

**2009-2010 Development Code Docket  
A-6: Amend Development Code to  
increase landscaping buffers between  
incompatible uses and zones**

Date: Tentative – May 19, 2010

Public Hearing Date: Tentative Date: June 2, 2010

Prepared by: Scott Longanecker,  
Associate Planner

Proponent/Applicant: Thurston County

Action Requested: Amend Development Code to  
increase landscaping buffers  
between incompatible uses and  
zones (Titles 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23).

Map Changes  Text Changes  Both  Affects Comprehensive Plans/documents  
 Affected Jurisdictions

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**ISSUE:**

In many cases, currently required landscaping buffers on new development have proven to be inadequate in protecting existing development. Amendments may include increasing the width of landscaping buffers and ensuring the effectiveness of buffers in terms of separating and screening incompatible uses and protecting property values.

**BACKGROUND:**

Higher property values can force property owners to develop property for it's "highest and best use" as defined by development potential, tax status, allowed uses under zoning, location etc.

Older, pre-existing land uses are often of lower intensity and located on larger lots than newer development. This is often caused by newer zoning regulations and the State Growth Management Act, which requires higher density residential development in Urban Growth Areas (UGAs). In order to meet minimum density requirements in higher density urban residential zones, smaller lot sizes are the norm. When compared with older and often much larger lots in urban areas, higher density developments can dramatically alter neighborhood character, particularly if natural areas are converted to high density or intensified residential and commercial use. A concern commonly heard from neighbors of newly proposed or constructed developments relates to visual impacts from higher density and more intensive land uses.

1 **DEPARTMENT ANALYSIS:**

2 Some of the benefits of improved and larger buffers between uses also include the ability  
3 to save more existing trees and vegetation. This can have additional benefits including  
4 conserving bird and wildlife habitat corridors and protection from erosion and off-site storm  
5 water impacts. The proposed change would also help to define neighborhoods and mitigate  
6 some of the visual impacts of both urban and rural development.

7 In 2005 Thurston County Resource Stewardship adopted a policy related to landscaping  
8 between incompatible residential uses<sup>1</sup>. The proposed changes to Thurston County Development  
9 Code would codify some of the general standards contained in this 2005 UGA Residential  
10 Screening policy. The proposed changes to County Code would help to mitigate many of the  
11 negative impacts typically associated with newer development. Impacts felt by pre-existing  
12 property owners can include a decreased sense of privacy, changes to the physical environment  
13 such as increased light and noise pollution, loss of large trees and wildlife etc. A significantly  
14 larger buffer separating and screening incompatible uses as described herein, may help to  
15 mitigate or decrease these impacts.

16 Under the current proposal a 30-foot wide buffer is suggested in order to provide greater  
17 separation of incompatible uses than the minimum buffers required under most existing  
18 landscaping regulations. Building setbacks for residential projects in both rural Thurston County  
19 as well as the Urban Growth Areas range from five – fifteen feet in most cases. A 30-foot wide  
20 buffer would provide more space between uses and allow for more vegetation. A wider buffer  
21 would also allow for larger tree species such as Douglas firs to be safely planted and maintained  
22 over the long-term. Narrower buffers can result in encroachment into tree root zones thereby  
23 impacting the health and shortening the life span of larger trees.

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26 **ALTERNATIVES:**

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28 Alternative 1) Amend Titles 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23 to require larger landscaping buffers  
29 between incompatible uses in rural and suburban areas of Thurston County.

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31 Alternative 2) Make no change to Titles 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23 in terms of buffering  
32 incompatible uses.

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34 **SEPA:**

35 A SEPA determination has not been made at this time.

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37 **NOTIFICATION:**

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39 Written notice of the public hearing will be published in The Olympian at least twenty (20) days  
40 prior to the public hearing.

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42 **DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION:**

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44 Amend TCC 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23 to require larger landscaping buffers between incompatible  
45 uses in rural and suburban areas of Thurston County. The Resource Stewardship Department  
46 recommends the Planning Commission forward Development Code Docket item A-6, Amend

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<sup>1</sup> ZONE.POL.801.05 – UGA Residential Screening  
Resource Stewardship Staff Report  
A-6 – Incompatible Uses  
Version no. 1

1 Development Code to increase landscaping buffers between incompatible uses and zones. (Title  
2 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23) with a recommendation of approval to the Board of County  
3 Commissioners as follows:

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6 Deleted Text: ~~Strikethrough~~ Proposed Changes: Underlined  
7 Staff Comments: *Italics* Unaffected Omitted Text: (...)

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9  
10 **New proposed language for the landscaping chapters of Titles 21, 22 and 23:**

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12 Incompatible Uses-

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14 1. An incompatible use is defined as:

- 15 a. A commercial or industrial zoning district or use adjacent to a residential lot less  
16 than two acres in size, or residential zoning district with a density greater than  
17 one unit per acre.

18 *(Note: Lots over two acre in size should in general have sufficient area to act as a*  
19 *buffer from adjacent incompatible uses. In these cases standard landscaping should*  
20 *be sufficient.)*

- 21 b. A residential zoning district or proposed residential subdivision lot that is less  
22 than fifty percent (50%) of the square footage of an existing contiguous  
23 residential lot.

24  
25 2. Applicability-

- 26 a. Where the common property line is at least twenty feet (20') in length and  
27 where a proposed use is adjacent to an incompatible use as described in section 1.  
28 *(Add full citation for applicable code, i.e. title 21, 22 etc.)*

29  
30 3. Screening between incompatible uses – At minimum, screening shall consist of a 30-foot  
31 wide buffer containing the following:

- 32 a. A vegetated buffer of predominantly native species (75% native minimum) that  
33 will provide a very dense sight barrier and physical buffer to significantly separate  
34 conflicting uses and land use districts.  
35 b. Plant materials and ground cover shall be selected and maintained so that the 30-  
36 foot buffer will be fully vegetated within three years.  
37 c. A combination of trees, shrubs, earthen berms, and related plant materials or  
38 design features may be selected, provided that the resultant effect is sight-  
39 obscuring from adjoining properties. In addition, fences and walls may be  
40 incorporated into the landscaping buffer.  
41 d. A minimum of one tree per 25 linear feet. Trees shall be a minimum one inch in  
42 caliper measured six inches above the base at the time of planting.  
43 e. Shrubs must be capable of growing to a minimum of five feet in height, within  
44 three years. Shrubs shall be planted on eight-foot centers at minimum.  
45 f. Ground cover shall consist of bark, mulch, native grasses and/or native understory  
46 vegetation such as salal, Oregon grape, Knickknick, Sword fern, etc.  
47 g. Retention and salvage of existing native vegetation and trees is preferred over  
48 removal and replacement of vegetation.

1 ( Here refer back to applicable landscaping performance and maintenance requirements of  
2 each zone i.e. TCC 21.80.080 etc.).  
3

4 4. The 30-foot buffer required by this section may be used for the following so long as the  
5 design standards of (3.) can be met.

6 a. Storm water treatment facilities.

7 b. Open space.

8 c. Tree tracts.

9 d. Critical area protection.

10 *(Other possible uses? If other uses are not allowed within this 30-feet it may*  
11 *affect density. Should we allow this buffer area to be deducted from the density*  
12 *calculation?)*

13 e. Required landscaping.

14 *(For Title 20 remove b. and c. b/c they are not applicable in the rural county.*  
15 *Also, note that this will need to be consistent with proposed changes to TCC 17.25*  
16 *in terms of tree tract design and width in particular.)*  
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18 **New proposed language for Title 20, Chapter 20.45 – Landscaping and Screening:**

19  
20 Incompatible Uses-

21  
22 1. An incompatible use is defined as:

23 a. A commercial or industrial zoning district or use adjacent to a residential lot less  
24 than two acres in size or zoning district with a density of one unit per acre or  
25 greater.

26 b. A proposed residential subdivision lot that is less than fifty percent (50%) of the  
27 square footage of an existing contiguous residential lot.

28  
29 2. Applicability-

30 a. Where the common property line is at least twenty feet (20') in length and

31 b. where a proposed use is adjacent to an incompatible use as described in section 1.  
32 *(Add full citation for applicable code, i.e. title 20...)*

33  
34 3. Screening between incompatible uses – At minimum, screening shall consist of a 30-foot  
35 wide buffer containing the following:

36 a. A vegetated buffer of predominantly native species (75% native minimum) that  
37 will provide a very dense sight barrier and physical buffer to significantly separate  
38 conflicting uses and land use districts.

39 b. Plant materials and ground cover shall be selected and maintained so that the 30-  
40 foot buffer will be fully vegetated within three years.

41 c. A combination of trees, shrubs, earthen berms, and related plant materials or  
42 design features may be selected, provided that the resultant effect is sight-  
43 obscuring from adjoining properties. In addition, fences and walls may be  
44 incorporated into the landscaping buffer.

45 d. A minimum of one tree per 25 linear feet. Trees shall be a minimum one inch in  
46 caliper measured six inches above the base at the time of planting.

47 e. Shrubs must be capable of growing to a minimum of five feet in height, within  
48 three years. Shrubs shall be planted on eight-foot centers at minimum.

- 1            f. Ground cover shall consist of bark, mulch, native grasses and/or native understory
- 2            vegetation such as salal, Oregon grape, Sword fern, etc.
- 3            g. Retention and salvage of existing native vegetation and trees is preferred over
- 4            removal and replacement of vegetation.
- 5
- 6            4. The 30-foot buffer required by this section may be used for the following so long as the
- 7            design standards of (3.) can be met.
- 8            a. Storm water treatment facilities.
- 9            b. Critical area protection.
- 10           c. Required landscaping.
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13 **ATTACHMENTS:**

14 Attachment A:                    Thurston County Policy ZONE.POL.801.05

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