



# CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

## PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

100 Lincoln Street | Sitka, Alaska 99835

[www.cityofsitka.com](http://www.cityofsitka.com)

[planning@cityofsitka.org](mailto:planning@cityofsitka.org)

907-747-1814

## Frequently Asked Questions for Variances

### What actions qualify as variances?

A variance is a waiver of development standards as outlined by municipal code. Variances may be sought for standards such as building setbacks, structure height, building lot coverage, lot size, and sign size. **Variances may be granted only when unique circumstances outside an owner's control exist** that restrict the ability of a property owner to reasonably develop a property. Examples include steep topography, small lot size, or unique lot shape.

Three different types of variances exist within the Sitka General Code: **major variances** apply to major structures or expansions, such as variances arising from the construction of a house on a residential lot; **minor variances** apply to minor expansions, such as fence heights and sign size; **platting variances** are variances pursued during the subdivision process, which may reduce minimum lot sizes or increase density.

### What kind of supporting materials do I need to submit with my application?

Applications for variances require a general application, a supplemental application for a variance, a site plan, and other documentation as necessary to ensure the burden of proof is met.

### When do I need to have my application submitted?

Staff requires that all materials are complete and submitted at least three weeks prior to the next scheduled Planning Commission meeting. Regular meetings are scheduled for the first and third Wednesday of each month.

### Are there any fees associated with my variance request?

Variance requests have a \$75, non-refundable filing fee, plus sales tax.

### How long does the variance process take?

The variance process typically takes about a month. Timelines may vary depending on the scope of the development and the classification of variance (a major variance may take longer than a minor variance).

### If the variance request is approved, when does it take effect?

Following Planning Commission final approval of a plat, a ten-day appeal period must lapse before the variance takes effect. After the lapse of the appeal period, the applicant may utilize the permit.

**How long do I have to activate my variance permit before it becomes void?**

Substantial construction progress must be made on a project approved through the variance process within one year of the date of the variance approval, or else the approval becomes void (SGC Table 22.25.010-2. Note 2).

**Do I need to be present at the Planning Commission meeting?**

Yes, you must be present at the Planning Commission meeting at which your permit request is heard. The Planning Commission often has specific questions pertaining to variance requests, and your presence ensures those questions are answered.

**Do I need to speak with my neighbors beforehand and will they be notified of my project?**

As a general courtesy to your neighbors, the Planning Office recommends you inform surrounding neighbors of your project plans.

The Planning Office mails notification of variance hearings to all property owners within 300 feet of the project, in addition to publishing public notice in the newspaper twice prior to the meeting (SGC 22.10.120).

**Where can I read more about regulations for variances?**

Required findings for major and minor variances—the criteria on which the Planning Commission bases its decisions—are available under SGC 22.10.160, online at [sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/22.10.160](http://sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/22.10.160).

Information on platting variances is available under SGC 21.50, at [sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/21.50](http://sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/21.50).

Information regarding development standards is available under SGC 22.20.030, at [sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/22.20.030](http://sitka.municipal.codes/SGC/22.20.030).

If you have further questions, please speak with a member of the Planning Office staff.