

Chapter 1123: Landscaping and Buffering

1123.01 Purpose

The preservation of existing trees and vegetation, as well as the planting of new trees and vegetation, can significantly add to the quality of the physical environment of the City of Wooster. The regulations contained below are designed to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of the residents of the City by:

- (a) Promoting the proper utilization of landscaping and screening as a buffer between certain land uses to minimize the possibility of nuisances including potential noise, glare, and the visual clutter associated with parking and service areas;
- (b) Providing interruption of large expanses of vehicular use areas and reduction of reflected heat and glare through the implementation of interior and perimeter vehicular use area landscaping;
- (c) Improving the appearance of off-street parking areas and other vehicular use areas and properties abutting public rights-of-way, thereby reducing conditions which lead to urban blight;
- (d) Providing areas of permeable surfaces in order to:
 - (1) Allow the infiltration of surface water into groundwater resources;
 - (2) Reduce the quantity of storm water discharge, which helps to reduce the hazards of flooding and aids in the control of erosion and storm water runoff; and
 - (3) Improve the quality of storm water discharge.
- (e) Establishing minimum standards for the consistent appearance of plant material in the community landscape;
- (f) Providing physiologically, psychologically, sociologically, and aesthetically necessary counterpoints to the man-made environment; and
- (g) Protecting, preserving, and promoting the aesthetic character valued by the residents of the City of Wooster.

1123.02 Applicability

- (a) The provisions of this Chapter shall apply to:
 - (1) All new development on vacant land that requires the submission of a development plan or a zoning certificate. The required landscaping shall be so indicated on plans submitted as part of the application.
 - (2) The entire site of existing development, with the exception of existing parking lots or vehicle use areas indicated in Section [1123.02\(a\)\(2\)](#), when substantial expansion is conducted. An expansion of an existing property is substantial when any of the following apply:
 - A. The expansion of the square footage of an existing building exceeds 50 percent of the gross floor area of the building as it existed prior to the effective date of this code;
 - B. The expansion of the square footage of the vehicular use area exceeds 50 percent of the total existing vehicular use area; or
 - C. The land area of the development site is increased by 50 percent or more.

- (3) Any existing parking lots or vehicular uses areas that are not being removed or otherwise changed as part of any expansion or reconstruction shall not be required to comply with the applicable parking lot landscaping requirements of this chapter.
- (4) The portion of a developed site devoted to the expansion of an existing building, structure or expansion/alteration of a vehicular use area when such site is not governed by Subsection [1123.02\(a\)\(2\)](#). The minimum landscaping and screening required by this chapter shall be provided to the extent of the alteration or expansion, but not for the entire property of which the alteration or expansion is a part.
- (b) Single-family and two-family dwellings shall be exempt from the requirements of this chapter except those regulations in Section [1123.04](#) and Section [1123.05](#).
- (c) The requirements of this chapter are minimum landscaping requirements, and nothing herein shall preclude a developer and the City from agreeing to more extensive landscaping.
- (d) All requirements of Chapter 925 of the Codified Ordinances, Storm Drainage, shall be applicable.

1123.03 General Landscaping Standards

(a) Existing Landscape Material

- (1) Unless otherwise noted, existing landscape material in healthy condition can be used to satisfy the requirements of this section in whole or in part provided they meet all requirements of this section.
- (2) The Zoning Administrator shall have the authority to determine if any existing landscape material can be used to satisfy the requirements of this section.
- (3) Developments on properties with a wooded area of no less than one contiguous acre, containing dense vegetation primarily composed of mature trees, shall be configured and developed to provide as little impact as practically possible on such wooded area.

(b) Intersection Visibility

All landscaping shall be subject to the intersection visibility standards established in Section [1115.02\(d\)](#).

(c) Walls and Fences Used for Landscaping

- (1) Walls and fences used to comply with the standards of this section shall also comply with Section [1113.01](#).
- (2) Chain link fences with or without wooden or synthetic slat material shall not be allowed when used to satisfy the buffer requirements of this section.

(d) Plant Standards

All plants utilized in the fulfillment of the requirements of this section shall meet the following requirements:

- (1) Plants installed shall meet the standards for size, form, and quality set out in the American Standard for Nursery Stock (ANSI Z60.1, latest edition).
- (2) Plant materials should consist of hardy, native and/or drought-tolerant vegetation to the maximum extent feasible. Applicants should review the Wooster City Urban Forestry Policy Manual, current edition, for recommendations and basic information for the planting, maintenance, and removal of landscaping materials.

- (3) All planting materials shall be free of noxious weeds, disease, and pests.
- (4) Street trees and any trees located within public rights-of-way or on publicly owned property shall be subject to the requirements of the Wooster City Urban Forestry Policy Manual, current edition, that regulates species, pruning, maintenance, and removal of such trees.
- (5) Vegetation shall comply with the minimum size requirements established in [Table 1123-1](#).

TABLE 1123-1: MINIMUM SIZE REQUIREMENTS FOR VEGETATION	
Vegetation Type	Minimum Size Requirement
Large Deciduous Trees	2.0-inch DBH with a clear trunk height of 6 feet when planted
Small Deciduous Trees	1.5-inch DBH with a clear trunk height of 5 feet when planted
Evergreen Trees	6 feet in height when planted
Shrubs	2 feet in height when planted
Hedges	Size as needed so that the plant materials forms a continuous, unbroken screen within one planting season
DBH = Diameter at Breast Height	

(e) Species Diversity

To curtail the spread of disease or insect infestation in a plant species if a new development contains over 20 trees, the application should include diversity in plant choices.

(f) Planting Arrangement

Trees and shrubs shall be arranged to create varied and attractive views and plant material should provide a variety of color displayed throughout the year

(g) Installation

If installation of plantings is not completed in a planting season, then landscaping must be installed during the next planting season.

(h) Parking

Vehicle parking shall not be permitted in landscaping or buffering areas required by this chapter.

(i) Pedestrian Movement

Materials shall not be placed where they will prevent pedestrian movement unless so planted for that or similar purpose.

(j) Accessways

Necessary accessways shall be permitted to traverse required landscaping and buffering areas. The width of such accessways shall not be subtracted from the linear dimensions used to determine the minimum number of trees and shrubs required in this Chapter.

(k) Mounding Specifications

- (1) Mounding provided in lieu of or in combination with walls, fences, and/or evergreen plantings shall consist of a strip of land as wide as necessary to obtain a maximum slope of 3:1 (angle of repose).
- (2) Mounding may include rocks and other excavated materials, but one foot of dirt covered by six inches of topsoil shall be provided over the entire mounding. Trees, shrubs, wood, and other non-compactable items shall not be used in the construction of mounding.
- (3) No mounding will be allowed in any required utility easements, except for perpendicular utility easement crossings. Mounding shall provide adequate access to utility easements adjacent to the mounding.
- (4) Mounding shall be planted with a ground cover suitable to prevent erosion, and shall be maintained by the private property owner, in conformance with code, on which the mound rests. Other forms of vegetation may also be planted on the mounding.
- (5) A difference in elevation between areas requiring screening does not constitute an existing earth mound and shall not be considered as fulfilling any screening requirement.
- (6) Drainage patterns shall be considered, maintained and/or modified only with the approval of the City Engineer, when mounding is used.
- (7) The property on which the mound is located is responsible for the maintenance of the mound including but not limited to grass cutting, tree trimming/replacement, etc.

(l) Damage to Public Works

In no case shall any plant material interfere with or cause damage to underground utility lines, public roadways, or other public works. Species of trees whose roots are known to cause damage to pavements or other public works shall not be planted closer than 15 feet to such public works.

(m) Maintenance

- (1) The owner of the property shall be responsible for the continued property maintenance of all landscaping materials, and shall keep them in a proper, neat and orderly appearance, free from refuse, debris, and weeds at all times.
- (2) All unhealthy or dead plant material shall be replaced within one year, or by the next planting period, whichever comes first.
- (3) No plant material required by this code shall be removed for any reason unless replaced with like kind and size at the time of removal. If replaced with a like kind and size of material, no approvals shall be required.
- (4) Any changes to an approved landscaping plan shall require approval in the same manner as landscaping plan was original approved.
- (5) Violation of these provisions shall be subject to the enforcement provisions of [Chapter 1133: Enforcement and Penalties](#).

1123.04 Street Trees

In all zoning districts, developers shall plant and maintain shade trees along public streets in compliance with the following:

(a) Species

Trees shall be limited to species found in the Wooster City Urban Forestry Policy Manual, current edition. If other species are desired, the developer must apply to the Urban Forestry Commission for approval.

(b) Quantity, Size, and Location Requirements

- (1) One large deciduous tree shall be provided for every 40 linear feet of frontage, or fraction thereof, along each road.
- (2) Trees shall be planted in accordance with the Wooster City Urban Forestry Policy Manual, current edition.
- (3) In the C-4 District, street trees shall be planted in sidewalk pits in accordance with the Wooster City Urban Forestry Policy Manual, current edition. The sidewalk pits shall have a minimum dimension of five feet by five feet.
- (4) Street trees shall be planted in the public right-of-way, however, due to varying conditions near public roads and rights-of-way, street trees may be located elsewhere on the property at the discretion of the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission, as applicable.

(c) Installation

- (1) In the case of residential subdivisions, street trees shall be planted on developed lots after 75 percent of the residential dwelling units have been occupied or received a certificate of zoning compliance. Undeveloped residential subdivision lots at the time of the above required street tree planting shall have street trees planted prior to receiving a certificate of zoning compliance.
- (2) For all other developments that require the approval of a development plan pursuant to Section [1105.07](#), street trees shall be planted prior to receiving a certificate of zoning compliance.

(d) Maintenance

The developer shall be required to maintain the trees for two years after the trees are planted and to replace any tree that dies within such two-year guarantee period.

- (1) Upon completion of the street tree planting, the landscape contractor shall contact the Zoning Administrator.
- (2) The two year guarantee period shall begin after the approval from the Zoning Administrator and submission of a financial guarantee in accordance with Section [1129.04\(g\)](#).
- (3) A final inspection shall be made at the end of the guarantee period.
- (4) The developer shall notify the Zoning Administrator within five business days of the end of the guarantee period to schedule the final inspection.
- (5) All trees not exhibiting a healthy, vigorous growing condition, as determined by the Zoning Administrator, shall be replaced at the expense of the developer or builder.
- (6) If the Zoning Administrator determines that replacement of a tree is required, such replacement shall occur within 30 days of the date the City's inspection report is submitted to the developer. The two-year guarantee period shall begin anew for each replacement tree.

- (7) Developments requiring 10 or more street trees shall require the developer to deposit a guarantee amount equal to 50 percent of the total cost of providing and installing the street trees as determined by the Zoning Administrator. The deposit shall be in the form of a financial guarantee as defined in Section [1129.04\(g\)](#).

1123.05 Site Landscaping

(a) Landscaping Along a Street Frontage

- (1) Landscaping shall be provided in any front yard as defined in Section [1115.01\(d\)](#).
 (2) The landscaping in [Table 1123-2](#) shall be required unless the principal building is set back five feet or less from the applicable lot line, in which case, the lot shall be exempt from these landscaping regulations.

TABLE 1123-2: STREET FRONTAGE PLANTING REQUIREMENTS	
Land Use	Minimum Plantings
All lots that contain only residential uses.	One deciduous or evergreen tree for every 40 linear feet, or fraction thereof, of street frontage.
All uses in an I-1, I-2, or I-3 Zoning District	One deciduous or evergreen tree plus 10 shrubs for every 125 linear feet, or fraction thereof, of street frontage
All other uses	One deciduous or evergreen tree plus 10 shrubs for every 75 linear feet, or fraction thereof, of street frontage

- (3) Trees required by Section [1123.05\(b\)](#) or Section [1123.06](#) may be included in the calculation to meet the requirements of [Table 1123-2](#). Street trees or shrubs located in the right-of-way shall not be used in the calculation for the requirements of [Table 1123-2](#).
 (4) All areas not devoted to trees and shrubs shall be planted with grass, ground cover (including mulch, river rock, or similar materials constructed of natural materials), or other live landscape treatment with the exception of any permitted driveway, accessway, structure, or other permitted use.

(b) Parking Lot Landscaping

- (1) This section establishes the minimum standards by which parking lot will be screened from adjacent public streets or from adjacent properties. In addition, this section delineates standards for landscaping within parking lots.
 (2) Whenever required landscaping is located within or adjacent to parking lots or driveways, such screening shall be protected by bollards, wheel blocks, or curbing to avoid damage by vehicles.
 (3) This section shall only apply to properties with parking lots that contain five or more parking spaces.
(4) Perimeter Landscaping
 A. Perimeter landscaping shall be required when an applicable parking lot abuts adjoining property that is not a right-of-way.
 B. The perimeter landscaping shall not be required if the parking lot is a shared lot with the adjoining property.

- C. A landscaped strip meeting the required minimum parking setback (in depth) of the applicable zoning district shall be located between the parking lot and the abutting lot lines. See Section [1125.03\(b\)](#).
- D. The landscaped strip shall include one large deciduous tree, two small deciduous trees, or one evergreen tree for each 50 linear feet of parking area that abuts the adjoining property.
- E. Perimeter landscaping for parking lots in the C-4 District shall be exempt from this section but shall require a buffer in accordance with Section [1123.05\(b\)\(5\)](#).
- F. The requirements for this section shall not apply where planting is required for buffering in accordance with Section [1123.06](#).

(5) Buffering of Parking Lots

When a parking lot is located adjacent to a public street right-of-way, screening shall be provided to reduce the visual impact of the parking lot. A landscaped buffer shall be installed between the parking lot and public rights-of-way per the following requirements:

- A. A landscaped buffer shall be located directly adjacent to the parking lot and be no less than 10 feet in width in all districts, except the C-4 District, where the buffer may be three feet wide. The buffer shall be composed of a continuous evergreen hedge or dense planting of evergreen shrubs.
- B. Landscaping shall be at a height of no less than three feet at the time of installation. Landscaping may be placed upon a berm to achieve the required height at planting except in the C-4 District where the use of a berm is prohibited. The minimum buffer height requirement shall not apply when the grading of the site results in an elevation of the adjacent street which is three or more feet higher than the parking lot.
- C. A fence or a wall may be incorporated into the landscape buffer per the fence requirements of the applicable zoning district. See Section [1113.01](#).

(6) Interior Landscaping

- A. There shall be a minimum of 10 square feet of interior landscaping for every parking space.
- B. The interior landscaping shall be located within landscaped islands that are separated from the perimeter landscaping required in Section [1123.05\(b\)\(4\)](#), and shall be scattered throughout the parking area to break up large areas of pavement. Landscaped islands that are designed as extensions from the perimeter landscaping areas shall also be considered as interior parking area landscaping but shall not count as the perimeter landscaping area. See [Figure 1123-A](#).

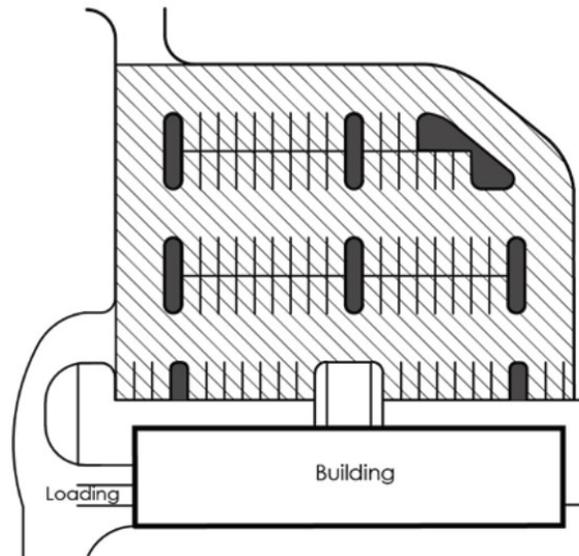


Figure 1123-A: Illustration of the landscaped areas (darkened landscaped islands) that count towards the minimum interior parking area requirement.



Figure 1123-B: The above images show different options for landscaped islands with the top image illustrating landscaped islands that run the full length of parking spaces. The bottom image illustrates a smaller landscaped island at the end of a parking bay.

- C. Interior landscaped areas shall be dispersed so as to define aisles and break up the expanse of paving and limit unbroken rows of parking to a maximum of 100 feet.
- D. Landscape islands shall have a minimum size of 162 square feet within a minimum dimension of nine feet in any direction to provide a suitable living environment for the landscaping.
- E. If an existing tree is to be used to meet the requirements of this subsection, the landscape island shall be equal in size to the tree's drip line area to protect the root system of the existing tree.
- F. All areas of a landscape island not devoted to trees and shrubs shall be planted with grass, ground cover (including mulch, river rock, or similar materials constructed of natural materials), or other live landscape treatment.

- G. At least one large deciduous tree must be provided per ten parking spaces within landscape islands, provided there is no impairment to visibility of motorists or pedestrians. In no case shall there be less than one tree planted in each landscaped island.
- H. If the specific application of the interior landscape requirements will seriously limit functions of the building site, the Zoning Administrator shall have authority to permit consolidation and relocation of these landscaped areas on the building site.

1123.06 Buffering Between Land Use and Zoning Districts

(a) Purpose

The purpose of this section is to establish provisions for a visual screen or buffer between incompatible uses and to reduce the effects of glare from automobile headlights, noise and other objectionable activities conducted on a given lot.

(b) Buffer Requirements

[Table 1123-3](#) shall establish when a buffer yard is required between uses and zoning districts.

TABLE 1123-3: REQUIRED BUFFERS		
	Adjacent To:	
	Any Use in a R-1, R-2, or R-T District	Any lot in an R-3 or R-4 District
Proposed Use:		
Any nonresidential use in an R-1, R-2, R-T, or PD District	X	
Any use in an R-3 or R-4 District except single-family or two-family dwellings	X	
Any use in a C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, CF, I-1, I-2, or I-3 District	X	X

(c) Required Buffer Width

The width of the buffer yard shall be equal to the parking set back set forth in the applicable zoning district (See Section [1125.03\(b\)](#).) or 10 feet, whichever is greater.

(d) Location of Buffers

- (1) The landscape buffer shall be provided along the entire lot line between the two adjacent uses identified in [Table 1123-3](#).
- (2) Buffers required by this section shall be located completely on the lot subject to the buffer requirement and only along the outer perimeter of the lot where it abuts another lot, and shall extend to the lot line or right-of-way line.
- (3) The buffer yard may be placed in the lower intensity zoning district or partially within both zoning districts if both sides of the zoning district line and the entire buffer yard width are within common ownership and a permanent easement is provided over any portion of the buffer yard not within the higher-intensity zoning district.

- (4) If a buffer yard is located in a residential development that has an owners' association or other similar legal entity, all buffer yards shall be located in open space owned by the association or in an open space easement controlled by the owners' association.
- (5) When property lines abut an adjacent jurisdiction, the Planning Commission shall determine the specific screening and buffering requirements along that property line after consideration of the zoning designation and or land use of the adjacent property. Requirements shall not exceed those that would be required for similarly situated/zoned property within the City of Wooster.

(e) Vegetation Requirements within the Buffer

When the natural vegetation within the required buffer yard does not form a solid, continuous, visual screen or does not have a minimum height of six feet along the entire length of the common boundary at the time of occupancy, screening shall be installed in compliance with this subsection.

- (1) Screening design and development shall be compatible with the existing and proposed land use and development character of the surrounding land and structures. Screening within the buffer yard shall consist of one or more or combination thereof of the following:
 - A. A dense vegetative planting incorporating trees and/or shrubs of a variety which shall be equally effective in winter and summer. Trees and/or shrubs shall be adequately spaced to form a solid, continuous visual screen within three years after the initial installation. At a minimum, at the time of planting, the spacing of trees shall not exceed 12 feet on center, and the planting pattern shall be staggered. Shrubbery shall be more closely spaced.
 - B. Non-living opaque structures such as a solid masonry wall that is compatible in materials and color with the principal structure, or a solid wood fence, together with a landscaped area at least 10 feet wide. The fences and walls shall comply with the standards of Section [1113.01](#).
 - C. An ornamental fence with openings through which light and air may pass together with a landscaped area at least 10 feet wide. The fences shall comply with the standards of Section [1113.01](#).
 - D. A landscaped mound or berm at least seven feet wide.
- (2) The location of the wall, fence, or vegetation shall be placed within the buffer yard to maximize the screening effect, as determined by the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission.
- (3) The wall, fence, and vegetation shall be continuous and in place at the time of occupancy. If vehicular or pedestrian access through the screen is necessary, the screening function shall be preserved.
- (4) The height of screening shall be in accordance with the following:
 - A. Visual screening by walls, fences, or mounds in combination with vegetation, fences or walls shall be a minimum of six feet high measured from the natural grade, except as set forth in sub-section B. below.
 - B. Whenever the required screening is located within a front yard, the required screening shall not exceed a height of three feet.

- C. When used alone, vegetation shall be a minimum of six feet high, as measured from the natural grade, in order to accomplish the desired screening effect. The required height shall be achieved no later than three years after the initial installation.

(f) Development within Required Buffers

The required buffer shall not contain any development, impervious surfaces, or site features that do not function to meet the standards of this section or that require removal of existing vegetation, except for the following features:

- (1) Fences or walls;
- (2) Sidewalks, trails, and other elements associated with passive recreation, if all required landscaping is provided;
- (3) Signs and light posts;
- (4) Driveways, access roads, and similar uses if they cross perpendicularly across a required buffer, are designed to limit disturbance of vegetation; or
- (5) Overhead and underground utilities required or allowed by the City.

1123.07 Screening Requirements

(a) General Requirements

In addition to the other forms of required landscaping, screening shall be required to conceal specific areas of high visual or auditory impact or hazardous areas from adjacent, less intense uses and from views from public rights-of-way. Such areas shall be screened at all times, unless otherwise specified, regardless of adjacent uses, districts, or other proximate landscaping material.

(b) Screened Items

- (1) The following areas shall be screened in accordance with this section:
 - A. All large waste receptacles (e.g., dumpsters and cardboard recycling containers), waste receptacles of any size when five or more are located on a single lot, and refuse collection areas;
 - B. Outdoor storage and bulk sales;
 - C. Off-street loading areas;
 - D. Pipes, conduit, and cables associated with the building or use;
 - E. Outdoor service areas that are necessary to support common business operations (e.g., outdoor freezer or refrigeration units, storage units, etc.);
 - F. Ground-level or façade-mounted mechanical equipment and utility structures; and
 - G. Roof top equipment that is not otherwise hidden by the roofline, parapet wall, or other similar feature.
- (2) Screening shall not be required if any of the above items are not visible from adjacent rights-of-way or from adjacent lots in any residential, commercial, or special zoning districts.
- (3) All sides of the item shall be screened with the exception that one side of the item may be screened with a gate or other similar feature to allow access while screening the item when access is not necessary.

(c) Screening Methods

- (1) The following items are permitted for use as screening materials, and more than one method may be used on a lot or site.
 - A. Vegetative materials that provide a fully opaque screen to the minimum height necessary to fully screen the facility from off-site views (See [Figure 1123-C](#)); or
 - B. An opaque fence or wall consistent with the standards of Section [1113.01](#); or
 - C. Integration into the building design (e.g., false walls or other architectural screening) that utilizes the same building materials and colors as the principal building.
- (2) The required screening shall have a height sufficient enough to screen the applicable item(s) provided it is in accordance with any other applicable sections of this code.
- (3) For loading spaces, a single gap of no more than 40 feet shall be permitted to allow for ingress and egress to a loading area. All other required screening shall have a minimum height of six feet and may include a mound with a maximum height of three feet.
- (4) Alternative screening materials that are not listed or alternative configurations may be proposed as part of an equivalency provision review application. See Section [1105.10](#).
- (5) To the maximum extent feasible, pipes, conduit, and cables should be located along the rear facade of buildings if conditions do not allow for them to be enclosed within the building itself. Pipes, conduit, and cables shall be located as far away from public view as practical and shall be painted a similar color as the building façade to further reduce visibility.



Figure 1123-C: The above image illustrates a vegetative screen that hides HVAC equipment and a dumpster.

(d) Configuration of Vegetative Materials

In cases where vegetative materials are used for screening in accordance with this subsection, the vegetative materials shall:

- (1) Be planted around the perimeter of the site feature to be screened in a manner that screens the site feature from all off-site views;
- (2) Be configured in two staggered rows or other arrangement that provides maximum screening;
- (3) Be upright, large evergreen shrubs or a hedge and be capable of reaching at least six feet in height within three years of planting; and
- (4) Be spaced no farther than necessary to create an opaque screen when the shrubs or trees are fully grown. In no case shall trees used for screening be spaced further than eight feet apart on center.

1123.08 Modifications to Buffering and Screening Requirements

The buffering and screening requirements of Section [1123.06](#) and Section [1123.07](#) shall be applied equally to all similarly situated properties. The Zoning Administrator is empowered to modify the above buffering and screening requirements if, and only if:

- (a) Natural land characteristics such as topography or existing vegetation on the proposed building site would achieve the same intent as the applicable sections;
- (b) Innovative landscaping or architectural design is employed on the building site to achieve an equivalent screening and buffering effect;
- (c) The required screening and landscaping would be ineffective at maturity due to the proposed topography of the site, and/or the location of the improvements on the site;
- (d) The topography of adjacent and surrounding sites is such as to render required screening ineffective at maturity;
- (e) A written request is received from the owners of the abutting residential district property that the screening as required herein should be waived or varied based on stated purposes; or
- (f) It can be clearly demonstrated that it is highly improbable that the abutting property will be developed for residential purposes due to circumstances, which have taken place since the adoption of the comprehensive plan and this code.