1	BEFORE THE LAND USE BOARD OF APPEALS
2	OF THE STATE OF OREGON
3	
4	DAVID BRANNON,
5	Petitioner,
6	
7	VS.
8	
9	MULTNOMAH COUNTY,
10	Respondent.
11	
12	LUBA No. 2017-117 03/22/28 M 8/03 LUBA
13	
14	FINAL OPINION
15	AND ORDER
16	
17	Appeal from Multnomah County.
18	
19	Christopher P. Koback, Portland, filed the petition for review and argued
20	on behalf of petitioner. With him on the brief was Hathaway Larson LLP.
21	Katharing Theorem 1. I. J. Theorem 1 in the Angine of Computer Changes In
22	Katherine Thomas and Jed Tompkins, Assistant County Counsels,
23	Portland, filed a response brief and argued on behalf of respondent.
24	HOLSTUN, Board Member; RYAN, Board Chair; BASSHAM, Board
25 26	Member, participated in the decision.
26 27	Member, participated in the decision.
28	AFFIRMED 03/22/2018
28 29	
29 30	You are entitled to judicial review of this Order. Judicial review is
31	governed by the provisions of ORS 197.850.
51	governed by the provisions of Ords 197.000.

Opinion by Holstun.

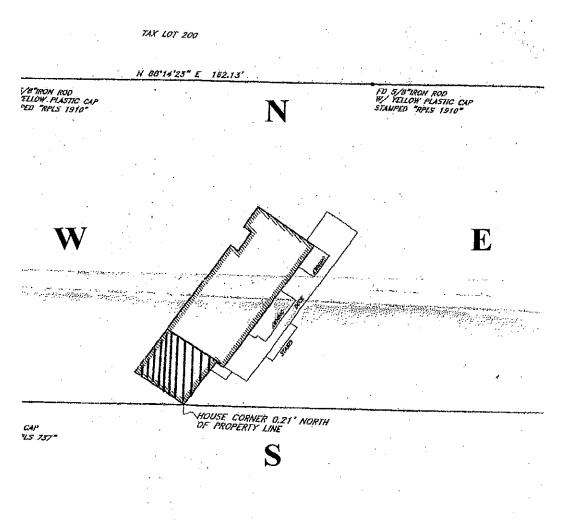
2 NATURE OF THE DECISION

Petitioner appeals a county hearings officer decision that denies his
request for after-the-fact approval of an addition to a single-family dwelling.

5 FACTS

6 The subject 9.6-acre parcel is in a heavily wooded area that lies between NW Cornell Road, NW Thompson Road and NW Skyline Road, near Forest 7 8 Park just outside the City of Portland, in Multnomah County. The parcel is now zoned Commercial Forest Use (CFU-2) and is subject to several overlay zones 9 (Significant Environmental Concern for Wildlife Habitat, Significant 10 11 Environmental Concern for Wildlife Streams, and Hillside Development and Erosion Control). The property is located approximately one-quarter mile west 12 of NW Thompson Road, between that road's intersections with NW 53rd Drive 13 14 and NW Cornell Road. A shared driveway that connects with NW Thompson Road serves the subject property and a neighboring property. 15

16 The subject property is improved with a detached single-family dwelling. 17 There are maps in the record that show the location of the L-shaped subject 18 property and the location of the house on the subject property in the bottom 19 part of the "L," and there is a 2010 survey that accurately depicts the proximity 20 of the house to the southern property line. Record 131-33; 159. A portion of 21 the survey is reproduced on the following page.



One of petitioner's predecessors constructed a house on the property 2 sometime between 1968 and 1970 (the original house). In 1995, another of 3 petitioner's predecessors constructed a paved recreational vehicle parking pad 4 roughly in the area shown on the reproduction of the 2010 survey in 5 crosshatch. A driveway that travels along the west side of the original house 6 provides access to the parking pad from a shared driveway. The plan that the 7 prior owner submitted to the county in seeking approval for the parking pad 8 incorrectly indicated the pad was located approximately 33 feet north of the 9

southern property line that separates the subject parcel from the adjacent parcel to the south. Sometime after the pad was approved in 1995, in the approximate area of the paved parking pad, an addition to the original house was constructed without permits (post-1995 addition).¹ Petitioner later acquired the property, with the original house and post-1995 addition, in 2000.

Petitioner was advised by the county in 2012 that the post-1995 addition 6 was constructed without required county permits. As indicated earlier, the 7 8 2010 survey disclosed that the original house was located only 18 feet from the 9 adjacent southern property line and that the post-1995 addition is .21 feet (approximately two and one-half inches) from the southern property line.² The 10 county took the position that although the original house that was constructed 11 pursuant to permits between 1968 and 1970 violated a general 30-foot setback 12 that existed at the time and violates a later-enacted 30-foot Forest Practices 13 Setback and Fire Safety Zone, which we discuss at length below, the county 14 15 would pursue no enforcement action regarding the original house. However, the county did pursue enforcement action regarding the unpermitted post-1995 16 addition. The application that led to the hearings officer decision that is before 17

¹ Although it is sometimes referred to as an accessory structure, the accessory structure is more accurately described as an addition to the original house that is integrated into the original house. The addition included both a garage and added living area.

 $^{^2}$ The existing house on the adjacent parcel to the south is approximately 500 feet from the original house and post-1995 addition on the subject property.

us in this appeal was petitioner's effort to secure after-the-fact approval for the
 post-1995 addition that is located entirely within a 30-foot Forest Practices
 Setback and the required 30-foot Fire Safety Zone.

Finally, although it has no material bearing on the issues presented in this appeal, it appears from the record that petitioner was unaware that the original house and the post-1995 addition encroached into a 30-foot Forest Practices Setback and a 30-foot Fire Safety Zone, until the county initiated the enforcement action against him in 2012.

9 FIRST ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR

As already noted, this application seeks after-the-fact approval for the post-1995 addition that was constructed without required permits. Staff took the position that for purposes of applying applicable Forest Development and variance standards, those standards must be applied as though the post-1995 addition had not yet been constructed.³ The Multnomah County Code (MCC) imposes Forest Practices Setbacks to avoid interference with forest practices on

³ That position was stated both when applying the Forest Practices Setback and Primary Fire Safety Zone and when applying variance standards:

[&]quot;[W]e must review the proposal as if the addition is not there and being proposed today." Record 26.

[&]quot;[T]he variance criteria must be applied as if the addition does not exist because it received no permits or approvals. In other words, the applicant must meet the variance criteria as if he were applying to construct the addition, not to legalize it." Record 30.

adjoining properties.⁴ The MCC also imposes Fire Safety Zones to provide a
 buffer to protect structures from fire. A portion of a table that sets out Forest
 Practices Setbacks and Fire Safety Zone requirements in the CFU-2 zone is
 reproduced in relevant part below.

5

Use	For	Fire Safety Zones		
Description of use and location	Nonconforming Setbacks	Front Property Line Adjacent to County Maintained Road (feet)	All Other Setbacks	Fire Safety Zone Requirements
Replaced or restored dwelling in same location &/or less than 400 sq. ft. additional ground coverage; Alteration and maintenance of dwelling	May maintain current nonconforming setback(s) if less than 30 ft. to property line	30	30	Property owner is encouraged to establish Primary to the extent possible.
Replaced or restored dwelling in same location & greater than 400 sw. ft. additional ground coverage; Alteration and maintenance of dwelling	May maintain current nonconforming setback(s) if less than 30 ft. to property lines	30	30	Primary is required to the extent possible within the existing setbacks

⁴ The MCC and the parties sometimes refer to the Forest Practices Setbacks in the singular, Forest Practice Setbacks. All references in this opinion use the plural.

* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *	* * *
Addition to an existing structure	May maintain current nonconforming setback(s) if less than 30 ft. to property lines	30	30	Primary is required to the extent possible within the existing setbacks

Under MCC 33.2256, required Forest Practices Setbacks range from 30
feet to 130 feet, depending on the proposed use and the circumstances. Under
MCC 33.2256(A), variances may be approved to reduce the required Forest
Practices Setbacks.⁵

6 Under MCC 33.2256(D)(1), a minimum Primary Fire Safety Zone of 30 7 feet is required, and a larger Primary Fire Safety Zone is required on steep 8 slopes. Under MCC 33.2256(D)(2), a Secondary Fire Safety Zone is required 9 in some circumstances. Under MCC 33.2256(B), exceptions may be granted to 10 reduce the required Secondary Fire Safety Zones, but variances to reduce 11 Primary Fire Safety Zones are prohibited.⁶ In this case it is not disputed that the

⁵ MCC 33.2256(A) provides:

"Reductions to a Forest Practices Setback dimension shall only be allowed pursuant to approval of an adjustment or variance."

⁶ MCC 33.2256(B) provides:

"Exception to the Secondary Fire Safety Zone shall be pursuant to MCC 33.2310 only. No reduction is permitted for a required Primary Fire Safety Zone through a nonconforming, adjustment or variance process."

applicable Forest Practices Setback is 30 feet, as is the Primary Fire Safety
 Zone, and no Secondary Fire Safety Zone is required.

The relevant issue below was whether the disputed post-1995 addition 3 can be approved as located .21 feet from the south property line, 4 notwithstanding the 30-foot Forest Practices Setback and 30-foot Primary Fire 5 Safety Zone. The hearings officer applied the row in the table for "[r]eplaced or 6 restored dwelling in same location & greater than 400 sq. ft. additional ground 7 coverage" (the second row).⁷ The row for an "[a]ddition to an existing 8 9 structure" (the last row) seems at least as applicable here. However, it seems to 10 impose the same standards as the row the hearings officer applied, and in any 11 event, no party questions the hearings officer's selection of the second row of 12 the table. The hearings officer concluded the original house, located 18 feet 13 from the south property line, established a nonconforming setback. The hearings officer found that approval of the post-1995 addition (which 14 encroached further into that 18-foot nonconforming Forest Practices Setback) 15 16 therefore required a variance to the Forest Practices Setback requirement, which the hearings officer approved. Petitioner does not challenge that part of 17 the hearings officer's decision. 18

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- 20

Regarding the 30-foot Primary Fire Safety Zone, the hearings officer also found petitioner must maintain the existing 18-foot substandard Primary Fire

⁷ The post-1995 addition is approximately 624 square feet in size.

Safety Zone, since that is the Primary Fire Safety Zone that is "to the extent
 possible within the existing" southern setback. However, the hearings officer
 concluded that because a variance may not be approved under MCC
 33.2256(B), after-the-fact approval for construction of the post-1995 addition
 within that substandard 18-foot Primary Fire Safety Zone could not be granted.

6 To set the second row of the CF-2 zone table in context, we note that the "[m]ay maintain current nonconforming setback(s)," and "[p]rimary is required 7 to the extent possible within the existing setbacks" language only applies in 8 9 circumstances where an existing structure is being altered in some way. 10 Outside those circumstances, the Forest Practices Setbacks and Primary and/or 11 Secondary Fire Safety Zones are simply required, subject only to the possibility of a variance from the Forest Practices Setbacks and Secondary Fire Safety 12 Zones.8 13

14

1. Hearings Officer's Failure to Interpret

As noted, the language in the second row of the table concerning the Forest Practices Setbacks ("[m]ay maintain current nonconforming setbacks if less than 30 ft. to property lines") is different from the subsequent language in that line concerning Fire Safety Zones ("[p]rimary is required to the extent

⁸ We also note that when an existing dwelling is being replaced or restored in the same location with less than 400 additional square feet (first row of the table), the applicant is merely "encouraged" to establish a Primary Fire Safety Zone. Neither the Forest Practices Setback nor the Primary Fire Safety Zone is "required" in that circumstance.

possible within the existing setbacks"). Petitioner first argues that the hearings 1 officer concluded that the existing setback of 18 feet must be maintained for 2 purposes of both the Forest Practices Setback and the Fire Safety Zone and 3 failed to squarely address and interpret the different language of the Forest 4 Practices Setback and the Fire Safety Zone in a manner that gives effect to 5 both. In particular, petitioner argues that the hearings officer failed to give 6 independent effect to the language "to the extent possible within the existing 7 8 setback."

9 Most of the hearings officer's decision addresses petitioner's arguments regarding the 30-foot Forest Practices Setback. Petitioner argued below that 10 because MC 33.2256 states that the Forest Practices Setbacks, like the Fire 11 Safety Zones, are "based upon existing conditions," the post-1995 addition 12 established both the "current nonconforming" Forest Practices Setback and the 13 Primary Fire Safety Zone that is "possible within existing setbacks." The 14 hearings officer rejected that argument, concluding that the reference to 15 "existing conditions" did not extend to structures built without required 16 permits. However, the hearings officer did not adopt an interpretation, at least 17 an express interpretation, of what he understands the phrase "to the extent 18 possible within the existing setback" to mean. 19

We do not believe the absence of an express interpretation by the hearings officer that articulates the hearings officer's understanding of the phrase "to the extent possible within the existing setback" is a basis for reversal

or remand. To the extent the hearings officer's interpretation of the relevant
 MCC language is inadequately explained, we agree with the county's
 explanation in its response brief of the meaning of that language, set out below,
 and reject petitioner's interpretation.⁹

5

2. Petitioner's Interpretation

Petitioner begins with his agreement with the hearing officer's 6 interpretation that the existing 18-foot nonconforming Forest Practices 7 Setback, which is "less than 30 ft. to [the] property line," must be maintained 8 9 and for that reason required a variance. But petitioner argues that the differently worded Fire Safety Zone language ("Primary [Fire Safety Zone] is 10 required to the extent possible within the existing setbacks") presumably does 11 12 not have the same meaning. Petitioner contends the hearings officer's conclusion-that that different language also requires that the 18-foot Fire 13 14 Safety Zone that existed south of the original house be maintained—fails to 15 give effect to that different language and is inconsistent with the requirement to give different effect where different words are used in a statute. ORS 16 174.010.¹⁰ Instead, petitioner argues a 30-foot Primary Fire Safety Zone is 17

⁹ Since the decision on review was rendered by a county hearings officer rather than the board of county commissioners, our standard of review is set out at ORS 197.835(9)(a)(D) under which LUBA must reverse or remand a local government decision if it "[i]mproperly construed the applicable law[.]"

¹⁰ ORS 174.010 provides, in part, "where there are several provisions or particulars such construction is, if possible, to be adopted as will give effect to all."

only required "to the extent possible within the existing setbacks," and since 1 2 the full 30-foot setback is not possible within the existing 18-foot setback from the south property line, the post-1995 addition provides the required Primary 3 Fire Safety Zone, so long as it is located somewhere "within" the previously 4 existing 18-foot setback: "[f]or an addition, an applicant can establish 5 compliance with a proposed Fire Safety Zone that is less than, but somewhere 6 within the existing setbacks." Petition for Review 19. We understand 7 petitioner to contend the hearings officer failed to give any effect to the words 8 9 "to the extent possible within the existing setbacks."

10

3. The County's Interpretation

11 The county's response brief explains why the result reached by the 12 hearings officer gives effect to the different language regarding Forest 13 Practices Setbacks and Fire Safety Zones and results in a far better 14 interpretation of the table language. We cannot improve on the county's 15 explanation, and it is set out below:

"The Forest Practices Setback, like many other setback 16 requirements, is a 'dimensional setback' that 'provides for 17 separation between structures and property lines.' See MCC 18 33.0005 (defining 'Setback' and 'Forest Practices Setback'). As 19 with setbacks in general, the Forest Practices Setback promotes the 20 public welfare, but does so by serving a particular purpose: it 21 ensures that the placement of structures will not interfere with 22 forestry practices on adjacent property. MCC 33.0005 (defining 23 Forest Practices Setback as assuring that 'accepted forestry 24 25 practices can occur on adjacent properties without the adjacent 26 property owner needing to alter those practices due to the close proximity of a dwelling or structure'). Thus, the primary focus of 27

the Forest Practices Setback is protecting forestry practices, not
 structures or people.

"Consistent with that purpose, and similar to other dimensional 3 4 standards, a Forest Practices Setback can be varied or adjusted if, among other things, the public welfare will be protected. See 5 MCC 33.7606(A), (B) (listing '[d]imensional standards that may 6 be modified' to include 'forest practices setbacks'); MCC 7 33.7611(B) (requiring that '[a]ny impacts resulting from the 8 9 adjustment are mitigated to the extent practical'); MCC 33.7616(D) (requiring that the variance 'will not be materially 10 detrimental to the public welfare'). 11

- 12 "In contrast, and as the name implies, a Primary Fire Safety Zone promotes public safety by establishing 'a fire break extending a 13 minimum of 30 feet in all directions around a dwelling or 14 structure.' MCC 33.2256(D)(1)(a); see also (Rec. 27) (concluding 15 in Hearings Officer Decision that [Fire Safety Zone] 'clearly is a 16 public safety standard'). Of note, unlike a setback, which requires 17 a structure to be a certain distance from the property line, the 18 Primary [Fire Safety Zone] requires a buffer to extend out from the 19 structure, with requirements for spacing, pruning, and height of 20 trees and other vegetation. Id. In some instances, a Secondary 21 Fire Safety Zone is required, which is 'a fire break extending a 22 minimum of 100 feet in all directions around the primary fire 23 safety zone.' MCC 33.2256(D)(2). Like the Primary [Fire Safety 24 Zone], the Secondary [Fire Safety Zone] also focuses on public 25 safety, specifically by 'reduc[ing] fuels so that the overall intensity 26 27 of any wildfire is lessened.' Id.
- "In strict promotion of that public safety purpose, and in stark 28 29 contrast to the Forest Practices Setback, the County Code prohibits reduction of the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] through 30 а nonconforming, adjustment, or variance process. MCC 33.2256(B) 31 The Code is more lenient with respect to the 32 (so stating). Secondary [Fire Safety Zone], but, even there, reductions are 33 allowed only in limited circumstances and are subject to the robust 34 standards provided in MCC 33.2310. See MCC 33.2256(B) (so 35 36 stating).

1 "That said, the Code demonstrates recognition of the fact that 2 development occurred prior to the adoption of the current 3 framework for the Forest Practices Setbacks and Fire Safety Zones 4 in MCC 33.2256 and, in limited circumstances, makes allowances 5 for reductions to each.

"In relevant part, for the development at issue in this case, an 6 existing nonconforming setback of less than 30 feet may be 7 8 'maintained' and need not be increased to the full 30 feet. In 9 coordination with this allowance for nonconforming setbacks, the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] is required, but only 'to the extent 10 possible within the existing setbacks.' MCC 33.2256, Table 1. 11 12 Thus, despite the general prohibition on reducing the Primary [Fire Safety Zone], in this instance the Code allows for reduction of the 13 Primary [Fire Safety Zone] in order to conform to a pre-existing, 14 nonconforming setback. However, the Code does not allow for 15 reduction beyond that because the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] must 16 17 extend 'to the extent possible' in light of the nonconforming 18 setback.

"Petitioner, however, asserts that the Code goes one step further: 19 it not only allows the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] to be reduced to 20 the extent of the nonconforming setback, but also allows the 21 Primary [Fire Safety Zone] to be reduced further than the 22 nonconforming setback. Petitioner asserts that this is the case 23 because any other interpretation requires the [Fire Safety Zone] 24 phrase 'to the extent possible' to be read as equivalent to the 25 setback term 'maintain,' which would not be given independent 26 meaning to those two different phrasings. 27

28 "****

"Contrary to Petitioner's assertion that the Hearings Officer's
interpretation impermissibly equates the phrase 'to the extent
possible' in the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] standard with the term
'maintain' in the setback standard, the County's interpretation
gives full effect to the meaning of the phrase 'to the extent
possible within the existing setbacks.'

"As explained above, Forest Practices Setbacks are dimensional 1 2 standards for the siting of structures that may be reduced through 3 nonconforming, adjustment, and variance processes. MCC 33.256 4 Table 1; MCC 33.2256(A). In fact, Table 1 of MCC 33.2256 5 includes a column that specifically addresses how nonconforming 6 setbacks operate. In development situations like the one in this 7 case, the drafters chose to allow nonconforming Forest Practices 8 Setbacks of less than 30 feet by providing that an applicant 'may 9 maintain' those setbacks, rather than increase them to the full 30 10 feet. MCC 33.2256, Table 1. In other words, the drafters used the 11 phrase 'may maintain' to establish that applicants would not have 12 to *increase* their nonconforming setbacks, not to suggest that they 13 could not decrease their setbacks through an adjustment or 14 variance process. Indeed, as Petitioner did here, an applicant 15 could further decrease a nonconforming setback through the adjustment or variance process. See MCC 33.2256(A) (providing 16 17 that Forest Practices Setbacks can be reduced only through 18 adjustment or variance).

"In contrast, the phrase 'may maintain' was not appropriate for the 19 corresponding Primary [Fire Safety Zone] because the drafters 20 wanted to do more than establish that applicants were not required 21 to increase the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] to the full 30 feet where 22 there was a nonconforming setback; the drafters wanted to make 23 clear that applicants could not further decrease the [Fire Safety 24 Zone] either. The phrase 'to the extent possible' achieved that 25 goal because it both (1) established that the full 30-foot Primary 26 [Fire Safety Zone] was not required in the case of a 27 nonconforming setback, while also (2) limiting the extent of the 28 reduction by requiring the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] 'to the 29 extent possible' given the reduced setback. See MCC 33.2256, 30 Table 1 ('Primary is required to the extent possible within the 31 existing setbacks.' * * * 32

"In sum, although a reduction in the Primary [Fire Safety Zone]
was necessary to accommodate existing nonconforming setbacks
of less than 30 feet, the drafters used different text to refer to the
different standards for good reason: while the nonconforming
Forest Practices Setback did not have to be increased ('may
maintain'), the Primary [Fire Safety Zone] could not be further

decreased ('required to the extent possible'). Rather than equating those different phrasings, the County's interpretation gives full effect to the text of each provision." Respondent's Brief 12-17 (footnote omitted; emphases in original).

5 We agree with the county's explanation that any apparent anomaly of 6 interpreting the table's language to allow an applicant to seek and receive a 7 variance to the 30-foot Forest Practices Setback (or an existing nonconforming Forest Practices Setback), while strictly adhering to the 30-foot Primary Fire 8 9 Safety Zone and not allowing a variance, is likely explained by the different purposes served by the Forest Practices Setbacks and Primary Fire Safety Zone. 10 More importantly, although the different language concerning Forest Practices 11 Setbacks and Fire Safety Zones both require that the house remain setback 18 12 feet from the south property line, that similar result is not inconsistent with the 13 14 different language and does not fail to give effect to the adopted language, for the reasons stated by the county. 15

We also agree with the county that under petitioner's construction of the
table's language, a variance to the Forest Practices Setback would operate "as a
de facto Primary [Fire Safety Zone] variance, contrary to [MCC 33.2256(B)]."
Respondent's Brief 20. As the county further notes:

20 Petitioner's interpretation conflicts with the "Moreover. framework within which these setbacks and [Fire Safety Zones] 21 operate in that it allows for unfettered reduction of the Primary 22 [Fire Safety Zone] (i.e., anywhere within a setback) in the least 23 safe situations (*i.e.*, nonconforming situations), while no reduction 24 is allowed in more safe situations [*i.e.*, conforming situations]. 25 * * *." Respondent's Brief 21 (emphasis in original). 26

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The first assignment of error is denied.

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SECOND ASSIGNMENT OF ERROR

In 1997, the owners of the adjacent property to the south of the subject property granted petitioner's predecessor a 70-foot by 60-foot easement for construction, access to and maintenance of a septic system drain field. Record 156-57. Petitioner argued to the county that the 60-foot wide easement over the parcel to the south for the septic drain field should be considered adequate to satisfy the requirement for a 30-foot Primary Fire Safety Zone.

9

MCC 33.2256(D)(4) provides:

"Required Primary and Secondary Fire Safety Zones shall be
established *within the subject tract* as required by Table 1 above."
(Italics and underlining added.)

In relevant part, "tract" is defined as "[o]ne or more contiguous Lots of Record in the same ownership." MCC 33.2210. The adjacent parcel to the south and the subject parcel are different tracts. Because relying on the easement across the tract to the south would not result in a Primary Fire Safety Zone "within the subject tract," the hearings officer denied petitioner's argument that the easement over the parcel to the south could be relied on to comply with the 30foot Primary Fire Safety Zone.

20 Petitioner argues that the text underlined above, "as required by Table 21 1," implicates the table text requiring a 30-foot Primary Fire Safety Zone only 22 "to the extent possible within setbacks" and means petitioner may establish a

Primary Fire Safety Zone that is not entirely on the subject tract because it is
 not possible within existing setbacks.

The county responds: "the reference to Table 1 in MCC 33.2256(D)(4) is not intended to alter the requirement that Fire Safety Zones must be established on the tract, but, instead, serves to identify which Fire Safety Zones must be established on the subject tract in different development circumstances." Respondent's Brief 25. We agree with the county.

8 The second assignment of error is denied.

9 The county's decision is affirmed.