

Land Use Design Standards

LAND USE DESIGN STANDARDS

The land use design standards generally apply to **all new development and alterations in C-1, C-2, HM, T, PDB, and Mixed-Use Center Districts**, as well as to **townhouses in Residential Districts**, except when specifically exempted in Tacoma Municipal Code (hereinafter TMC) 13.06.100.

- **Alterations to Existing Development** – The extent to which remodels and/or additions must comply with design standards is based on the value of work proposed as compared to the value of existing development or structures. The value of proposed work must include all remodels and/or additions within a two year period.
 - Level I Alterations – Value or proposed work is less than 50% vs. existing value. The requirement is only that the proposed improvements meet the standards and do not lead to further nonconformance with the standards.
 - Level II Alterations – Value or proposed work ranges from 50% to 200% vs. existing value. All standards that do not involve repositioning the building or reconfiguring site development shall apply to Level II alterations.
 - Level III Alterations – Value or proposed work exceeds 200% vs. existing value. Such alterations shall conform to ALL standards.



Level I Alteration Example –
Painting



Level II Alteration Example –
Building Addition



Level III Alteration Example –
Repositioning a Building

EXEMPTIONS

- Remodels that do not change the exterior form of the building;
- however, if a project involves both exterior and interior improvements, then the project valuation shall include both exterior and interior improvements
- Additions to super regional malls of less than 10,000 square feet
- Temporary structures
- Single-family dwellings established prior to August 1, 2011; however remodels and additions shall not increase the level of nonconformity
- Sites that must comply with the Tacoma Landmarks Preservation Commission when those standards conflict with standards applied by the Commission
- Religious facilities, if demonstrated that the design standards impose a substantial burden, administratively or financially, on their free exercise of religion
- Accessory structures in parks, recreation, and open space areas

VARIANCES TO DESIGN STANDARDS

If it appears you have circumstances that prevent compliance with design standards, or if you would like to propose an alternative design that would provide equal or superior results, the project can be discussed with a Planner by phone at (253) 591-5030 or in-person at Planning and Development Services on the 3rd floor of the Tacoma Municipal Building, 747 Market Street.



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 (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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VARIANCE PROCESS

- Submittal of application materials. 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.
- Application can be submitted online (<https://aca.accela.com/tacoma/Default.aspx>) or in-person during [walk-in hours](#). Pre-application requests can be made on-line, see [Pre-application Request Tip Sheet](#) for more information.
- 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 the property information sign(s) and post it at the site.
- **Yellow post card public notices** are mailed to neighbors within 100 feet of the property. The public notice includes instructions for viewing the submitted application materials on-line. The public is given 14 days to comment on the project.
- 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.
- The Land Use Administrator will issue a decision to either approve or deny the request within 120 calendar days from the date that the application is submitted. (Timeline is approximate and does not account for any holds placed on a project.)
- **Blue postcard decision notices** containing a summary of the decision are mailed to any neighbors within 100 feet that have not provided comments. Neighbors who have provided comments will receive a copy of the full report and decision. A request for reconsideration or an appeal may be made within 14 days after the decision is issued.
- If the variance is approved, the applicant has five years from the date of approval to submit a complete application for a building permit.

RESPONSE TO DESIGN VARIANCE CRITERIA

The following questions may be used as guidelines in providing information for response to the review criteria contained in TMC 13.05.010.B. Applicants must describe how the variance request meets one of the criteria listed below:

- Does the parcel have an unusual shape that was established prior to 2002 that creates practical

difficulties in achieving compliance with the design standards? Describe in detail.

- Are you requesting the variance in order to preserve a critical area, unique natural feature, or historic building and/or feature? Describe in detail.
- Is the topography of the site widely varied, creating practical difficulties in achieving compliance with the standards?
- Is there a pending public action, such as a street widening, which creates practical difficulties in achieving compliance with the standards?
- Is your proposal an alternative design that departs from a requirement that can be demonstrated to provide equal or superior results to the requirement from which relief is sought in terms of quantity, quality, location, and function? Provide pictures, drawings, a narrative, etc to help describe why the variation is equal or superior. The design standards are intended to implement the urban design goals of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Tacoma. The Comprehensive Plan is available on-line: <http://www.cityoftacoma.org/planning>.

SUBMITTAL CHECKLIST

All application materials must be submitted in electronic PDF format on compact disc (CD) or online at TacomaPermits.org. See [Electronic File Standards Tip Sheet](#).

- Application for Land Use Permit, completed and signed
- Site plan to scale
- Floor Plan(s) to scale
- Building elevations to scale (exterior view of all sides)
- Written response to criteria
- Application fee
- Other Information as determined by staff

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

Tacoma Municipal Code Section: [13.05 – Land Use Permit Procedures](#), [13.05.010 - Variances](#), [13.06.010 - General Restrictions](#), [13.06.100 - Building Design Standards](#)



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