



B3 Guidance on Variance Requests

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Background:

The B3 Guidelines (formerly MSBG) is a guide to promote the design of more sustainable buildings. Sustainable design is a means to reduce energy expenditures; enhance the health, well-being and productivity of the building occupants; lower life cycle costs; and improve the quality of the natural environment. The guidelines track the human, community, environmental, and life-cycle economic costs and benefits of high-performance building projects. The B3 Guidelines differ from other rating systems in that it requires compliance with all of its components. Due to the variability of projects, some projects may require full or partial variances. These variances should be requested during Schematic Design. Due to the variability of projects, full or partial variances may occasionally be necessary for specific B3 guidelines.

Two primary reasons for variance:

1. *Programmatic conflicts.* If the project's building program and the B3 Guidelines are in direct conflict with each other, the building program should be respected. If the building program cannot accommodate the guideline, a variance for a specific guideline should be requested. (ex. The Department of Correction's program requires a higher light level at the edge of their properties than the guideline specifies. A variance to guideline: S.5 Light Pollution Reduction, S5A. Light trespass: Do not exceed specified luminance values is regularly granted)
2. *Project type.* Projects with limited scope may wish to request variances for guidelines outside of their scope of work. (ex. a remodel project may require variances on some stormwater management guidelines that are not applicable.)

Variances can be granted, rejected, or amended. Through the variance process, the requirements of sustainable strategies can be partially or fully waived. A partial variance should be considered first. A partial variance maintains the intent of the guideline while allowing flexibility to adequately resolve programmatic or other conflicts. Variance requests are typically proposed by the building designers. Approval authority for variances lies with the agency project manager; in B3 guidelines this person is the Agency Contact. The person charged with reviewing requests should be familiar with the intent of guidelines and the overarching goals of the program. If the agency contact doesn't feel comfortable with the intent of the guideline, it can be referred to CSBR staff, currently handled by Richard Strong strong081@umn.edu.

Conditions not considered as grounds for a variance:

- Variances will not be considered if alternative design strategies have not been evaluated, including consideration of a creative solution which may maintain the intent of the guidelines.
- Variances will not be considered on the basis of monetary or convenience rationale.
- Variances will not be considered because compliance with the B3 Guidelines would alter the standard operating procedures of the design team.
- Small or irregular sites are not an automatic reason for a variance