

CHAPTER 165

ZONING REGULATIONS

SECTION 165.08 OPEN SPACE, LANDSCAPING AND BUFFERING

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1. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Landscaping and landscaped open spaces provide multiple benefits including energy conservation, increased property values, and an enhanced aesthetic quality throughout the City. Combined, these benefits promote the health and general welfare of the citizens of Indianola. The purpose of this Chapter is to establish minimum standards to achieve the following objectives: preservation of existing vegetation and topsoil; protection of water quality and wildlife habitat; reduction of heat generated from paved surfaces, buffering of incompatible land uses and screening negative site elements; and, enhancement of the overall appearance and natural beauty of the community.

2. APPLICABILITY

These regulations shall apply to new development, the redevelopment of existing sites, all site modifications including building additions and expansions, new parking lots and paved area expansions, and the subdivision of land within all zoning districts.

The approval authority can approve alternative landscaping standards in order to address special or unique circumstances provided the overall intent of this section is met.

3. DEFINITIONS

The following terms are defined for this chapter:

- A. Deciduous Ornamental Tree.** A deciduous tree (often an ornamental type tree) that reaches a mature height of less than 30 feet.
- B. Deciduous Shade Tree.** Defined as a deciduous tree with one vertical stem or trunk which begins branching at a height of six (6) feet or more and has a distinct crown that reaches a mature height of at least 30 feet.
- C. Evergreen / Coniferous Tree.** Defined as a tree that has needle-shaped or scale like leaves that remain green throughout the year; commonly referred to as pine, fir, and spruce trees. These trees generally reach a mature height of over 25 feet.
- D. Invasive Plant Species.** A plant reproducing outside its native range and outside cultivation that disrupts naturally occurring native plant communities by altering structure, composition, natural processes or habitat quality. Invasive plants are those plants recognized by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (Iowa Code; Chapter 317.1A Noxious weeds).
- E. No Mow and Low Maintenance Grasses.** Defined as cultivated grasses that do not grow taller than 12 inches or require limited mowing to maintain a height of 12 inches or less.
- F. Open Space.** Any area not covered by a building, structure, parking lot, loading area, driveway, or other similarly paved area. Open space may include sidewalks, trails, pedestrian plazas and patios, and landscaped parking lot islands.
- G. Ornamental Grasses.** Defined as tall perennial grasses, generally over 24-inches at mature height, that are specifically grown and cultivated for their decorative properties. Most of the commonly used ornamental grasses are non-native, introduced species such as: Feather Reed Grass, Blue Oat Grass, Silvergrass, and Fountain Grass.
- H. Prairie Grass Plantings.** Native grasses and forbs (flowering plants) found within the native prairie environment typical for the area prior to clearance and cultivation of the land by European settlers. For the purposes of this Chapter, prairie plantings may contain native grasses without forbs to simplify prairie plant installation and maintenance.
- I. Turf Grass.** A continuous plant coverage consisting of a grass species that is mowed or maintained at an established height of 6 inches or less and can include native and non-native vegetation, e.g., Kentucky Blue Grass, Perennial Ryegrass, Tall Fescue, Fine Fescue, Buffalo Grass.

4. OPEN SPACE AND LANDSCAPING REQUIRED

- A. Open Space.** All sites shall provide no less than the minimum amount of landscaping as required for each zoning district.
- B. Landscaping.**
 - (1) Ground Cover. All area unencumbered by buildings, paving or hard-surfaced, shall be landscaped with turf grass, prairie grass plantings, plant beds, shrubs, and trees. No mow and

low maintenance grasses should not be utilized within the street rights-of-way, within parking lots, and within the front yard area of any site and should be restricted to low traffic and low visibility areas or larger areas within a site intended to be preserved and maintained as a more natural area.

- (2) Use of Mulch. Except for single-family and two-family dwellings, wood-based mulch shall be used around all plantings and in all plant beds. Large areas of wood mulch that do not contain plantings shall not be permitted except when used around play structures. Inorganic ground cover material, including rock, chip brick, and synthetic turf (unless part of a designated sport field or play surface), is prohibited except along building foundations, around drainage structures, and in other limited applications as may be deemed acceptable by the Zoning Administrator.
- (3) Minimum Open Space Landscape Requirements. The following minimum open space plantings shall be required for all sites except for single-family and two-family dwellings. Each single-family and two-family dwellings constructed after the adoption of this ordinance shall be required to plant two (2) trees (ornamental or shade) and four (4) shrubs per lot or unit prior to the issuance of an occupancy permit.
 - a. One (1) deciduous shade tree, two (2) deciduous ornamental trees, and two (2) shrubs shall be planted for every 2,000 square feet of required open space. However, the minimum required landscape for all sites shall be no less than one (1) deciduous shade tree, two (2) deciduous ornamental trees, and two (2) shrubs.
 - b. This landscaping is in addition to landscaping required for parking lot landscaping and open space plant materials shall not count towards the fulfillment of any other landscaping requirement.
- (4) Off-Street Parking, Driveways and Loading Areas. The following standards shall apply to all off-street parking and loading areas with ten (10) or more parking stalls or with more than 2,500 square feet of paved area. Off-street and loading area required plant materials shall not count towards the fulfillment of any other landscaping requirement.
 - a. Parking Lot Design.
 - i. All rows of parking shall be terminated with a curbed landscaped island that is a minimum nine (9) feet wide and no less than 16 feet in length (32 feet in length for head-to-head parking stalls).
 - ii. No off-street parking or loading area shall be more than 100 feet from a deciduous shade tree located within a landscaped open space area.
 - iii. Sidewalks that abut the front edge of any parking stall shall be no less than seven (7) feet wide to accommodate a two (2) feet vehicle overhang.
 - b. Landscaping Required.
 - i. All parking lot islands shall be landscaped with a combination of turf grass, prairie grass plantings, plant beds, shrubs, and trees.

- ii. Rock, chip brick, pavers, pavement and similar hard surfacing shall not be permitted within a parking lot island. Sidewalks may be constructed within a parking lot island as necessary to accommodate pedestrian circulation.
 - iii. No less than one (1) deciduous shade tree shall be planted within each required landscaped island.
- c. Parking Lot Screening.
- i. Whenever an off-street parking area fronts along a public street an average of one (1) deciduous shade tree and two (2) deciduous ornamental trees shall be planted every 50 feet within the parking lot setback area.
 - ii. Additionally, a minimum three (3) foot tall vehicle headlight screen shall be installed between the parking lot and the adjoining street. This screen can be constructed with any combination of prairie plantings, shrubs, ornamental grasses, earth berming, and low masonry walls.

5. BUFFERING

A. Buffers Required. Buffers are required, as provided in this Chapter, for the following conditions. Properties separated by a public street right-of-way are not considered adjoining for the purposes of this section.

- (1) Between any residentially zoned or developed property and any adjoining commercial, office, or industrial uses.
- (2) Between any single-family residentially zoned or developed property and any multi-family residential use.
- (3) Between any commercial or office zoned or developed property and any industrial use.
- (4) Double Frontage Lots. Any proposed single-family residential lot that has both its front and rear lines abutting a street shall have a buffer from the street along its rear yard. No fences or structures shall be permitted within this buffer and the rear yard building setback shall be measured from the buffer yard line.

B. Burden of Providing a Required Buffer. The burden of constructing and maintaining a required buffer shall be determined as follows:

- (1) In the case of a buffer required between two (2) undeveloped properties, the property with the more intensive zoning shall be burdened with the buffer requirements.
- (2) In the case of a buffer required between an undeveloped and a developed property, the property proposing the development shall be burdened with the buffer requirements.
- (3) In the case of a buffer required between a property proposed for redevelopment and a developed property, the property proposed for redevelopment shall be burdened with the buffer requirements.

- (4) Two properties may agree to transfer or share the burden of a required buffer.

C. General Buffer Provisions.

- (1) All building and parking lot setbacks shall be measured from the closest edge any required buffer yard.
- (2) No structures or parking lots or loading areas may be permitted within a required buffer. Fences, sidewalks, and trails may be permitted within a required buffer except that no fence may be constructed within a buffer that fronts along a street.
- (3) Buffer plantings should be in small groupings to appear more natural versus evenly spaced in a line.
- (4) Earth berming required within a buffer may vary and undulate to accommodate drainage and to provide a more nature appearance.

D. Buffer Options. The following buffer options may be utilized to meet the buffering requirements of this chapter, unless an alternate standard is established by the Board of Adjustment as a condition for approval of a Special Use Permit conditional use or by the City Council as a condition of a rezoning or site plan approval to mitigate conditions that may otherwise be detrimental to adjoining residential properties.

(1) 30-Foot Wide Buffer.

- a. Minimum Width: 30 feet.
- b. Landscape Requirements: For every 25 linear feet of required buffer a minimum of 1-overstory tree, 2-evergreen trees, and 6-shrubs shall be planted.
- c. Earth Berming: three (3) foot tall.

(2) 60-Foot Wide Buffer.

- a. Minimum Width: 60 feet.
- b. Landscape Requirements: For every 25 linear feet of required buffer a minimum of 1-overstory trees, 1-evergreen trees, and 3-shrubs shall be planted.
- c. Earth Berming: three (3) foot tall.

- (3) Buffer Reduction. Should the burden of a buffer requirement cause a property to become practically undevelopable, at the sole discretion of the Zoning Administrator, the width of a required buffer may be reduced in lieu of the installation of additional landscaping, a minimum six (6) foot tall privacy fence or masonry screen wall, and other measures necessary to mitigate the impact on the property to be buffered.

6. PLANT MATERIALS STANDARDS

A. Plant Materials. All plants shall be of the type and species appropriate for the climate and location being planted. All plant material shall be commercially produced and meet the minimum standards recognized by landscape professionals.

- (1) To reduce the threat and impact of plant disease, multiple plant types and species shall be utilized on each site.
- (2) No less than 50% of the plant material on an individual site shall be species native to Iowa.
- (3) Ornamental and prairie grass plantings must be appropriate in size, scale, quantity, and type for the location they are being placed so not to appear unkept or encroach walkways and driveways.
- (4) Prohibited Trees. The City declares that invasive nonnative species as listed by the most recent publication of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' (IDNR's) list of invasive plant species are a public nuisance that degrades landscaped and natural areas. The City shall prohibit the planting of any nonnative invasive plant species in all public and private properties. The following trees are prohibited:
 - a. Ash (all species/cultivars)
 - b. Black Locust
 - c. Birch, White/Paper
 - d. Boxelder
 - e. Eastern Cottonwood
 - f. Elm (all species/cultivars except Dutch Elm Disease resistant cultivars)
 - g. Maple, Silver/Norway/Amur
 - h. Pear (all species/cultivars)
 - i. Poplar (all species/cultivars)
 - j. Russian and Autumn Olive
 - k. Trees with thorns
- (5) Minimum Plant Sizes. All plant sizes shall meet the following size and design requirements:
 - a. Deciduous Shade Trees – minimum 2.0-inch caliper, measured six (6) inches above the immediate ground level.
 - b. Deciduous Ornament Trees – minimum 1.5-inch caliper, measured six (6) inches above the immediate ground level.
 - c. Evergreen / Coniferous Tree – minimum 5-feet in height.

- d. Shrubs – minimum three (3) gallon container.
 - e. Ornamental Grasses – minimum one (1) gallon container.
- (6) Plant Locations. All plantings shall comply with the following:
- a. In general, all plants shall be sited and spaced in a manner to allow for appropriate growth to mature size.
 - b. Trees shall be located no closer than six (6) feet to the back of curb along any street or driveway and no closer than four (4) feet to the edge of any parking lot, sidewalk or walkway.
 - c. Ornamental and prairie grasses with a mature height of over four (4) feet shall not be permitted within the front yard area of any residential property.
 - d. Landscaping must meet minimum clearances from all fire hydrants and building sprinkler systems as required by the fire department.
 - e. Deciduous shade trees should not be placed within any public sanitary sewer, storm sewer or watermain utility easement.
 - f. No landscaping shall be planted in violation of the City's street intersection vision clearance requirements.
 - g. A permit must be obtained prior to planting any street tree or landscape material in the public right-of-way and shall comply with all City clearance and setback requirements.
- (7) Plant Substitutions. Substitution of required plant materials may be made as follows:
- a. One (1) deciduous shade tree may be substituted in place of 10 required shrubs.
 - b. One (1) deciduous ornamental tree may be substituted in place of five (5) required shrubs.
 - c. One (1) evergreen/coniferous tree may be substituted in place of one (1) required deciduous shade tree.
 - d. One (1) deciduous shade tree may be substituted in place of two (2) required deciduous ornamental trees. Deciduous ornamental trees may not be substituted for required deciduous shade trees.
 - e. Three (3) ornamental grasses may be substituted for one (1) required shrub.

- B. Existing Trees and Tree Preservation Credit.** The preservation of existing trees on a site is encouraged when they are in good condition and at least 2-inch caliper in size. Such trees may be counted as part of the required number of trees on a site.

A credit of two (2) trees toward the number trees shall be given for each existing tree on a site that is of the type of tree listed in the above sections which is over ten (10) inch caliper in size measured six (6) inches above the immediate ground level. However, this credit may not be applied in

reducing the number of required interior parking lot trees, unless the tree is located within the parking lot area.

7. REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS

A. Plan Approval Required. A landscape plan that follows the provisions of this Chapter shall be submitted as part of any application for approval of a Site Plan and as part of any application for approval of a Preliminary Plat that is for a single-family residential subdivision. No building permit shall be issued without an approved landscape plan in accordance with this Chapter.

B. Plan Submittal Requirements. The landscape plan shall be prepared and signed by a licensed landscape architect or other licensed professional with competency in preparing landscape plans. The plan set shall include the following:

- (1) Property boundary and general location of all existing and proposed structures, fences, walls, paved areas, parking lots, utilities, easements, and storm water management facilities.
- (2) Identification of all required Stream Buffers (see Chapter 104)
- (3) Existing and proposed grades.
- (4) Identification of all existing landscaping including whether it is to be preserved or removed.
- (5) Details for the methods by which existing landscaping planned to be preserved will be protected during site construction.
- (6) Identification of all proposed landscaping include plant species and size.
- (7) Identification of all proposed ground cover.
- (8) Width and details for all required buffers including buffer type and plant quantifies.
- (9) Details of all required screening.
- (10) Specifications for soil conditioning and plant installation.
- (11) Summary of the following site details:
 - a. Square footage of the total site area.
 - b. Sum square footage of all impervious areas.
 - c. Square footage of the current and proposed building footprint area and paved areas (not including sidewalks, patios, and pedestrian plaza).
 - d. Required open space calculations and square footage of open space provided.
 - e. Calculation of the require landscaping and summary of landscape provided.
- (12) Other information as required by the Zoning Administrator.

(13) The Zoning Administrator may waive any of these required elements if determined unnecessary to ensure compliance with this Chapter.

- C. Final Approval.** Prior to approval of a Final Plat for any single-family residential subdivision and prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for any building, all landscaping must be installed in accordance with the approved landscape plan. Should any of the required landscaping not be installed prior to a request for Final Plat approval or Certificate of Occupancy, due to weather conditions or time of the year, the Zoning Administrator, at their sole discretion, may accept a cash surety or performance bond as a guarantee of installation and approve the Final Plat or issue a temporary Certificate of Occupancy. The surety amount shall be no less than one and one-half (1½) times the cost of installation.
- D. Modifications.** The Zoning Administrator may administratively review and approve requests for minor changes to any approved landscape plan, such as changes in plant materials or plant locations, provided those changes comply with the requirements of this Chapter and do not materially alter the appearance of the site.
- E. Nonconformities.** Existing developed sites seeking approval of a building permit or site plan approval for any site modifications including building additions and paving expansions shall attempt to bring the entire property into full compliance with the requirements of this Chapter. At a minimum, all new buildings, building additions, new parking lots, and new paved areas shall comply with the regulations of this Chapter. No site plan or building permit shall be approved that causes or increases a site's nonconformity with this chapter.

8. MAINTENANCE AND REPLACEMENT

- A. Maintenance.** All property owners shall maintain all landscaping including regular mowing, trimming, and pruning and removal of dead, dying, or diseased plant material and keep the property clear from weeds, debris, and litter. Plant material shall be regularly trimmed and pruned to keep from encroaching sidewalks, walkways, driveway, and parking areas.
- B. Replacement.** The owner of any lot or parcel for which a landscape plan has been approved under this section shall further be responsible for the replacement of any dead, dying, or diseased plant material to remain in compliance with the approved landscape plan. Should a tree for which a landscape credit was given, die, become diseased, or is otherwise removed, the owner of the property on which the tree is located shall replace the tree at the same ratio at which the credit was originally given. Failure to maintain the landscaping in accordance with this provision shall constitute a violation of the site's site plan and/or building permit approval and certificate of occupancy.