

SGA ENGINEERING, PLLC

CIVIL ENGINEERING, LAND PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, & LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

2005 BROADWAY
VANCOUVER, WA, 98663

Phone (360)993-0911
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Date: March 31st, 2020

Re: Highland Terrace Subdivision (2006-019-SUB)
Type II Administrative Variance Narrative – Revised

The Highland Terrace Subdivision proposes to subdivide 25.3 acres into 95 single-family detached lots in three phases. Individual driveways will take access off of the proposed public streets as shown on the Revised Preliminary Plat. One existing home will remain in phase I on lot 17. Two other existing homes will be removed prior to construction of phases 2 & 3. One existing home is located in the north center portion of phase I, just west of lot 51, on tax parcel 258703-000. All the parcels are zoned LDR-7.5.

The Lot Requirements for residential lots in the Urban Reserve (UR), known today as the LDR-7.5 zone, are described in title 17.25 of the La Center Municipal code. This project is vested under this older code section and is choosing to adhere to this vested code. The lot dimensions and setbacks meet the zoning requirements as follows:

- Maximum Building Height of 33 feet
- Minimum Lot width of 60 feet
- Minimum Lot depth of 90 feet
- Minimum Front Yard Setback of 20 feet
- Minimum Street Side Yard Setback of 10 feet
- Minimum Side Yard Setback of 7.5 feet (6 feet proposed with this variance)
- Minimum Rear Yard Setback of 20 feet (10 feet proposed on lot #51)
- Minimum Lot Area of 7,500 sf
- Maximum Lot Area of 15,000 sf

We are requesting two variances as described below:

Variance 1:

A reduction of interior side setbacks from 7.5 feet to 6 feet. (20% reduction on 37 lots in the development)

Variance 2:

A reduction of the rear yard setback from 20 feet to 10 feet for lot 51. (50% reduction for 1 lot)

VARIANCE 1 JUSTIFICATION

We are asking for a reduction of interior side setbacks from 7.5 feet to 6 feet (20% reduction on 37 of the 95 total lots) This reduction will apply to lots: 2,4,9-13,14-16,18-20,31,32,60-66,69-71,79-82,84,86,88,89 & 91-94. Please see the revised preliminary plat for more development information discussed in this narrative. Lots with the * Asterisk after their number are requesting the reduced setbacks.

Per LCMC 18.260.040 Approval Criteria. The review authority shall approve or approve with conditions an application for a variance if he or she finds the applicant has sustained the burden of proving that:

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(1) Unusual circumstances or conditions, such as size, shape, topography and location of an existing legal development on the site, apply to the property and/or the intended use such that the strict application of this title would deprive the owner of the subject property of rights and privileges enjoyed by owners of other properties in the vicinity in the same zone; and

(2) The granting of the variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare, or injurious to the property or improvements in the vicinity and zone in which the property is situated. [Ord. 2006-17 § 1, 2006.]

- The unusual circumstances and conditions this project has been faced with are described below.

1. The unusual circumstance impacting Highland Terrace is financial. The applicant has been carrying this project for 15 years, paying interest on their A & D loan throughout that time, and incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars in engineering and consultants cost to develop the project. Evergreen Homes expected to start building homes in Phase I in 2008 but were prevented from doing that by the financial crisis and the subsequent decade-long slowdown in the local housing market. While many other builders and developers went bankrupt and returned properties like our land in La Center back to their banks to dispose of, Evergreen Homes remained committed to building out the project. Unfortunately, Phase 1 is burdened by extremely high front-end costs including the need to do all of our frontage improvements on Old Pacific Hwy., the need to pay for all of the off-site water and pump station expenses up front, the need for the stormwater facility for the entire project to be installed, and the Fire Marshall's requirement that a paved secondary access for fire truck from Phase 1 to connect up to Bolen Rd. As a result, the economic feasibility of Phase 1 of Highland Terrace is marginal at best.
 - **It is imperative that the homes built in Phase 1 be as valuable and appealing as possible so this project does not fail financially.**
 - The difference between a 48' wide building envelope and a 51' buildable envelope is the difference between being able to offer a 3-car garage instead of a 2-car garage. A 3-car garage is a major objective for many buyers, which adds value to the lot. With the requested setback variance, those 37 lots become more valuable and saleable to buyers. While saleability is not usually the City's concern, what is unusual about this situation is that these lots must be saleable or we will not be able to financially justify this project.
 - By reducing the number of lots and re-apportioning that space to make the remaining lots wider, we could achieve the goal of wider lots with more attractive/appealing homes, but each lost lot will reduce revenue by more than \$100K, shifting the project from being marginal to becoming financially infeasible.
 - In conclusion, the proposed reduction in setbacks on the narrower lots helps make the Highland Terrace project financially justifiable at this time. The alternative is to not build the 53 lots in Phase 1 at this time.

- The granting of this variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare, or injurious to the property or improvements in the vicinity and zone in which the properties

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are situated. This approval criteria is described below.

There are no adverse impacts resulting in this variance request. Access and livability in these reduced setback lots will remain adequate. Narrow side yards are primarily used for access to the rear yard. A narrow 7.5 foot side yard will function the same as the proposed 6 foot side yard.

This variance will not substantially impede vehicle or pedestrian access or safety.

The reduced lot setbacks will not create any blocked intersection sight distances or vision clearance areas. The lots requesting these variances are not located on street intersections.

Reducing the side yard setback from 7.5' to 6' allows each impacted home to be 3' wider, which allows us the flexibility to build homes that are more diverse and more appealing to buyers.

Additional Discussion:

With narrower but deeper houses, more windows end up on the sides of the home, and hallways from the front to the back become longer—both of which are negatives for prospective buyers. Homeowners want their windows at the front and rear of their homes, not on the sides, and longer hallways result in a “tunnel” effect which homebuyers try to avoid—so avoiding this type of home benefits La Center and the builder.

Wider homes can fit the same amount and size of rooms into fewer total square feet, so a wider home typically means less hallways, fewer finished interior sf, less foundation, less roof. This reduces costs for the homebuyer and avoids waste and resource consumption.

Wider homes reduce impervious surface area, thereby reducing strain on the stormwater management system.

Aesthetically, wider homes are more attractive individually and they allow for a more varied and attractive streetscape. Wider homes allow for wider or more windows at the front facade, a wider or multi-depth roofline at the front porch, and a variety of garage door configurations (2 singles or 1 single and 1 double) instead of forcing every home to be the same with a single 16' wide garage door. With narrower building envelopes, garages tend to be more visually dominant, resulting in a less appealing streetscape.

In net, neighborhoods with wider homes offer more variety, and are more appealing because they are more diverse and less “cookie cutter”. Homes that are more valuable per sf (less wasted space) and more attractive, attract buyers more readily because buyers respond positively to neighborhoods which are diverse and appealing. Attractive, desirable neighborhoods improve La Center’s property values and hence its tax revenues.

VARIANCE 2 JUSTIFICATION

We are asking for a reduction of the rear yard setback from 20 feet to 10 feet for lot 51. (50% reduction for 1 lot). This reduction will only apply to lot 51 due to unusual circumstances and conditions as described below.

Lot 51 is a unique lot, it is relatively narrow due to its long axis being parallel to the street.

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The proposed lot dimensions are set due to the road alignment for the entire development on the east side of lot 51 while parcel 258703-000 is on the west side. The future house will face the street and will of necessity be wide and shallow. By code the front lot line is the street side from which the lot takes access. With a 20' rear yard setback the buildable area on Lot 51 would only be 36 feet at the north end. This would be too shallow and virtually unbuildable with a traditional home. Reducing the rear yard setback to 10 feet increases the viability of creating a buildable and saleable floorplan. This still provides a smaller usable backyard which is appealing to many older buyers because of it is easy to keep up with and low maintenance. A larger side yard will be available likely on the south side of lot 51. Most homes will not utilize all the width of the 114-foot-wide building envelope.

Parcel 258703-000 is located directly west of lot 51, in phase I of the development. The existing home on parcel 258703-000 is located 30'+ west of their eastern property line. This is the lot line which they will share with lot 51. A ten foot rear yard setback for lot 51 will provide a minimum of 40 feet between these two structures. This is equal to two typical 20 foot rear yard setbacks like you would see elsewhere in this zone. The 40 feet minimum between buildings as proposed also exceeds what other typical rear yard, plus side yard setbacks would equal ($20'+7.5'=27.5'$ typ.)

As explained above, the granting of this variance will not be materially detrimental to the public welfare, or injurious to the property or improvements in the vicinity and zone in which this property is situated.

Summary

These minor reductions in side yard setbacks will allow for more diverse building opportunities. This project seeks to retain a variety of lot widths and unit options. Due to unusual circumstances and site constraints this project needs the reduced side yard setbacks to achieve a quality and desirable development. Lot 51 needs the 10 foot reduced rear yard setback to be a buildable and desirable lot as described above. Approval criteria 1 & 2 have been satisfied with this narrative for both variances. The applicant will be better equipped to meet the needs of future La Center residence with these reduced setbacks being approved. By reducing the depth of building foundations on the steep lots in this project the builder and future owner can save tens of thousands of dollars on foundation costs. Many of the lots also have easements for existing or proposed utilities which reduce the building envelopes on one side or the other. Neither of the requested variances will be materially detrimental to the public welfare, or injurious to the property or improvements in the vicinity. Both variances requested have unique conditions and unusual circumstances.

We appreciate you taking the time to review, evaluate and assist us with these design variance requests.

Please feel free to contact Scott Taylor with SGA Engineering at 360-993-0911 with any questions, concerns or feedback with this variance.

Sincerely,
Scott Taylor, Planner