

**Article VII, Regulations of General Applicability****Division 3. Transitional Buffers, Landscaping and Vegetation****Section VII-301. Purpose**

The purpose of this Division is to establish standards for landscaping and buffering. The primary intent is to promote the public health and welfare by specifying minimum standards for landscaping that will enhance the appearance of the city, help improve air and water quality, conserve soil, screen unattractive views, and muffle sound. Incompatible land uses may lead to conflicts that can be reduced or eliminated by spatial separation, vegetative buffers, physical and/or visual barriers. Abutting land uses can also be complementary or mutually supportive even though they are different. In those instances, the additional space required for buffers may be contrary to the City of Sarasota's objectives for mixed-use development. The requirements contained herein are intended to provide a comprehensive, consistent and flexible system to protect existing trees, to foster creative and attractive landscape design, and to require adequate buffer areas in those instances where they are needed.

**Section VII-302. Applicability**

- A. All new multi-family residences, group housing, nursing homes, dormitories, and all nonresidential development shall comply with all of the standards provided in this Division.
- B. All additions to existing buildings, except single-family and duplex dwellings, that cumulatively exceed fifty (50) percent of the floor area of the existing building shall comply with all of the standards set forth in this Division.
- C. All new detached (not additions to existing buildings controlled by Subsection (B) above) multi-family and nonresidential buildings added to existing development shall comply with all the standards provided in this Division.
- D. Changes of occupancy in existing buildings involving a change in use-type, shall comply with all the standards provided in this Division.

**Section VII- 303. Buffer Requirements and Installation Standards****A. General.**

1. Vegetated buffers shall be required to separate land uses of different intensities from each other to eliminate or minimize potential negative effects such as dirt, noise, litter, glare of lights, signs, parking areas, or to provide spacing to reduce the adverse impacts of noise, odor, or danger from fires or explosions. Buffers will also provide open space and natural barriers around the perimeter of a proposed land use in order to separate and screen the proposed use from adjacent development and vacant land.

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2. The amount of land and the type and amount of planting specified for each buffer required by the Division are designed to ameliorate nuisances between adjacent land uses. The plant units required for each of the buffers have been formulated to ensure they, in fact, function as "transitional buffers".
  3. The width, amount of vegetation, and other features of a buffer will vary depending on the nature of the abutting development and vacant land.
  4. A buffer may be used for passive recreation, when appropriate upon approval of the approving authority. In such instances, the buffer may contain pedestrian and bicycle trails and siting areas, provided that: 1) minimal plant material is eliminated, 2) the total width of the buffer is maintained, and 3) all other regulations of this Code are met.
  5. Minimal, generally perpendicular, utility crossings may be included in a buffer provided that: 1) canopy trees are neither displaced nor prevented from being planted, and 2) comparable performance standards are maintained. In instances where utility easements are permitted in buffers, landscaping (buffer plantings) in those utility easements will not be allowed unless agreed to by the agency controlling the easement.
  6. Concrete curbs or other barrier at least six (6) inches high shall be provided between vehicular use areas and landscaped buffer areas to protect the landscaping.
  7. Use of Buffers. A buffer may be used for utility or drainage easements, provided that the requirements of such use and the buffer requirements are compatible.
  8. Maintenance of Buffer Integrity. Buffers shall remain part of the zoning lot for which they are required.
  9. No Development Within The Required Buffer. The required buffer shall not contain any development, impervious surfaces, or site features that do not function to meet the standards of this Section. No grading, development, or land-disturbing activities shall occur within the buffer unless approved as part of a development plan. Storm water detention or treatment areas and easements shall be shown on the approved landscape plan and such areas shall not occupy more than fifty (50%), horizontally, of the width of the buffer.
  10. The arrangement of required plants and trees shall be distributed in a relatively uniform manner and as depicted on the approved landscape plan.
  11. Existing trees and vegetation within a required buffer, which meet these requirements may be counted toward the total buffer plant material requirements. If existing trees and plants do not fully meet the standards for the type of buffer required, additional vegetation shall be planted.
- A. Location of Buffers. The buffers required by these regulations shall be located along the perimeter of a zoning lot where required, except at approved entrances or exits to the property or in required sight triangles. Buffers shall extend to the zoning lot line or right-of-way line,

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except where easements, covenants, or natural features may require the buffer to be set back from the property line.

B. Determination of Required Buffer: The type and width of buffer required between a proposed land use and an abutting land use is based on the degree of compatibility between the uses. To determine the type of buffer required between two abutting zoning lots refer to Table VII-301 below.

**Table VII-301: Buffer Type Required by Impact Category and Land Use**

| Proposed Use   | Adjacent Site – Existing or Future Land Use<br>(whichever is most restrictive) |               |               |                                 |
|--|--|---------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
|  | Residential  | Office        | Commercial    | Production Intensive Commercial |
| <b>Impact Category 1</b><br>Multi-family residences, group housing, nursing homes, and dorms.  | A  | A             | B             | C                               |
| <b>Impact Category 2</b><br>All permitted uses in office zones; conditional uses in residential zones.   | A  | None required | A             | B                               |
| <b>Impact Category 3</b><br>All permitted uses in commercial and special purpose zones; conditional uses in office zones.                          | B  | A             | None required | None required                   |
| <b>Impact Category 4</b><br>All permitted uses in production intensive commercial zones; conditional uses in commercial and special purpose zones. | C  | B             | A             | None required                   |

(Ord. No. 03-4472; Sec. 9, 6-16-03)

C. Interpretation and exceptions

1. Letters (A, B, & C) indicated in Table VII-301 above refer to buffer types required.
2. For purposes of determining buffer requirements, if any, the Director of Building, Zoning & Code Enforcement is authorized to make all interpretations relating to proposed land uses and specific impact categories on the site proposed for development, and existing or future land uses on adjacent sites.
3. Buffers shall not be required for single-family dwellings, duplexes, or on zoning lots in the CT, CBN, or C-CBD zone districts.

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4. Buffers may be waived or reduced on zoning lots where the adjacent land use is more intensive and/or existing buffers are already in place. Such waivers shall be approved by the Director of Building, Zoning & Code Enforcement as part of an Administrative Site Plan or by the Planning Board or City Commission, as applicable, for all other Site Plan applications (Reference Zoning Code § IV-501).
5. Buffers shall not be required for accessory uses internal to residential developments for use by its residents.
6. Type B buffers shall be required for accessory uses when they abut other properties in a residential zone district.

**D. Buffer Illustrations and Specifications.**

1. The buffer illustrations in Exhibits "1" through "3" hereof graphically indicate the specifications of each buffer. Buffer requirements are stated in terms of the buffer width and number and type of plant units required per one hundred (100) linear feet, or fraction thereof, of buffer. The requirements of a buffer may be satisfied by any of the options illustrated within a buffer category type. The "plant unit multiplier" is a factor by which the basic number of plant units required for a given buffer is determined in accordance with the selected width of that buffer. To determine the total number of plant units required, the length of each side of the property requiring a given type of buffer shall be divided by one hundred (100) and multiplied by the number of plant units shown in any of the options illustrated. Any buffer area that overlaps another buffer area shall be subtracted from the total to avoid double counting. If the calculations required by this Subsection yield a fractional number, that number shall be rounded up to the next highest whole number.
  - a. Each illustration (Exhibits "1" through "3" hereof) depicts the total buffer required between two uses.
  - b. Whenever a wall, fence, or berm is required within a buffer, these are shown as "structure required" in the buffer illustrations, where their respective specifications are also shown. (See Exhibits "4" and "5" hereof)
  - c. All buffers shall be provided with a ground cover of vegetation or other organic material. Buffers shall be maintained free from junk and debris. Dead or diseased vegetation shall be removed and replaced with healthy vegetation. The responsibility to maintain and replace plant materials shall be that of the landowner on whose property the plant material needing maintenance or replacement is located.
  - d. The density and type of buffer planting shall be arranged to achieve maximum reasonable protection to adjoining less intense uses.
  - e. Where the buffer type selected requires a berm, the berm should be graded to appear smooth, rounded and natural. Its slopes shall not exceed 3:1 grade.

- f. Use of Fences, Walls, Berms, and Hedges When Not Required in a Specific Buffer Type. Any combination of additional fences, walls, or berms may be used to supplement required trees, shrubs in required buffers. All chain-link fencing shall have all components vinyl coated (i.e., either green, black or brown vinyl). Chain link fences shall be accompanied by planting of a vine or shrub for each ten (10) foot section of fence so that the foliage will grow to create a fence that will be at least sixty (60%) percent opaque.
- g. Fences and Walls, Location and Finished Side. Whenever a fence or wall is placed in a required buffer, the fence or wall shall be placed on, or near, the property line (as illustrated in the various buffer types) with the finished side of such fence or wall facing off the property on which the buffer is located.

### **Section VII-304. Parking Lot Landscaping**

Landscaping of off-street parking lots shall be required to reduce the visual impact of parking areas that support multi-family residential development and nonresidential development. Regulatory standards for parking lot landscaping are imposed to control adverse impacts on abutting and adjacent land uses.

- A. Minimum Requirements. All off-street parking lots, in excess of one thousand five hundred (1,500) square feet or five (5) spaces, which ever is less, shall comply with the following:
  1. Such parking lots shall be landscaped. For all uses, landscaping shall cover a minimum of ten (10) percent of the total area of the parking lot. Calculations to verify these requirements shall be shown on the landscape plan. Such required parking lot landscaping as herein provided shall be in addition to any other buffers required.
  2. A 5-foot minimum width, Type A buffer, shall be required around the perimeter of all parking lots, in all zone districts, regardless of Impact Category or adjacent land use, except those parking lots abutting public alleys. Required trees may be eliminated by the Director of Building, Zoning & Code Enforcement where they would compete with existing or planned street trees within abutting public rights-of-way.
- B. Design Standards.
  1. All open automobile parking and maneuvering areas shall have landscaping that is evenly placed throughout the area. See Exhibits "6" and "7" for examples.
  2. Concrete curbs or other approved barrier at least six (6) inches high shall be provided between vehicular use areas and landscaped areas to protect the landscaping.
  3. Parking areas shall be graded so that landscape islands do not impound or impede the flow of storm water runoff.

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4. Groves of trees, as well as isolated islands with single trees, are encouraged. See Exhibits "6" and "7".
5. In "other vehicular use areas" where the strict application of this Section will seriously limit the functionality of areas such as off-street loading areas, the required landscaping may be located near the perimeter of the paved area, including such perimeters which may be adjacent to a building on the site.
6. The front of a vehicle may encroach up to two (2) feet upon any required landscaped area or walkway. Two (2) feet of such landscaped area or walkway may be part of the required depth of each abutting parking space in such instance; however, in such instances the width of the sidewalk shall be increased to at least six (6) feet.
7. When an access way intersects a public right-of-way, all landscaping within the triangular areas described below shall provide unobstructed visibility. Such visibility shall be provided at a level between two and one-half (2½) and eight (8) feet above finish grade. However, trees having limbs and foliage trimmed so that no limbs or foliage extend into the cross-visibility area shall be allowed. In addition, such trees shall be located so as not to create a traffic hazard. Landscaping, except required grass or ground cover, future growth lines shall not be located closer than three (3) feet to the edge of any access way pavement. The triangular areas above referred to are:
  - a. The areas of property on both sides of an access way formed by the intersection of each side of the access way and public right-of-way lines, with two (2) sides of each triangle being thirty (30) feet in length from the point of intersection, and the third side being a line connecting the ends of the two other sides (i.e., such as the hypotenuse of a triangle).
8. Good visibility in parking lots is important for both security and traffic safety reasons. Therefore, plants and trees that restrict visibility, such as tall shrubs and low branching trees shall be avoided.
9. The landscaped areas should be evenly dispersed throughout the parking lot. This gives the maximum effect to the purposes of landscaping, while minimizing impacts on sight lines and ease of access. However, this is not meant to prohibit the provision of major plant groupings in wider islands.
10. Existing plant material on a zoning lot that is retained and meets the planting requirements of this Division relative to location, size and species may be counted toward the total planting requirement of this Section.

**C. Parking Area Standards.**

1. All double parking rows shall have a terminal island placed at each end with a canopy tree and shrubs as provided herein. Each such island shall be at least two hundred and eighty-eight (288) square feet in area and at least eight (8) feet wide, measured back of

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curb to back of curb. Larger islands are recommended, however, especially where canopy trees are provided.

2. No row of parking spaces shall contain more than fifteen (15) spaces uninterrupted by a required landscape island. See Exhibits "8", "9" and "10".
3. Each double row terminal island shall include at least two (2) canopy trees and six (6) shrubs and either ground cover, mulch or solid sod to cover the balance of the island. All other islands shall include one (1) canopy tree and three (3) shrubs and either ground cover, mulch or solid sod to cover the balance of the island.
4. Landscaping on each island shall be located so as not to cause a traffic hazard. Visibility must be maintained for all traffic movements. Shrubs shall not exceed thirty (30) inches in height, and all trees shall be kept with at least five feet (5) feet of clear trunk. See Exhibit "8".
  - a. See Exhibits "6" and "7" for examples of acceptable parking lot landscape areas.

**Section VII-305. Preservation Standards**

- A. Construction Barriers. During the development of the property, the owner of the property shall be responsible for the erection of any and all barriers or protective guards necessary to protect any existing or installed vegetation from damage both during construction. See Exhibit "10".
- B. Wall. Wherever a change of grade is planned, the trees to be preserved shall be protected by a wall so as to preserve the existing grade for the tree's root system. See Exhibit "9".
- C. Topsoil. Wherever a change of grade is planned, the topsoil stripped on site shall be preserved for the new landscaping to be installed.

**Section VII-306. Maintenance Standards**

- A. Landscaped Areas. All required landscaped areas must include an irrigation system. The plantings in any landscaped area must be properly maintained in order for the landscaped area to fulfill the purposes for which it was established. Such maintenance shall include all actions necessary to keep the landscaped area free of litter and debris and to keep plantings healthy and orderly in appearance. Where reuse water is not used to irrigate, the developer is encouraged to use drip or micro-spray irrigation systems.
- B. Buffers. The plantings, fences, walls, and berms that constitute a buffer must be properly maintained in order for the buffer to fulfill the purpose for which it is established. Such maintenance shall include all actions necessary to keep the buffer free of litter and debris, and to keep plantings, walls, fences, and berms in good repair and neat appearance. All buffer material shall be protected from damage by motor vehicles or pedestrians which could reduce the effectiveness of the buffer.

- C. Damage. In the event that any vegetation or physical element functioning to meet the standards of this division is severely damaged, it shall be replanted or replaced within ninety (90) days or one (1) growing season, whichever is sooner. In the event that the damage is found to be caused by an "Act of God" (i.e., hurricane, winds, fire, flood, freeze) a grace period of one hundred and eighty (180) days (an additional ninety (90) days) shall be granted for replacement.

### **Section VII-307. Landscaping Plan Requirements**

#### **A. Landscaping Plan.**

1. An applicant for development approval who is required to install landscaping shall submit a landscaping plan as part of the development plan portion of an application for development approval.
2. The landscaping plan, which shall be drawn by a Florida Registered landscape architect, shall include all of the following:
  - a. Name of proposed development.
  - b. Name, location, quantity, size, and type of existing and proposed vegetation and landscaping on the site, and its relation to all other site features such as existing and proposed buildings, utilities and easements.
  - c. Florida Registered landscape architect's license number, name, address, and telephone number, signature and seal.
  - d. Elevation and Section drawings of any solid screen proposed.
  - e. Installation schedule.
  - f. All trees four (4) inches DBH (Diameter Breast Height) or greater to be retained and those proposed for removal.
  - g. All proposed building footprints; drives, walks, patios, parking areas, lighting and other hardscape improvements.
  - h. Scale, date and north arrow; and street names.
  - i. Plant list showing botanical and common name, size and quantity of all proposed plantings.
  - j. Any other information that may be needed to show compliance with this Division.

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- k. At the time of building permit review, irrigation plans, showing head type and location, piping route and size, valves, time clocks, water source, rain shut-off device, and irrigation schedule.
3. Criteria For Approval of Landscaping Plans. The following criteria shall be used to evaluate proposed landscaping plans:
    - a. Landscaping materials that are native to the area as determined by soil characteristics, wind and salt tolerances, drought tolerance and maintenance demands should be selected wherever feasible.
    - b. Landscaping should reduce the intrusion of headlights and other glare and also provide a safety barrier between pedestrians and vehicles;
    - c. Landscaping shall offer a visual separation or screen between land uses that have intense activities or significantly different appearances, or that are otherwise incompatible to some degree.
    - d. Landscaping shall be designed to trap noise, odor, and dust, control erosion, and allow groundwater to recharge and to provide energy conservation by providing shade.
    - e. Landscaping should provide a natural habitat for birds and other animal life, and should preserve existing natural vegetation and other natural features of a site so as to enhance overall site design and protect animal populations and other ecological systems.
    - f. Landscaping shall be maintained as described in Section VII-307.
    - g. When existing or proposed overhead power lines (except service-drops) exist, trees shall not be planted where such trees could, at mature height, conflict with those overhead utilities.
  4. Time For Installation of Required Landscaping.

All required landscaping, including mulching and seeding, shall be completed in accordance with the landscape plan portion of the approved development plan and so certified by the designing Florida Registered Landscape Architect in writing, prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy for the site.

**Section VII-308. Plant Material and Installation Standards**

- A. General. Plant materials used in conformance with the provisions of this Section shall be cold tolerant for the Sarasota area and shall conform at a minimum to the standards for Florida No. 1 or better, as given in "Grades & Standards for Nursery Plants", State of Florida, Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, Tallahassee, as amended.

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- B. Ground Covers. Ground covers wholly or partly in lieu of grass shall be planted in such a manner as to present a finished appearance and furnish reasonably complete coverage and shall be used with an organic mulch such as pine, cypress bark or a similar material. In no instance shall loose stone, shell or gravel be permitted or utilized.
- C. Shrubs and Hedges. Shrubs shall be a minimum of two (2) feet in height when measured immediately after planting.
- D. Vines. Vines shall be a minimum of thirty (30) inches in height immediately after planting and may be used in conjunction with fences, screens or walls to meet physical barrier requirements specified.
- E. Lawn Grass. Grass areas shall be planted with grasses of species normally grown in permanent lawns in the Sarasota area. Grass areas may be sodded, plugged, sprigged or seeded, except that solid sod shall be used in swales or other areas subject to erosion by wind or water.
- F. Trees.
1. All canopy trees shall be of those species having an average mature spread or crown of greater than fifteen (15) feet in the Sarasota area and trunks which can be maintained in a clear trunk condition five (5) feet or more above finish grade. Palm trees having an average mature spread of crown less than fifteen (15) feet may be substituted, for a maximum of 30% of required canopy trees, by grouping the same so as to create the equivalent of a crown spread of fifteen (15) feet.
  2. Canopy trees shall be a minimum of twelve (12) feet in overall height and a minimum tree caliper dimension of three (3) inches (measured at six (6) inches above grade) at the time of planting. All trees of species whose roots are known to cause damage to public roadways or other public works shall be planted so as to be no closer than six (6) feet to such public works. An approved root control barrier shall be installed for those trees deemed to be a hazard to utilities, at the time of planting.
  3. A minimum of fifty (50) percent of the required canopy trees shall be native to Florida.
  4. A recommended list of canopy trees and palms to be used for the remaining fifty (50) percent of required canopy trees includes but is not limited to the following types:
 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Quercus virginiana</i> (Live Oak)            | <i>Bauhinia blakeana</i> (Hong Kong Orchid)           |
| <i>Quercus lauri folia</i> (Laurel Oak)         | <i>Bauhinia alba</i> (White Orchid)                   |
| <i>Peltophorum dubium</i> (Peltophorum)         | <i>Plantaus occidentalis</i> (Sycamore)               |
| <i>Tabebuia argentia</i> (Gold Tree)            | <i>Jacaranda acutifolia</i> (Jacaranda)               |
| <i>Magnolia grandifolia</i> (Southern Magnolia) | <i>Ilex Opaca</i> 'East Palatka' (East Palatka Holly) |
| <i>Bauhinia purpurea</i> (Purple Orchid Tree)   | <i>Bucidia buceras</i> (Black Olive)                  |
| <i>Celtis laevigata</i> (Sugarberry)            |   |

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5. One (1) of the following palms is equivalent to one (1) required canopy tree when planted at the required height of twelve (12) feet:

*Phoenix canariensis* (Canary Island Date Palm)

*Phoenix reclinata* (Reclinata Palm)

6. Three (3) of the following palms are equivalent to one (1) required canopy tree when planted at the required height of twelve (12) feet:

*Syragus romanzoffianum* (Queen Palm)  
*Roystonea elata* (Royal Palm)

*Sable palmetto* Cabbage Palm (Sable Palm)  
*Washingtonia robust* (Washingtonian Palm)

7. Requirements for canopy trees may be substituted with understory trees when the mature height of the canopy trees will conflict with overhead powerlines (except service-drops). Appropriate setbacks of trees from such powerlines, as referenced by Florida Power and Light's "Plant the Right Tree in the Right Place" publication shall be required, a copy of which is on file at the Office of the City Auditor and Clerk.
8. Accent/Understory trees shall be a minimum of eight (8) feet in overall height with a minimum spread of three (3) feet and a tree caliper dimension of one (1) inch (measured six (6) inches above grade) at the time of planting.
9. The following is a recommend list of accent/understory trees to be used:

*Juniperus silicicola* (Southern Red Cedar)  
*Prunus caroliniana* (Cherry Laurel)  
*Bauhinia Spp.* (Orchid Tree)  
*Pinus elliottii* (Slash Pine)  
*Persea borbonia* (Redbay)  
*Acer rubrum* (Red Maple)  
*Gordonia lasianthus* (Loblolly-Bay)  
*Ilex cassine* (Dahoon Holly)

*Ilex vomitoria* (Youpon Holly)  
*Taxodium distichum* (Bald Cypress)  
*Callistemon viminalis* (Weeping bottlebrush)  
*Etliobotrya japonica* (Loquat)  
*Myrica cerifera* (Wax Myrtle)  
*Lagerstroemia indica* (Crepe Myrtle)  
*Psidium littorale* (Cattely Guava)

**G. Credit for saving existing trees.**

1. Credit is given at the ratio of one (1) to one (1) for existing canopy trees, in good health, meeting the tree definition. No credit shall be given to canopy trees identified by these regulations as nuisance trees. The following trees shall be considered nuisance trees: *Malalueca quinquenervia* (Punk Tree), *Schinus terebinthifolius* (Brazilian Pepper), *Casuarina spp.* (Australian Pine), *Capaniopsis anacardioides* (Carrotwood), *Melia azedarack* (China Berry), and *Sapium sebiferum* (Chinese Tallow).
2. Credit is given at the following ratios for existing canopy trees in good health to be preserved:

4" - 12" caliper = 1 tree  
12" - 18" caliper = 2 trees

18" - 24" caliper = 3 trees  
24" or greater caliper = 4 trees

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3. Credit is given at the ratio of three (3) palms to one (1) tree for existing native palms.
4. A maximum ten (10) percent required parking credit may be allowed for the purpose of preserving trees.