

MEMO

TO: Three Forks Staff, Counsel
FROM: Lee Nellis, FAICP
DATE: April 24, 2026

RE: Access Issues

My notes and recollection are not completely clear about what we did with the distance from driveways to intersections or clear sight triangles. My conclusion on driveway spacing is to allow it to be addressed by the design and construction standards or MDT. That is noted in Section 11-26-D. My understanding of the final conclusion about the clear sight triangles is that the language I proposed applies in new development.

CHAPTER 20 - ACCESS MANAGEMENT - CIRCULATION

11-20-1: PURPOSE:

The standards adopted here are intended to:

- Ensure that DEVELOPMENT has safe, adequate access for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists;
- Protect public safety and CITY and state investments in streets and highways by ensuring that development does not result in traffic congestion or hazards, and that existing hazards are remediated, as feasible, by redevelopment; and
- Extend the city's existing street grid where the terrain does not dictate otherwise.

'Safe, adequate access' is defined as access that complies with the standards adopted in these regulations and the *STANDARDS FOR DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION*.

11-20-2: ACCESS TO STATE HIGHWAYS:

- A. Any development proposing new or expanded access to a state highway must have an approach permit from the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).
- B. An application for a permit required by these regulations may be submitted before MDT approval of the approach permit if it includes a copy of the application for an approach permit that has been submitted to MDT. Approval of the city permit will then be conditioned on MDT approval. Applicants should be aware that, per Section 11-1-4.A, any changes in plans needed to gain MDT approval may require them to obtain a new permit from the city.

Here is the link to the MDT approach manual.

<https://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/manuals/approach-manual.pdf>

11-20-3: APPLICABILITY:

Applications for any of the approvals or permits required by these regulations must clearly show how safe, adequate access for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists will be provided in compliance with these regulations and the current *Standards for Design and Construction*.

The Standards for Design and Construction include most of what would otherwise be in this chapter. Note that there is a lot of “boilerplate” language in that document that doesn’t apply in a small place like Three Forks. We have added some specifics that we think are important and helpful. These could be amended into the Standards if the city prefers that as the place to put them.

11-20-4: EXTENDING THE GRID:

- A. Three Forks intends for development to connect with and replicate the existing grid of alleys, streets, and sidewalks. This rule does not apply in the SED (please see Chapter 11-22) due to the terrain. Other exceptions may be allowed at the time of annexation or subdivision, but only where physical constraints make extending the grid impractical. Where extending the grid is not practical, developments must still provide connectivity for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists with the rest of the community.
- B. Where culs-de-sac are permitted, direct pedestrian and bike connections to adjoining streets, sidewalks, or trails may be required.

11-20-5: HEADWATERS TRAIL SYSTEM:

Applications for permits for new residential development must show how the project will be connected with and, where that is planned, extend the Headwaters Trail System.

11-20-6: DRIVEWAYS:

- A. DRIVEWAYS must be defined by curb cuts or similar means. New CONTINUOUS CURB CUTS are not permitted.
- B. The number of driveways - and thus the congestion and collisions that tend to increase with the number of points of access - to private or public streets and highways shall be minimized.
- C. Additional gated driveways may be permitted for emergency access to industrial and commercial uses.
- D. Where multiple driveways or a continuous curb cut exist, the application for a permit must show how the number of points of access will be consolidated to the minimum needed.
- E. The placement of driveways may be affected by the STANDARDS FOR DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION or, along the highway, the requirements of the MDT.

11-20-7: CLEAR SIGHT TRIANGLES:

New development shall be designed to permit clear sight triangles free of visual obstructions to drivers at all intersections and driveways.

- A. The clear sight triangle at a street intersection will be defined by lines extending twenty-five (25) feet along the intersecting street rights-of-way. The clear sight triangle at an intersection with an alley or for a driveway will be defined by lines extending ten (10) feet along the street right-of-way and (ten) 10 feet along the alley right of way or the outer edge of the driveway surface. MDT may require larger clear sight triangles at intersections with a state highway.

- B. No structures, including opaque fences, shall rise above grade in the clear sight triangles required by A, above, except for required regulatory signs. Landscaping will be limited to turf or another ground cover and ornamental plantings that attain a height of no more than thirty-two inches (32") above grade. Existing trees may remain if they are pruned to a single stem up to eight (8) feet above grade.
- C. Failure to keep a required clear sight triangle free of obstructions is a violation of these regulations, subject to the enforcement procedures of Chapter 11-9.

11-20-7: REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS:

All measures required to comply with this chapter and the *Standards for Design and Construction* are REQUIRED IMPROVEMENTS subject to the requirements of Chapter 11-9.