CITY OF SAN MATEO
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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VARIANCE FAQs

- **What is this handout?** This handout contains answers to frequently asked questions regarding Variances.

- **What is a Variance?** A Variance allows projects which do not meet the established standards stated in the Zoning Code. A Variance should only be considered as a last resort when compliance with the Code is not possible.

- **What findings need to be met for a Variance?** Findings are statements of fact about your project that the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission must be able to make in order to approve your application. A hardship is determined to exist if all of the following four conditions apply to your situation:
  1. There are exceptional or extraordinary circumstances or conditions applicable to the property that do not apply generally to property in the same zone or neighborhood.
  2. A Variance is necessary for the preservation and enjoyment of a substantial property right of the applicant possessed by other property owners in the same zone or neighborhood.
  3. Granting of the Variance will not be harmful to the public health, safety or welfare, or negatively impact other property or improvements in the neighborhood in which the property is located.
  4. Granting of the Variance will not adversely affect or be inconsistent with the General Plan.

  It is important to note that the variance findings are strictly interpreted; only in very unusual and unique circumstances is approval of a variance considered.

- **What kinds of Variances can you request?**
  - Reduce setback(s)
  - Reduce off-street parking/loading facilities
  - Reduce build-to-line(s)
  - Parking stall dimensions. Please also submit information responsive to SMMC 27.78.020(b).
  - Exceed floor area ratio
  - Increase of up to 25 percent of maximum distance of parking from the use served
  - Allow land use of property with insufficient lot area
  - Shared parking for two or more uses, provided the uses do not occur simultaneously

- **Zoning Administrator** reviews single-family homes and duplexes, along with accessory structures, parking lots, and other minor site improvements

- **Planning Commission** reviews all other projects not reviewed by the Zoning Administrator

- **What is the Variance Application Process?** Before applying, a Neighborhood Meeting for your Variance application must be held. Afterwards, you will submit a completed Planning Application form along with the required plans and Variance fee deposit. A project planner is assigned to your application and performs the following tasks:
  - Reviews the application for completeness and consistency;
  - Determines if an environmental impact assessment is necessary;
  - Prepares report for review by the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission

For more information, please see San Mateo Municipal Code 27.78 – Variances.