

Sec. 8-3066. Visual buffers and screening.

(a) *Generally.* Buffers shall be provided as set forth herein to effectively protect all property from the adverse effects of adjacent land use activity of a more intensive nature where such activity may result in nuisance, including visual blight, threat to safety, or noise or odor encroachment to an adjacent parcel or one located across a public right-of-way.

The provisions of this section shall not apply to uses or zoning districts where greater or more intense buffer elements are required elsewhere in these regulations for such uses or districts. Where a conflict in design standards exists, the most restrictive buffer and screening standard shall apply.

(b) *Buffer plan required.* A buffer plan shall be submitted with all applications for building permits, occupancy permits or site plan approvals for development of a site for which a buffer element is required hereunder.

The buffer plan shall show in detail the layout of the proposed development, including the arrangement of buildings, parking areas, permanent open spaces, and the lotting arrangement and location of buildings on adjacent properties which require buffering from the proposed development. The plan shall also show the location of proposed buffers, including a detailed description or sketch of such buffer materials to be used, including a provision for an irrigated water source within 50 feet of the buffer and landscaping areas.

All plans shall be reviewed for completeness prior to their being accepted for processing and shall be forwarded to the MPC staff for approval or denial. Appeals from the MPC staff review shall be made to the MPC board.

(c) *Certification of buffer plans.* The MPC staff shall certify approved buffer plans to the zoning administrator for the issuance of permits.

(d) *Required buffers.* Buffers shall be provided as follows:

(1) *One-family buffer requirements.* Buffers shall be provided as described below to protect one-family detached residential property (including one-family developed and undeveloped property zoned for residential use). The buffer types indicated for each circumstance are described in section 8-3066(f), Buffer Types.

- a. A type "A" buffer shall be required where one-family detached residential property is adjoined by multifamily residential or by semidetached or end row dwellings or manufactured homes.
- b. A type "B" buffer shall be required where one-family detached residential property is adjoined by institutional or nonretail commercial activity, including religious facilities, hospitals, care

homes, public and private schools, day nurseries and kindergartens, banks, professional offices, and other uses of a like nature.

- c. A type "C" buffer shall be required where one-family detached residential property is adjoined by lodging facilities or convenience or general retail commercial activity not accompanied by outside storage of goods or products or by service or repair of vehicles. Examples of uses within this category include motels, clothing stores, specialty shops, restaurants, food and drug stores, laundromats, furniture stores, department stores, auto parts stores, auto filling stations, and other uses of a like nature.
- d. A type "D" buffer shall be required where one-family detached residential property is adjoined by uses such as auto repair and paint shops, motorcycle sales and service, auto upholstery shops, sale or rental of autos, trucks, boats or trailers, mini-warehouses, drive-in restaurants, cocktail lounges, nightclubs, package stores and uses of a like nature.

(2) *Multifamily buffer requirements.* Buffers shall be provided as described below to protect multifamily residential property (including multifamily developed and undeveloped property zoned for multifamily residential use). The buffer types indicated for each circumstance are described in section 8-3066(f), Buffer Types.

- a. A type "B" buffer shall be required where multifamily residential property is adjoined by institutional or nonretail commercial activity, including religious facilities, hospital and care homes, and public and private schools, day nurseries and kindergartens, banks and professional offices, and activities of a like nature.
- b. A type "C" buffer shall be required where multifamily residential property is adjoined by lodging facilities or convenience or general retail commercial activity not accompanied by outdoor storage of goods, products, or the service or repair of vehicles. Examples of uses within this category include motels, clothing stores, specialty shops, restaurants, food and drug stores, laundromats, furniture stores, department stores, auto parts stores, auto filling stations, and other uses of a like nature.
- c. A type "D" buffer shall be required where multifamily residential property is adjoined by uses such as auto repair and paint shops, motorcycle sales and service, auto upholstery shops, sale or rental of autos, trucks, boats, or trailers, mini-warehouses, drive-in restaurants, cocktail lounges, nightclubs, package stores, and other uses of a like nature.

- (3) *Nonresidential service and storage area buffer requirements.* A type "E" buffer shall be provided where outdoor storage and salvage yards, outdoor vehicle repair and service areas, wrecker storage compounds, and uses of a similar nature, both principal and accessory, adjoin other properties with a dissimilar land use classification or where such uses abut a public right-of-way. Trees planted with a type "E" buffer shall be staggered to achieve a degree of opacity that prevents clear recognition of the use. All trees and shrubs within the buffer shall be of evergreen variety. Supplemental planting of evergreen vegetation may be required within preserved buffers so that the use is not clearly distinguishable through the buffer.
- (4) *Manufacturing and industrial buffer requirements.* A type "F" buffer shall be required where any type of manufacturing or industrial use adjoins other properties with a dissimilar land use classification or where such use abuts a public road right-of-way. Trees planted within a type "F" buffer shall be staggered to achieve a degree of opacity that prevents clear recognition of the use. All trees and shrubs within the buffer shall be of the evergreen variety. Supplemental planting of evergreen vegetation may be required within preserved buffers so that the use is not clearly distinguishable through the buffer.
- (5) *Off-street parking lot buffer requirements.* A type "G" buffer shall be required where a parking lot containing four or more parking spaces adjoins other properties or where a parking lot abuts a public or private road right-of-way.

(e) *Provisions for certain preexisting uses.* All outdoor material or equipment storage yards, outdoor vehicle repair and service areas, wrecker service storage compounds, vehicle parking lots, loading areas, dumpster pads and trash disposal areas, and uses of a similar nature, both principal and accessory, in existence on the date of adoption of this amendment (December 5, 1991) shall be brought into compliance with the buffer provisions of this section.

Within 90 days from receipt of notice from the city zoning administrator, the owner of a use or property receiving notice that the existing use or property is not in compliance with the buffer and screening provisions of this section shall bring the property into compliance.

The provision for a landscaped buffer or natural buffer located adjacent to the exterior of a screening fence may be waived for a use not in compliance, if the existing fence is in compliance with the intent and the design standards of this section, as determined by the director of inspections.

(f) *Buffer types.*

- (1) *Minimum standards.* The following table contains the minimum standards for the various buffer types referenced in section 8-3066(d). Under each major type are options available to a developer. Some of the

options include more than one element (e.g., according to table 3-12.5 below, a type "A" buffer may be a six-foot high fence and a five-foot planted buffer or a six-foot high hedge and a ten-foot wide planted buffer or a 20-foot wide preserved buffer).

TABLE

| <i>Buffer Type</i> | <i>Fence height (feet)*</i> | <i>Hedge height (feet)*</i> | <i>Planted Width (feet)</i> | <i>Preserved Width (feet)</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A | 6 | - | 5 | - |
| | - | 6 | 10 | |
| | - | - | - | 20 |
| B | 6 | - | 15 | - |
| | 6 | - | - | 15 |
| C | 6 | - | 20 | - |
| | 6 | - | - | 20 |
| D | 8 | - | 25 | - |
| | 6 | - | - | 25 |
| E | 8 | - | 30 | - |
| | 6 | - | - | 25 |
| F | 8 | - | 30 | - |
| | 6 | - | - | 40 |
| G | 3 | - | - | - |
| | - | 3 | 3 | - |

*The height of the fence, hedge, or other vegetation within the buffer shall conform to the requirement of section 8-3013, Vision Clearance at Intersections.

(2) *Design standards.*

a. *Fences and walls.*

1. The design of fence or wall shall be the same architectural style and materials as the principal building or buildings on the lot.
2. Except where otherwise allowed by these regulations, any fence or wall shall be opaque so as to prevent the passage of light and debris, and shall be constructed of textured or split-faced block, brick, stone, stucco over concrete block, architectural tile, decay-resistant wood, or similar opaque materials. Decay-resistant wood includes wood that is naturally decay resistant (e.g., cedar, cypress, redwood) or wood that has been chemically and/or mechanically treated (e.g., chromate copper arsenate [CCA]) to a retention rate such that the manufacturer provides a guarantee against decay for 40 years.

3. Unfinished concrete block shall not be permitted.
4. Chainlink or wire fences shall be permitted within nonresidential zoning districts to buffer similar uses, provided that plant material is planted immediately behind or front of the fence.
5. The height of a fence or wall shall not exceed eight feet, except as allowed by other subsections of this subsection (f). Fences and walls shall be interrupted at intervals not exceeding 25 feet by architectural features such as pilasters or columns or by various species of plants that are at least as tall as the fence or wall or taller.
6. The fence or wall shall be set back not less than five feet from the property line unless otherwise approved by the MPC.
7. The area between the property line and the fence or wall shall be landscaped and maintained as an open area in conformance with the City of Savannah property maintenance ordinance.
8. The height of a fence or wall shall be measured from the finished grade at the base of the fence or wall to the top of the fence or wall, but shall not include columns or posts.

b. *Hedges.*

1. For newly established hedges, plants shall be a minimum of three feet in height in order to achieve 50 percent of the required buffer at plant maturity.
2. The area between the property line and the hedge shall be grassed and shall be maintained in conformance with the City of Savannah property maintenance ordinance.

c. *Vegetative buffers.* In general, the purpose of a vegetative buffer is to achieve a degree of opacity that prevents clear recognition of the use being buffered. There shall be no encroachment of structures or paving within the area designated as a buffer. The buffer shall be maintained in conformance with the City of Savannah property maintenance ordinance.

1. *Trees.* Trees shall be planted in conformance with requirements of the City of Savannah land disturbing and tree protection ordinance. Standards for the size, planting,

protection, and care of trees planted within a required buffer shall conform to the requirements of said ordinance regardless of whether tree quality points are requested for the trees.

2. *Shrubs.* Shrubs shall be planted in conformance with the requirements of the City of Savannah land disturbing and tree protection ordinance. Standards for the size, planting, protection, and care of shrubs planted within a required buffer shall conform to the requirements of said ordinance regardless of whether landscape quality points are requested for the shrubs.
3. *Preserved stands of vegetation within buffers.* Preserved stands of mature trees within buffers shall conform to the requirements of the City of Savannah land disturbing and tree protection ordinance. The acceptability of mature stands of trees as a buffer shall be determined by the City of Savannah arborist in conformance with the provisions of said ordinance regardless of whether tree or landscape quality points are requested for the stands. Provided, however, that selective hand clearing of underbrush may be permitted if approved by the MPC and the City of Savannah arborist.

(g) *Variations.* The planning commission may approve variations from these requirements at the request of the developer on a finding that such variations would:

- (1) Be in keeping with the overall character of the area.
- (2) Would not be contrary to the purpose and intent of these regulations.
- (3) Would not be detrimental to existing or proposed surrounding uses.
- (4) Serve the public purposes to a degree equal to or greater than the standards replaced.
- (5) Variations may also be approved by the planning commission in special situations where serious security problems would be posed by construction of a buffer designed in strict conformance with the requirements of this section.