



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

Planning and Community Development Department

AGENDA ITEM:

Case No: VAR 25-06
Proposal: Reduction in minimum lot size
Applicant: Casey Finn
Owner: Finn's Excavation, LLC
Location: 2011 Sawmill Creek Road
Legal: Lot 1-B, Hansen-Ness Subdivision
Zone: R-1 single-family or duplex low density, or single-family low density
manufactured home district
Size: 42,680 sf
Parcel ID: 3-1510-002
Existing Use: Vacant, undeveloped
Adjacent Use: Residential
Utilities: Sawmill Creek Road
Access: Sawmill Creek Road

KEY POINTS AND CONCERNS:

- Sitka General Code sets minimum lot size in the R-1 LDMH zone at 15,000 sf.
- Resulting lots will be almost twice as large as the required minimum lot size (6,000 sf) in the R-1 zone.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A: Aerial
Attachment B: Current Plat
Attachment C: Conceptual Plat
Attachment D: Photos
Attachment E: Applicant Materials

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The commission reviewed a conceptual plat on July 16, 2025 to subdivide Lot 1-B of Hansen-Ness Subdivision (2011 Sawmill Creek Road) in the R-1 LDMH zone into three lots, two of which are substandard for the zone's 15,000 sf minimum lot size, as detailed below:

- Lot A: 18,626 sf, net of access easement 16,106 sf
- Lot B: 11,721 sf, net of access easement 10,804 sf
- Lot C: 11,721 sf

ANALYSIS:

R-1 LDMH Lot Size

2011 Sawmill Creek Road is zoned R-1 LDMH, with a minimum lot size of 15,000 square feet. The unsubdivided property is 42,680 sf—less than 2,500 sf smaller than a size that would allow for subdivision into three lots outright.

While two of the proposed lots are significantly smaller than the 15,000 sf minimum lot size within the zone, all three lots are nearly double the 6,000 sf minimum lot size required within all other residential zones. Further, to adhere to the 15,000 sf minimum lot size, both lots would then be 42% larger than the required 15,000 sf lot minimum.

Drainage and Access Easements

Including both drainage and access easements and not accounting for steep topography, the lots will have the following amounts of buildable space:

- Lot A: 11,329 sf net of access and drainage easements
- Lot B: 10,783 sf net of access and drainage easements
- Lot C: 10,746 sf net of access and drainage easements

Though proposed Lots B and C have significantly less easement than Lot A, staff estimates that about half of these proposed lots will not be developable given steep topography at the rear of the property.

Rezoning

Another option discussed with the applicant was the rezoning of the property from R-1 LDMH to R-1 to allow for smaller lots by right. In preliminary meetings with the applicant, staff recommended rezoning as an option, which would also enable further subdividing to create four lots instead of three. The applicant indicated that the presence of access and drainage easements made this undesirable, as the lots would have less buildable space.

In addition to the presence of easements, topography at the property's rear renders subdivision into four lots less desirable, as staff estimates more than 10,000 sf at the rear of the property to be too steep for development.

Due to these challenges, rezoning and subsequent subdivision could result in more lots with less developable space. When considering square footage only, the property could be developed as a major subdivision with up to seven lots if rezoned to R-1. Given the drainage and topographical

challenges to the property, rezoning before subdividing could create the potential for suboptimal subdivision design and additional variance requests due to building constraints on smaller, skinnier lots encumbered by topographical challenges and the presence of easements.

Lot Width

Following the commission's July review of a conceptual plat, the applicant submitted a redesign of Lots B and C to allow for a more even distribution of buildable space. This redesign also impacted the width of Lot B. Per the site plan submitted, the applicant anticipates Lot B to be around 74 feet wide, six feet under the 80-foot minimum required for the zone. A lot's width is "the horizontal distance separating side lot lines of an individual lot" (SGC 22.05.970). In this scenario, the width of Lots B and C is determined by the lot line through which the property will be accessed, as neither lot has direct access to a public street. Because of this, only the proposed Lot B will require a variance reducing required lot width.

Comprehensive Plan: This platting variance supports the Comprehensive Plan Housing goal: *Expand the range, affordability, and quality of housing in Sitka while maintaining attractive, livable neighborhoods* by enabling development of land in a residentially zoned area, and by increasing the efficiency of the parcel in question. It also supports Action H 1.1e. *Encourage higher density development.*

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the platting variance reducing minimum lot size from 15,000 sf to no less than 10,000 sf and lot width from 80 feet to 70 feet at 2011 Sawmill Creek Road subject to the attached conditions of approval.

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS

1) "I move to approve the platting variance reducing minimum lot size from 15,000 sf to no less than 10,000 sf and reducing minimum lot width from 80' to 70' to enable a subdivision resulting in three lots at 2011 Sawmill Creek Road in the R-1 LDMH single-family, duplex low density, or single-family, low density, and manufactured home district subject to the attached conditions of approval. The property is also known as Lot 1-B, Hansen-Ness Subdivision. The request is filed by Casey Finn. The owner of record is Finn Excavation, LLC."

Conditions of Approval

- 1) This platting variance is subject to future Planning Commission approval of the preliminary plat for a minor subdivision. Approval of this platting variance shall not be construed as de facto approval of the subdivision.
- 2) The preliminary plat to be submitted shall be consistent with the plans, narratives, and other statement(s) of intent by the applicant for the subdivision action.
- 3) This platting variance is granted to enable subdivision of this lot into no more than three lots.
- 4) Substantial progress by the applicant, such as submission of a preliminary plat prepared by a licensed survey for Planning Commission review and approval, must be made within one year of the platting variance approval or the approval becomes void. In the event it can be documented that other substantial progress has been made, a one-year extension

may be granted by the Planning Director if a request is filed within eleven months of the initial approval.

2) “I move to adopt the findings required for platting variances as listed in the staff report.”

A variance from the requirements of SGC Title 21, Subdivisions, may be granted only if the Planning Commission finds the following¹:

- a. The granting of a platting variance will not be detrimental to the public safety or welfare, or injurious to the adjacent property *because the variance promotes development in line with existing uses in the surrounding neighborhoods; it allows for the most efficient use of land without substantially degrading the integrity of the zone; the conditions of approval protect the public’s health, safety, and welfare by requiring compliance with health and safety regulations.*
- b. The tract to be subdivided is of such unusual size and shape or topographical conditions that the strict application of the requirements of this title will result in undue and substantial hardship to the owner of the property *because of the unusual size of the lot which falls 2,320 square feet short of eligibility for subdivision resulting in three lots exceeding district standards in lot size. Resultant lots adhering to district standards would thus be 42% larger than the district minimum, therefore eliminating potential for increased housing and efficiency of land use. Additionally, the tract to be subdivided is of such unusual topographical conditions (presence of major drainage courses and significant steep slopes at the rear of the lot) such that it is not suitable for higher density development as would be allowed by right through a rezoning (i.e. strict application of Title 21 and 22 as it relates to allowing lower minimum lot sizes for a subdivision action in this case) of the property from R-1 LDMH to the neighboring R-1 zone.*

¹ Section 21.50.010—Requirements for platting variances.