

To: Bonner County Planning Department

From: Jeremy Grimm, Whiskey Rock Planning + Consulting

Re: Administrative Variance Request – Depth-to-Width Ratio

Project: Priest River Pines 1st Addition

File No.: SS0005-25

Applicant: Sanborn Creek Ventures, LLC

Date: 11.14.25



This memorandum provides supporting justification for an Administrative Variance from the lot depth-to-width ratio standard under BCRC 12-621(A) and the related depth/width measurement method described in BCRC Title 12, Chapter 8 – Lot Measurements.

This variance request applies to Lots 1 and 3 of the proposed short plat (SS0005-25), which exceed the 3.2:1 ratio due to inherited parcel geometry and the County's depth measurement formula. Lots 2 and 4 meet the ratio, but were also referenced in the staff report due to the same methodological issue.

This memo demonstrates that the variance request satisfies all required findings under BCRC 12-234.

The parent parcel contains several angled boundary lines that have existed for many decades. These inherited angles cause the County's depth-measurement formula — which measures the farthest distance between any two corners of a lot — to significantly overstate the 'depth' of the lots on paper.

What the formula does not account for is the actual experience of the land, the topography, and the way future homes will be sited. On the ground, each lot is wide, open, and naturally proportioned. The proposed layout follows the existing landforms, including gentle benches, natural view corridors, optimal driveway alignments, and logical septic and well locations.

The lots are intentionally shaped to work with the terrain — not against it — and this results in building envelopes that are practical, functional, and environmentally appropriate. The topography itself creates natural placement areas for residences, and the layout preserves these areas rather than forcing artificial boundaries that would require unnecessary grading or disturbance.

Although the depth-to-width formula flags certain lots as exceeding the ratio, this is solely because the mathematical calculation relies on diagonal corner-to-corner distances that have no relationship to how the land is actually used or how a residence will occupy the site. These diagonal distances fall across areas that will never be developed, accessed, or perceived as 'lot depth' by a homeowner.

In real-world terms, **none of the lots resemble the narrow, constrained, or elongated parcels the code is designed to prevent.** They are functional rural homesites that reflect the natural character of the property. The minor ratio discrepancy is a by-product of the County's strict geometric formula — not the physical characteristics, usability, or layout of the lots. These unique inherited conditions were not created by the owner and cannot be corrected without compromising environmental features or degrading the practical, usable form of the lots.

Background

The Priest River Pines 1st Addition proposes four 4.95-acre rural residential lots designed to follow the property's natural landforms, existing contour patterns, access easements, and the functional areas for future driveway and home siting.

Bonner County's depth-to-width ratio calculation requires determining the furthest straight-line distance between any two lot boundary points to establish "depth." Because the parent parcel contains several long-standing angled boundary lines from historic surveys, this formula produces depth values that are far greater than the functional, usable depth of the lots as experienced on the ground.

Despite this mathematical distortion, each lot is well-proportioned, usable, and consistent with the Rural-5 zoning district and the County's comprehensive plan.

II. Lot Depth-to-Width Calculations

The required ratio is $\leq 3.2:1$.

Lot	Depth (ft)	Width (ft)	D/W Ratio	Variance Needed?
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Lot 1	880.583	244.863	3.596 : 1	✓ YES
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Lot 2	793.250	271.821	2.918 : 1	✗ NO
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Lot 3	931.833	231.396	4.027 : 1	✓ YES
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Lot 4	743.333	290.075	2.563 : 1	✗ NO
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Only **Lots 1 and 3** require variance approval.

III. Required Variance Findings (BCRC 12-234)

The Administrative Variance criteria require the applicant to demonstrate:

1. **The special conditions were not created by the owner/applicant.**
2. **The variance will not be detrimental to the public interest, health, or safety.**
3. **There are unique or special conditions inherent to the property that are not common to other parcels.**

The applicant meets all three findings, as detailed below.

Finding 1

The special conditions or circumstances causing the need for the variance are not the result of the actions of the applicant.

This finding is fully satisfied.

A. The angled boundary lines are inherited, not created.

The parent parcel contains several angled, diagonal property lines that have existed for many decades. These boundaries were established through historic conveyances and recorded instruments long before this short plat was proposed.

B. These inherited angles artificially inflate the County's calculated "depth."

The County's depth formula measures the **furthest distance** between two boundary corners. Because of the existing angles, the formula produces an exaggerated "depth" that does not reflect the actual functional shape of the lots.

C. Real-world usable depth is significantly smaller than the calculated depth.

On the ground, a future homeowner would never perceive the lot as 880 or 930 feet "deep." The diagonal distance runs through areas that would never be developed, accessed, or considered part of the functional homesite.

D. Applicant designed the lots around required natural and environmental features.

The applicant intentionally shaped lot lines around:

- existing benches and natural terraces
- optimal driveway paths
- septic and well separation
- gentle topography
- view opportunities

- natural drainage patterns

These choices were required by the land itself and consistent with BCRC 12-626 (environmental features). They were not discretionary decisions that created the ratio issue.

Conclusion:

The lot shapes and depth measurements arise from long-standing parcel geometry and topographic realities, not the applicant's actions.

Finding 2

The variance will not be materially detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, or injurious to adjoining property.

This finding is also fully satisfied.

A. The lots are fully functional rural homesites.

Each lot exceeds minimum width, area, and dimensional standards. None of the lots resemble the long, narrow parcels that the depth-to-width ratio intends to prevent.

B. No emergency access, fire protection, or septic/well spacing issues exist.

The variance does not:

- reduce fire access
- impair defensible space
- affect ingress/egress easements
- disrupt the functionality of private wells or septic systems
- compromise driveway feasibility
- impact drainage or slope stability

C. The design enhances public welfare by respecting the landscape.

The lot design follows:

- natural building sites
- existing contour lines
- areas of stable slope
- practical driveway locations
- natural open spaces

This minimizes grading and environmental disruption, enhancing public health and environmental quality.

D. No effect on neighbors or rural character.

The lots are consistent with Rural-5 density expectations and match surrounding parcel patterns. There is no adverse visual, environmental, or functional impact on adjacent property owners.

Conclusion:

The variance poses no risk to public health or safety and does not harm neighboring property or rural character.

Finding 3

Special circumstances apply to the land or structure that do not typically apply to other properties in the same district.

This finding is clearly met.

A. The parcel's irregular historic boundaries are unique.

Very few Rural-5 parcels contain the unusual angled boundary lines found on this property. These angles are the direct cause of the inflated depth measurements.

B. The property's topography is uniquely suited to the proposed layout.

The land includes:

- natural benches
- view corridors
- logical septic areas
- gentle slopes ideal for homesites
- drainage patterns requiring avoidance
- existing easements and corridors

The proposed lot layout appropriately fits these natural features without unnecessary disturbance.

C. The County's strict mathematical formula produces an artificial result not reflective of the land.

The formula captures diagonal distances across areas that are irrelevant to functional lot depth. This is a unique interaction between:

1. legacy diagonal boundaries

2. natural landforms
3. the County's required measurement method

This combination is not typical for Rural-5 parcels.

Conclusion:

The variance arises from unique property characteristics not shared by surrounding parcels, satisfying Finding 3.

IV. Overall Conclusion

The depth-to-width ratio deviations for Lots 1 and 3 are **mathematical artifacts** caused by inherited parcel geometry and the County's extreme-points depth formula, not by lot design choices.

In real-world terms:

- The lots are wide, usable, proportionate, and fully functional.
- The design respects natural topography and environmental features.
- No adverse impacts occur to public health, safety, or welfare.
- The variance allows a superior, more environmentally appropriate subdivision layout.

For these reasons, approval of the Administrative Variance for Lots 1 and 3 of the Priest River Pines 1st Addition is fully justified and respectfully requested.