

Why do we Need Private Road Standards?

We often hear about big government and more regulations. “This is a private road just going to our homes. All we need is enough for cars and a couple inches of gravel. Why are you requiring all this extra? We can’t afford to build with all of these requirements!”

I’d suggest you can’t afford not to! The person doing a short plat or wanting a building permit may not have thought much about why higher standards. Have you thought about:

- How are you going to get the concrete truck in for the foundation, sidewalks, and driveways?
- Large delivery trucks bringing in building materials?
- What if you move? Can a large moving van get to your home?
- What if you have a house fire or a forest fire? How can the fire engine get to your home?

These needs go on and on. In some cases, the road might be such that it will someday become a county road! It soon becomes clear that standards are needed for road construction.

Road standard requirements vary from county to county depending on soils, terrain and local customs. Generally these standards include the following:

- Minimum width – 18’ to 20’ for two lane roads; lets two vehicles to safely pass.
- Able to see down the road; turnouts so you don’t crash into your spouse.
- Road surfaces and structures to carry large trucks. This includes cover over culverts so they won’t collapse. Bridges should be designed by a Professional Engineer.
- Turnarounds at the end; so large trucks don’t back over your yard.
- Grades vary with local conditions. Not so steep you can’t stop! Maximums in snow country are 6-8% (6 to 8 feet rise in 100 feet), up to 14% in other areas.

Maybe you really can’t meet the standards. Variances are usually a part of the ordinance. Variances might be allowed if the applicant would be caused an undue hardship; or would be deprived of property rights or privileges given other properties in the area. You should be prepared to show that these kinds of things are real.

A variance can include requirements to protect the public. They might require houses to use fire sprinkler systems if fire truck access is not available or limited. Plats might have notices printed on them so buyers know that property access may be limited.

Overall, private road standards are provided to ensure consistency and safety for the public. The extra cost and time required to provide a proper road will repay the users many times over.

If you have questions about what you might need, check with your County Engineer. They really want to help you do what’s best for you and your family!

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Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov.