project to follow a standardized corporate design? If not, demonstrate how the project does not follow a standard corporate design and how the purpose of your request is not primarily to avoid increased development costs.



**A decision will be issued to either approve or deny the request within 120 days from the date that the application is submitted and deemed complete.**

## APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

- Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.05 – Land use Permit Procedures](#), [13.06 - Zoning](#), [13.06.645 - Variances](#)



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