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August 18, 2025

City of Steamboat Springs Planning and Community Development
137 10th Street
Steamboat Springs, CO 80477
Phone: (970)-871-8207, Fax: (970)-879-8851

RE: Village Drive Townhomes
Parcel No. 328300001 / PL20220086
PL20220086 Major Variance

Dear City of Steamboat Springs Planning Department,

Please accept this letter as a major variance request narrative for the Village Drive Townhomes project. The Village Drive Townhomes project was approved for seven townhomes in 2022 by application PL20220086. The project is located on the northeast corner of Village Drive and Walton Creek Road and both buildings are nearing completion. The project is requesting three variances as outlined below to Community Development Code as outlined below due to final design for the retaining wall, construction methods, and overall site layout.

1. Project Variance #1: Removal of stairs on Duplex Building

Four Points Surveying and Engineering and Steamboat Architectural Associates are requesting a major variance to the Community Development Code (CDC) standards for the Section 437 – Multiple Family Residential Buildings Design Standards for access.

As stated in the Community Development Code Section 719 Variance, the CDC sets forth a united regulatory program for development but it is understood that no standard can anticipate all possible circumstances, alternative approaches and unanticipated consequences of its application.

The Village Drive Townhomes site is east of Village Drive which is a pedestrian and transportation corridor for other multi-family projects along the roadway. Based on the lack of access to individual residences for the surrounding developments, the owners are requesting to eliminate the stairway access for the duplex building for security and practicality. **The variance is being proposed as an acceptable alternative per Section 719 D. 3b(ii). The purpose and intent of the code standard will not be achieved by strict application of the standard in the particular circumstance.**

Variance #1 – Section 437 – Multiple Family Residential Buildings Design Standards.

The purpose of the multi-family residential building design standards state the following.

1. *Provide for the development of multiple-family housing while ensuring compatibility with adjacent properties of lower densities.*
 2. *Break down the visual and physical mass and scale of large buildings.*
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The request is to eliminate the approved stairs to each of the units for duplex building, which requires a variance to Section 437.D Access.

1. Standard

Buildings shall prioritize orientation of primary pedestrian entries to predominant public and private streets, pedestrian circulation, and gathering areas.

Request for Stair Removal

The development team formally requests the removal of two stairways on the duplex building and their connections to the main sidewalk along Village Drive. After careful evaluation, we believe that pedestrian access from Village Drive, a high-traffic pedestrian corridor, is not in the best interest of future unit owners.

Justification for Removal for stairways to the duplex decks.

1. Privacy and Security Concerns: The proposed stairway access points do not serve as primary pedestrian entries to private residences, as there is no parking permitted on Village Drive. Instead, they create an appearance more typical of commercial properties, drawing unnecessary foot traffic to access areas intended to be private. Additionally, direct exposure to a busy public sidewalk increases security risks, including unauthorized access and potential theft.
2. Unnecessary Public Access: Village Drive functions as a major pedestrian corridor connecting Sunray Meadows, Meadowlark Condominiums, and other developments to Steamboat Resort. With its high pedestrian and transit activity, the presence of direct entries to private residences introduces unwanted interaction between residents and passersby, compromising privacy without contributing to wayfinding or public accessibility.
3. Limited Functional Benefit: The existing access points do not serve a practical purpose, as there are no public amenities or destinations requiring access via these stairways. The removal of stairs does not impact pedestrian circulation but rather enhances the residential nature of the development.
4. Market and Resident Feedback: Realtors have reported that prospective buyers perceive these front-facing entry features as security risks, making the units less desirable. Removing the stairways would reinforce the exclusivity and residential character of the buildings while maintaining an active frontage on Village Drive through large street-facing windows. A letter from the contracted purchasers of the duplex units opposing the stairs is part of the submittal package.
5. Vehicle Access and Parking Constraints:
 - a) No vehicle parking is allowed on Village Drive, and no guest parking was approved with the project.
 - b) All delivery and guest parking will occur at the rear of the building, in front of individual garages.
 - c) If the front-facing stairs and doors were installed, it is highly unlikely that guests would park at the rear, then walk around the building to enter through the Village Drive entryways—rendering them functionally obsolete.
6. Precedent in Surrounding Developments: The concept of direct pedestrian entries along Village Drive is not utilized in any other nearby projects. Comparable developments, including Sunray Meadows, Meadowlark Condominiums, Trappeurs Crossing, Blackhawk Townhomes, The Lodge, and the recently approved Village Drive Apartments, do not have direct access to the detached public sidewalk along Village Drive.
7. Alternative Access Points Maintain Connectivity:
 - a) Perimeter sidewalks remain accessible through alternative entry points.
 - b) The Village Drive sidewalk is accessible via the parking and roadway entrance.
 - c) The garages, located on the east side, will serve as the primary entry points for residents, who will also access their bicycles, skis, and vehicles from this location.

Given these factors, we strongly recommend the removal of the stairways for the duplex building to better align the development with resident expectations and long-term livability.

Section 719.D – General Criteria for Approval.

1. The Variance will not injure or adversely impact legal conforming uses of adjacent property, or the applicant has accurately assessed the impacts of the proposed Variance and has agreed to mitigate those impacts. **The approved**
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multi-family development complements the surrounding uses of multi-family and condominiums in the neighborhood. No legal conforming uses of adjacent property will be injured or adversely impacted due to the removal of a stair connection from the public sidewalk to the private decks.

2. The Variance is compatible with the preferred direction and policies outlined in the Community Plan and other applicable adopted plans. The Steamboat Springs Area Community plan promotes high density development and work force housing. The Village Drive Townhomes site is a prime spot for redevelopment due to the proximity of the Steamboat Ski Area and transit. The development as previously approved is aligned with goals and policies of the Steamboat Springs Area Community Plan as noted in the following goals and policies.
 - a. Policy LU-5.2: *New neighborhoods will be well connected by streets, sidewalks, trails, walkways and bicycle lanes.*
 - b. Policy CD-1.4: *Encourage high quality site planning and design*
 - c. Policy CD-2.2: *Create a functional mix of uses in new neighborhoods and development areas*
3. The Variance application meets either the criteria for unnecessary hardship or practical difficulty, as applicable, or the criteria for an acceptable alternative. We are seeking variance based on: ***Section 719 D. 3b(ii). The purpose and intent of the code standard will not be achieved by strict application of the standard in the particular circumstance.*** There are no designated parking spaces along Village Drive in front of the townhomes, meaning all visitors and residents will access the site through the designated parking and private roadway entrance. During winter months, maintaining snow-free access on the approved stairways presents a significant burden, which most residents will naturally avoid by utilizing the heated concrete parking area for safer, more convenient access. Additionally, resident security and safety are compromised by providing direct access from a high-traffic public sidewalk to private front doors. These exposed entry points create opportunities for unauthorized access, increasing the risk of trespassing or other security concerns. Rather than fostering activity and safety, these ground-floor entries introduce unnecessary vulnerabilities, ultimately diminishing the sense of privacy and protection for homeowners. Based on the above facts, the strict application for the access in this particular circumstance will not achieve the intent of code standard.

The townhomes have other defining features that identify the western façades on Village Drive as the front of the building. Each building meets the frontage glazing and transparency requirements. The roof forms, siding and exterior architectural design all identify the western façade as the front. Additionally, the project meets the frontage landscape requirements along Village Drive.

2. Retaining wall - Variance #2 – Section 418 – Retaining Walls.

The project is requesting a variance for a wall over six feet in height that does not have an offset of at least three feet from the face of each wall segment.

The purpose of the retaining wall standard states the following.

1. Minimize the impact of retaining walls on adjacent properties.

The variance request is to allow for the retaining wall on the east property to be a maximum of 7.6 feet without being stepped wall segments with a three-foot horizontal offset. Currently, the constructed height exceeds the six-foot height limit of the CDC and includes a 2-foot 4-inch stepped wall segment. (75% of the requirement)

Section 719.D – General Criteria for Approval.

1. The Variance will not injure or adversely impact legal conforming uses of adjacent property, or the applicant has accurately assessed the impacts of the proposed Variance and has agreed to mitigate those impacts. The proposed multi-family development is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, which consists predominantly of multi-family residences and condominiums. No legally conforming uses of adjacent properties will be injured or adversely affected by the retaining wall located along the east property line. The retaining wall is situated at the rear of the proposed buildings
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and is not visible when walking or driving north along Village Drive, except at the development entry. It is visible when walking east along the sidewalk on Walton Creek Road. The wall features a ledgerstone finish that is both visually appealing and consistent with the architectural color palette of the buildings currently under construction. As a buffering and screening measure, a 3.5' tall fence is proposed above the retaining wall on the Pine Grove Condominiums. The fence will be stained to match the Vantage at Village Drive Condominiums and include 2"x4" rails, 6.5" on center with a 2"x6" cap. The fence, once constructed, will also be a safety measure for the adjacent neighbors. Village Drive Townhomes has reached a preliminary agreement with Pine Ridge Townhomes to install a wood fence along the top of the retaining wall at the east property line. (draft agreement attached). Village Drive Townhomes will purchase and install the fence, while Pine Ridge Townhomes has agreed to assume ownership and long-term maintenance responsibility.

2. The Variance is compatible with the preferred direction and policies outlined in the Community Plan and other applicable adopted plans. The Steamboat Springs Area Community plan promotes high density development and work force housing. The Village Drive Townhomes site is prime spot for redevelopment due to the proximity of the Steamboat Ski Area and transit. The development as proposed is aligned with goals and policies of the Steamboat Springs Area Community Plan as noted in the following goals and policies.

- a. *Policy LU-5.2: New neighborhoods will be well connected by streets, sidewalks, trails, walkways and bicycle lanes.*
- b. *Policy CD-1.4: Encourage high quality site planning and design*
- c. *Policy CD-2.2: Create a functional mix of uses in new neighborhoods and development areas*

The Variance application meets either the criteria for unnecessary hardship or practical difficulty, as applicable, or the criteria for an acceptable alternative. We are requesting a variance according to **Section 719.D.3.b(ii)** of the Community Development Code, which permits relief when the purpose and intent of a standard cannot be effectively achieved through strict application in a specific circumstance.

The approved construction drawings, prepared by Landmark Consultants and approved by the City of Steamboat Springs, included a general note indicating "wall by others." In August 2023, Geowall Designs provided a complete engineering plan set for a two-tier Redi-Rock retaining wall system, including construction drawings, a design report, and material quantity estimates. Four Points Surveying and Engineering (FPSE) incorporated the Geowall design into the civil construction plan set and completed wall staking in October 2024.

The final wall design is wider than the originally proposed layout in order to accommodate the required structural height and tie into existing grades at the adjacent Pine Ridge Townhomes. Although a two-tier system, as initially illustrated in the Landmark plans, was considered, there was insufficient space on-site to safely complete the necessary excavation while maintaining stable cut slopes behind the wall. The constructed Redi-Rock wall includes a 2-foot, 4-inch tier between segments, which effectively reduces the visual mass of the structure.

The intent of the code—to minimize the visual impact of retaining structures on adjacent properties—is achieved through the wall's strategic placement and tiered design. The limited horizontal separation between tiers helps reduce the perceived height and blends the structure into the surrounding topography. The contractor has successfully implemented a sound and context-sensitive solution within a physically constrained construction area.

We believe the two variances are aligned with the overall vision of the project and allowance for the variances will have very limited impact to the community. In conclusion, we request the City of Steamboat Springs Planning Department approve the variance as outlined herein acceptable for the development plan of the Village Drive Townhomes.

We look forward to the review and future public meetings for the project.

Sincerely;

Walter Magill, P.E.
Four Points Surveying and Engineering
