

Meeting Date: Wednesday, January 7, 2026

Prepared By: Melissa Houtsma, Community Development

Subject: Review of Current Landscaping Requirements

Request

Read and review the existing landscaping requirements outlined in the zoning code (attached) and provide staff with recommendations and options for refinement.

Background

As projects come through for review, staff works to uphold the regulations established in the city code. One piece of this includes a more broad evaluation to determine if the existing language continues to serve the city's goals and priorities effectively. While the current regulations have been in place for a number of years and provide a solid foundation, there are a number of areas where the language could be updated or clarified to better support the work that staff does and the community as a whole.

Opportunity Areas

The following points include a few areas for review and are intended to set the stage for additional discussion on how the current standards could be further refined.

1. Detailed, but limited list of allowable plantings

The current code includes a specific, limited list of "quality" trees (such as maple, ash, and spruce) directly within the ordinance. While this makes for a clear and clean-cut approach, it also decreases the likelihood of a diverse stock of trees. Additionally, embedding these details in the code does require staff time and likely legal review for hearings whenever an update is needed. Transitioning to an administrative list, that would be available upon request, could streamline the process while still preserving clarity and transparency.

2. Clarification of Priorities

A possible opportunity to harmonize the language includes clarifying the general property landscaping and tree replacement requirements. Currently, the code asks for a specific number of buffer trees depending on the length of the perimeter around the property, while also requiring a 30% replacement of the total caliper inches removed. A clearer policy would help to better understand whether the primary goal is the preservation of existing canopy or the successful establishment of new replacement trees, while also ideally communicating that these two things are not mutually exclusive.

3. Incorporating an Option for Alternative Compliance

While codes are often written with the best of intentions, the reality is that something so permanent likely cannot universally apply to each and every scenario. While staff acknowledges that benefits and importance of preserving and planting trees, each site or project will come with its own unique set of limitations. Incorporating the option for a fee in lieu of plantings may serve as an alternative for projects that have clearly demonstrated a commitment to compliance, but simply are unable to meet the requirements due to various unique constraints.

4. Various Minor Options

Broader Vegetation Options: Recognizing the value of ornamental trees, shrubs, and grasses in addition to the listed standard of deciduous and evergreen trees.

Planting Health: Ensuring new trees have adequate ground area and an anticipated area for the species necessary canopy spread to better ensure longevity.

Definitive Expectations: Providing more detailed clarity and guidance on expectations around maintenance and preservation of existing mature trees during and after the development process.

Contextual Scaling: Reviewing the minimum size requirements for trees in residential, commercial, and industrial districts to ensure a strategic vision that is calibrated with practical constraints.

Next Steps

Review existing landscaping code requirements and provide feedback. Staff has also provided a more structured opportunity for feedback. In the attached survey, please rate the importance of or select your preference of the options listed. While staff recognizes that all these items are important and work to create a benefit, this survey will help to narrow in on the more finite details and priority areas.

Example:

	Very important ↔ Not important				
	1	2	3	4	5
Creating a healthy, fun, and sustainable environment for West St. Paul residents	X				

	A	B
Best St. Paul city: A. West St. Paul B. Other (e.g. South St. Paul, North St. Paul)	X	

Landscaping Requirements Survey

Very important ↔ Not important

	1	2	3	4	5
Initial Selection					
Maintaining an updated preferred plantings list					
Diversity of tree species					
Diversity of planting types (<i>e.g. trees, shrubs, grasses</i>)					
Preservation of existing trees					
Ensuring sufficient replacement of trees removed					
Planting native and/or climate appropriate species					
Multi-purpose plantings (<i>e.g. fruit trees, pollinator friendly</i>)					
Placement					
Perimeter plantings or screening					
Distribution throughout the property					
Minimum planting area or spacing					
Maintenance					
Plantings be fully irrigated					
Ground treatment/root collar (<i>e.g. turf, wood mulch, rock mulch</i>)					
Neonicotinoid-free practices					

	A	B
Minimum planting requirements by: C. Property (e.g. perimeter, lot area) D. Use (e.g. residential = 1 tree per unit, commercial = 1 tree per 1,000 sq. ft.)		
Minimum requirements: A. Minimum amount of green space B. Minimum number of trees		
Preservation: A. Value by type and species B. Value by size (tiered approach)		
Accepting payment in lieu of plantings A. Yes B. No		

§ 153.031 SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCEDURE AND DESIGN REQUIREMENTS IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS.

...

(4) *Landscape standards.*

- (a) The off-street parking setback area shall be utilized as a protective buffer. The protective buffer shall not be used for parking, drive aisles, off-street loading or storage and shall be landscaped.
- (b) Minimum landscape requirements in the protective buffer shall include the following “quality type trees,” one two and one-half inch diameter at four feet above grade caliper deciduous tree, which shall be, hardwood type trees such as, maple, seedless green ash, locust or basswood, or six-foot conifer type trees, such as Colorado blue spruce, white pine, red pine or pyramidal arborvitae, or other approved types. The number of trees required is the equivalent of one for every 40 feet lineal of property line on the subject site or as approved through the site plan process. The protective buffer shall also contain grass, ground cover or shrubs and shall be irrigated to facilitate maintenance of landscaped areas. No impervious surfaces such as concrete or asphalt shall be placed in the protective buffer.
- (c) Minimum landscape requirements for each curbed island shall include one one and one-half inch diameter at four feet above grade caliper deciduous tree, all of which must be of “quality” types as listed in division (D)(4)(b) above. The curbed island shall also contain grass, ground cover or shrubs and shall be irrigated to facilitate maintenance of landscaped areas. No impervious surfaces such as concrete or asphalt shall be placed in the curbed island.
- (d) When tree removal occurs, replacement trees shall constitute at least 30% of the total amount of the caliper inches of “quality trees” removed.
- (e) All trees shall be placed around the site to promote the most efficient and effective use of the different types of trees installed.
- (f) When located adjacent to a single family or two-family use, the provisions of § [153.381](#) shall apply, except that for the portion adjacent to the residential properties, screening from the front building line to the rear property line and along the rear property line shall be six feet in height.

§ 153.032 SITE PLAN APPROVAL PROCEDURE AND DESIGN REQUIREMENTS IN COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS.

...

- (F) *Landscape, lighting and sign standards.* Unless modified as part of a site and building plan approval process, the following requirements apply.
- (1) The setback area shall be utilized as a protective buffer. The protective buffer shall not be used for parking, drive aisles, off-street loading or storage and shall be landscaped up to the building.
 - (2) Minimum landscape requirements in the protective buffer shall include the following “quality type trees,” one two and one-half inch diameter at four feet above grade caliper deciduous tree, which shall be hardwood type trees such as maple, seedless green ash, locust or basswood, or six-foot conifer type trees, such as Colorado blue spruce, white pine, red pine or pyramidal arborvitae, or other approve types. The number of trees required is the equivalent of one for every 20 feet of lineal property line on the subject site or as approved through the site plan process. The protective buffer shall also contain grass, ground cover or shrubs and shall be irrigated to facilitate maintenance of landscaped areas. No impervious surfaces such as concrete or asphalt shall be placed in the protective buffer.
 - (3) Minimum landscape requirements for each curbed island shall include one two and one-half inch diameter at four feet above grade caliper deciduous tree all of which must be of “quality” types as listed in division (F)(2) above. The curbed island shall also contain grass, ground cover, mulch or shrubs and shall be irrigated by an underground irrigation system to facilitate maintenance of landscaped areas. No impervious surfaces such as concrete or asphalt shall be placed in the curbed island.
 - (4) When a commercial or industrial development is located adjacent to or across from any “R” use, screening must comply with § [153.381](#), except that for the portion adjacent to the residential properties, screening from the front building line to the rear property line and along the rear property line shall be six feet in height. Required screening will be at least 95% opaque throughout the year. One or a combination of the following will satisfy the required screening:
 - (a) A decorative fence;
 - (b) A masonry wall; and/or
 - (c) Landscaping.
 - (5) Lighting levels must not exceed zero foot-candles at the abutting property line. No direct glare may extend onto the public street, public open space or neighboring properties.
 - (6) Regardless of the scope of the proposed construction, all signs must comply with the provisions of §§ [153.430](#) through [153.438](#) and §§ [150.105](#) through [150.110](#).
 - (7) When tree removal occurs, replacement trees shall constitute at least 30% of the total amount of the caliper inches of “quality trees” removed.
 - (8) All trees shall be placed around the site to promote the most efficient and effective use of the different types of trees installed.