

# City of Detroit

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**TO:** City Council Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee

**FROM:** Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director  
Eric Fazzini, CPC Staff  
Greg Moots, P&DD Staff

**RE:** Requested changes to Screening Text Amendment Ordinance

**DATE:** September 25, 2025

Following the June 5, 2025 City Council public hearing on the above captioned ordinance a number of potential modifications were discussed. The Planning and Development Department (PDD) and City Planning Commission (CPC) staff were asked to assess the modifications and draft corresponding changes. Below are the proposed changes as they would appear in the zoning ordinance. Text with a strikethrough would be deleted and underlined text would be added. Staff comments are provided in bold. We have a number of concerns with the potential implications of some of the changes. Upon reaching agreement to support the requested changes and at the direction of the Planning and Economic Development Standing Committee (PED), the below changes can be incorporated into an updated ordinance and will require be approval as to form by the Law Department.

Request: Sec. 50-12-270. Motor vehicle filling stations; screening and landscaping

(b) Traditional Main Street Overlay Areas.

(2)a. Trees. At least one tree shall be provided in the buffer strip for each ~~30~~ 10 linear feet of landscape buffer. Trees must have a minimum nonpaved planting area of ~~18~~ 36 square feet, with a minimum depth of five feet. Trees provided to meet the standards of this subsection shall not be planted more than ~~50~~ 25 feet apart. (See Figure 50-14-341(1)a.)

**Staff Comment: This section is not included in the approved as to form screening ordinance as there was not a desire to change TMSO standards. The Law Department should verify if this section can be amended during the PED continued public hearing as this section is not currently included in the screening ordinance. See additional comments under Plant size.**

Request: Sec. 50-14-323. Plant quality and type.

All plants shall conform to “American Nurserymen’s” standards, with coherent root ball or wrapped roots, of a height, leaf density and spread appropriate to the species. ~~No one species of tree or shrub may make up more than 50 percent of the total plantings.~~ Applicants should consult with the

**Urban Forester and General Services Department regarding the most effective tree species at mitigating pollution. See Appendix B of this chapter for a list of recommended trees and shrubs. (add 2019 MDOT Resource: Plants for Michigan Roadsides as a new Appendix B).**

**Staff Comment:** This section and a new Appendix B are not included in the approved as to form screening ordinance. The Law Department should verify if this section can be amended and Appendix B added during the PED continued public hearing as this section is not currently included in the screening ordinance. It should be noted that ease of enforcement is a goal of this amendment. So, having a list of approved plants that can be easily accessed, is preferred, over requiring each applicant who is required to have plantings (which is virtually all, when considering parking lot screening) consult with the General Services Department. The department would very likely be overwhelmed by that volume of calls. Hiring a qualified landscape architect to be a part of the site plan review process would be valuable, regardless, but this clearly has budget and operational implications. Using the appendix also has the advantage of the list being easily updated.

**Instead of having to choose whether a tree is optimal for pollution mitigation or visual screening when visual screening is required, trees could be identified that meet both performance objectives.**

**Instead of the requested language that would encourage consultation with the Urban Forester and GSD, staff recommends the following language with the addition of a new Appendix B:**

Sec. 50-14-323. Plant quality and type.

All plants shall conform to “American Nurserymen’s” standards, with coherent root ball or wrapped roots, of a height, leaf density and spread appropriate to the species. ~~No one species of tree or shrub may make up more than 50 percent of the total plantings.~~ **Applicants should consult with the Urban Forester and General Services Department regarding the most effective tree species at mitigating pollution. See Appendix B of this chapter for a list of recommended trees and shrubs. (add 2019 MDOT Resource: Plants for Michigan Roadsides as a new Appendix B, as-is or as modified by the city).**

Request: Sec. 50-14-325. Plant size.

The following requirements shall apply with respect to plant size, except upon special review and approval by the Recreation Department:

- (1) Shrubs. Shrubs planted to meet the landscaping and screening standards of this subdivision shall have a minimum size equal to or greater than a Number 3 container and have a minimum height of ~~18~~ **24** inches at the time of planting. Where shrubs are used to meet landscaping or screening standards, at least 50 percent shall be evergreen; and
- (2) Trees. Deciduous trees that are installed to meet the standards of this subdivision shall have a **minimum height of 10 feet and a** minimum diameter of ~~two~~ **two and a half** inches, which is measured 12 inches above the root ball, and a clear stem of at least five feet. Evergreen trees shall have a minimum height of ~~five~~ **10** feet at time of planting,

**Staff Comment:** This section is not included in the approved as to form screening ordinance. The Law Department should verify if this section can be amended during the PED continued public hearing as this section is not currently included in the screening ordinance. Additionally, per GSD, the cost of an evergreen tree more than doubles from \$700 to \$1,600 when tree height

increases from 6 ft to 10 ft. Many deciduous trees that are 2.5” caliper are 10 ft in height. The cost increase for the larger trees may be 50% or more, depending on species.

**Affordability concern**

Request: Sec. 50-14-369. Buffer Types III and IV.

(c) Type III and Type IV buffers are subject to the following:

	<b>Buffer Type III</b>	<b>Buffer Type IV</b>
Minimum Buffer Depth	7 feet, except if not practicable, buffer depth may be reduced to three feet, subject to approval by the Planning and Development Department	15 feet
<b>Fence and Wall Standards</b>		
Fence or Wall Requirement	Required	Permissible, Not Required
Material Opacity	Solid Continuous Screen	Transparent
Minimum Height	6 feet	Subject to Section 50-14-344(a)
Maximum Height	Subject to Section 50-14-344(b)	
<b>Landscaping Requirements</b>		
Ground Treatment	Subject to Section 50-14-326, except cobblestones/pavers/rocks must not exceed 10% of buffer area	
Deciduous Trees	1 tree within each <del>30</del> <b>10</b> linear-foot portion of buffer. Trees may be planted outside of buffer area within landscaped portion of right-of-way, subject to approval by Department of Public Works	1 tree within each <del>25</del> <b>10</b> linear-foot portion of buffer
Evergreen Trees	Not Required	1 tree within each 10 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must form a continuous screen.
Shrubs	1 shrub within each 5 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must be planted exterior to the required solid wall or fence and visible from adjacent streets and property.	1 shrub within each 3 linear-foot portion of buffer

Request: Sec. 50-14-370. Buffer Types V and VI.

(c) Type V and Type VI buffers are subject to the following:

	<b>Buffer Type V</b>	<b>Buffer Type VI</b>
Minimum Buffer Depth	<del>15</del> <b>30</b> feet	<del>30</del> <b>45</b> feet
<b>Fence and Wall Standards</b>		
Fence or Wall Requirement	Required	Permissible, Not Required

Material Opacity	Solid Continuous Screen	Transparent
Minimum Height	8 feet	Subject to Section 50-14-344(a)
Maximum Height	Subject to Section 50-14-344(b)	
<b>Landscaping Requirements</b>		
Ground Treatment	Subject to Section 50-14-326, except cobblestones/pavers/rocks must not exceed 10% of buffer area	
Deciduous Trees	1 tree within each <del>30</del> <b>10</b> linear-foot portion of buffer	1 tree within each <del>25</del> <b>10</b> linear-foot portion of buffer
Evergreen Trees	<del>Not Required. If provided, must be planted exterior to the required solid wall or fence and visible from adjacent streets or property</del> <b><u>1 tree within each 10 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must form a continuous screen.</u></b>	1 tree within each 10 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must form a continuous screen.
Shrubs	1 shrub within each 5 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must be planted exterior to the required solid wall or fence and visible from adjacent streets and property.	1 shrub within each 3 linear-foot portion of buffer. Must form a continuous screen

**Staff Comment:** In developing these buffer depths, staff looked at our existing ordinance, EPA recommendations for buffer widths (30') and past industrial projects PDD has either worked with developers on or mocked up designs for to understand what works/doesn't work from a site design perspective. In most cases, 15 feet is the "sweet spot" -- it screens, provide some pollution benefits, AND is feasible for many of our industrial opportunity sites -- finding a win-win-win is a good outcome.

There is a significant decrease in the buildable area of a parcel, especially on the smallest parcels, when the buffer depth increases by 15 ft.. For example, on a three-acre rectangular parcel, 8.3% of the parcel is used by the 15 ft buffer on the long side of the parcel, significantly reducing the buildable area. That drops to 6.4% on a five-acre parcel. If trees are required in addition to the masonry wall, it seems appropriate to permit clustering instead of forming one row to give flexibility and potentially increase visual interest. It should be noted that several fairly common types of development, such as warehouses and truck parking areas, require type V or VI screening, so this intense screening would be relatively frequently required.

**Crowding concerns**

Request: Sec. 50-14-367. Screening standards for specific uses and site features

(c) Required screening for specific uses. Screening is required for the following uses in accordance with the following standards:

<b>Uses that Require Screening</b>	
	<b>Permissible Buffer Types</b>

Use	Adjacent to street rights-of-way	Adjacent to or across and alley from Residential Districts	Adjacent to all other property lines
<b><u>Concrete batching plants (high-impact manufacturing or processing)</u></b>	<b><u>Type V or VI</u></b>	<b><u>Type V or VI</u></b>	<b><u>Type III</u></b>
Containerized freight yard	Type V	Type V	Type III
Junkyard	Type V	Type V	Type III
Light duty vehicle repair establishments	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Light duty vehicle services establishments	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Lumber yard	Type III or IV	Type V or VI	Screening Not Required
Medium/heavy duty vehicle or equipment repair establishment	Type III	Type III or V	Type III
Motor vehicle filling stations	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Motor vehicles, new or used, salesroom or sales lot	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Motor vehicles, new or used; storage lot accessory to a salesroom or sales lot for new or used motor vehicles	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Motor vehicle washing and steam cleaning	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Outdoor storage yard	Type V	Type V	Type III
Towing service storage yard	Type III	Type V	Type III
Transfer station for garbage, refuse, or rubbish	Type V	Type V	Type III
Trucking terminals, transfer buildings, recreational vehicle storage lots, and parking areas for operable trucks	<del>Type III or IV</del> <b><u>IV or V</u></b>	<del>Type V or VI</del> <b><u>IV or V</u></b>	Type III or IV
<b><u>Tunnel or bridge plaza and terminal, vehicular</u></b>	<b><u>Type III or IV</u></b>	<b><u>Type V or VI</u></b>	<b><u>Type III or IV</u></b>
Utilities, basic and major	Type III or IV	Type V or VI	Type III
Very-high impact manufacturing or processing facilities ( <b><u>e.g. asphalt manufacture, bituminous concrete manufacture, concrete crushing</u></b> )	Type V	Type V	Type V
Wholesaling, warehousing, storage buildings, or public facilities	Type III or IV	Type V or VI	Type III or IV

Request: Sec. 50-14-367. Screening standards for specific uses and site features

(d) Required screening for individual site features. For all uses not identified in Subsection (c) of this section, screening is required for the following individual site features in accordance with the following standards:

<b>Uses that Require Screening</b>			
	<b>Permissible Buffer Types</b>		
<b>Site Feature</b>	<b>Adjacent to street rights-of-way</b>	<b>Adjacent to or across and alley from Residential Districts</b>	<b>Adjacent to all other property lines</b>
Loading docks, service yards, exterior work areas, truck maneuvering areas, and open areas for the parking of trucks, semi-trucks, and semi-trailers	Type <del>III or IV</del> <u>IV or V</u>	Type <del>V or VI</del> <u>IV or V</u>	Type III or IV
Open storage areas, principal or accessory	Type V	Type V	Type III
Off-street parking areas	Type I or II	Type III	Screening Not Required
Off-street parking areas for operable commercial vehicles, not including taxicabs and limousines	Type III or IV	Type III or IV	Screening Not Required