

Memorandum



Date: March 4, 2026
To: Planning Commission Members
From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director
Subject: **Discussion - Unified Development Code – Buffering, Tree Preservation and Fencing**

Background

The Unified Development Code became effective on December 12, 2025, and staff has been using it to answer questions and review requests and is recommending Section 71-26 Buffering, Section 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards along with Section 71-29 Fencing standards be reviewed for clarification, expansion of regulations to include refuse screening and lighting standards.

Section 71-26 Buffering.

The language provides states “newly developing property” to provide buffering. Many buffering/landscape codes also allow the use of fencing.

Section 71-27.H Loading standards include information about refuse collection must be located and screened so it is not visible from adjacent streets, or residential uses (Section 71-27.H.1.b). This language is typically found with buffering or landscaping regulations.

Section 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards

Within Table 71-S there is at least one tree - Sweetgum which is typically not desired because it drops balls. There may be other species that may not be desired. In addition, there are some references that are unclear – “special status list” for protected trees. It is believed the language should be reviewed to look for opportunities for further clarification and improve the flow of the section. Staff would also recommend the Buchanan Tree Friends be involved once drafting is further along.

Section 71-29 Fencing standards

May fence regulations provide for posts to extend 6” above the actual fence material and most require the “good side” face out. There is also concern regarding safety and athletic fencing needs for some users as a 6’ fence may not be appropriate. Added language can be drafted to allow city staff under certain conditions to increase the allowable height of a fence, or the variance process can be modified for granting fence variances with different

standards. Staff have heard concern about the use of chicken wire fencing on neighboring properties that should be further discussed. Maximum heights of fencing have been provided, however, there is no reference to streetside when the parcel is a corner lot or the need to maintain the corner lot clear sight line.

Many communities regulate lighting in parking lots with maximum height of poles and cast of glare. The UDC does not have any provisions associated with lighting requirements. Staff are recommending language be added.

Next Steps

Discuss the concerns brought up by staff and decide if they should be addressed. If it is concluded changes are necessary, direct staff to prepare draft language for further review and discussion at a future meeting. Similar to the signage discussions, staff would review other community's ordinances and redline the existing language with proposed changes to be reviewed by the Planning Commission at future meetings.

Excerpt – Unified Development Code – Sections 71-26 Buffering, 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards and 71-29 Fencing standards

Sec. 71-26 Buffering

Buffering is required between industrial and commercial development and adjacent uses.

- A. Transition with landscape buffers. A landscape buffer is required along shared lot lines where different zoning districts abut, as specified in [Table 71-L Buffer Requirements](#).
- B. Buffers must meet the configuration standards in [Table 71-M Buffer Types](#).
- C. Landscape buffers must:
 - 1. Be located on the newly developing property;
 - 2. Include continuous evergreen hedges with one row per five feet of buffer width;
 - 3. Include ground cover to cover all exposed soil; and
 - 4. Allow two understory trees to substitute for one canopy tree, up to 30 percent of the required tree count.
 - 5. Natural drainage ways or existing vegetation may be substituted for required buffers when:
 - a. The feature is at least 20 feet wide.

TABLE 71-L BUFFER REQUIREMENTS							
Proposed Zoning	Existing Adjacent Zoning						
	N	NE	GN	NC	D	SC	I
N							
NE				A	B	C	C
GN				A	B	B	C
NC	C	B	A				B
D	C	B	A				B
SC	C	C	C	B	B		
I	C	C	C	C	C	B	

TABLE 71-M BUFFER TYPES			
Type	Width of Buffer	Hedge	Canopy Trees
A	6' minimum	6' high at maturity, planted 30 inches on center, minimum.	1 per each 50 linear ft.
B	10' minimum		1 per each 40 linear ft.
C	25' minimum		2 per each 50 linear ft.

Sec. 71-28 Tree preservation and landscape standards

A. Purpose.

1. Preserve and increase Buchanan's urban tree canopy for public health, safety, welfare, storm-water management, heat-island mitigation, habitat, community character, and economic development.
2. Implement the Buchanan Tree Maintenance Program, including its risk-based priorities, seven-year pruning cycle, planting targets, and species-diversity goals.
3. Satisfy Tree City USA eligibility and the MEDC "Development-Ready Communities" Best Practice 2.6 for Green Infrastructure.
4. Provide plain, prescriptive standards that is simple to administer, with direction from the Tree Board (formerly Buchanan Tree Friends) as needed.

B. Applicability.

1. All new construction, site-plan, or subdivision applications in every zoning district.
2. Any removal of a Protected Tree (≥ 8 in. diameter at breast height (DBH)) or Landmark Tree (≥ 24 in. DBH or on the City's "special-status" list).
3. Public trees in rights-of-way, parks, civic spaces, and City facilities.
4. Routine single- or two-family yard activity that does not remove a Protected or Landmark Tree is exempt from subsections E - G.

C. Administration.

1. The community development director (or designee) is the approving authority.
2. Tree-Work / Tree-Removal Permits are one-page forms; compliant applications are approved administratively within 5 working days.
3. The community development director may consult a certified arborist, the Tree Board, or the City's on-call engineer; reasonable review costs may be charged to the applicant.
4. A Tree Fund is hereby created; in-lieu fees, fines, and donations are used solely for public-tree planting, maintenance, or inventory updates.
5. Tree Board designation. The volunteer organization known as Buchanan Tree Friends is hereby designated as the Buchanan Tree Board for the purposes of this Code, Tree City USA, and grant eligibility.

D. Public tree care.

1. Street- and park-tree pruning must follow a 6- to 7-year cycle; young trees (< 6 in. DBH) must receive structural training every 3 years.
2. High-risk trees identified in the Buchanan Tree Maintenance Program are treated first, then moderate-risk, then routine maintenance.
3. Any contractor working on a public tree must hold ISA Certified Arborist credentials and obtain a permit.

E. Tree preservation in development.

1. Tree survey. Site plans must show location, species, and DBH of all existing trees ≥ 6 in. DBH.
2. Preservation priority. Designs must avoid Landmark Trees. The Administrator may waive preservation if no prudent and feasible alternative exists.
3. Protection during construction. Preserved trees must be fenced at the dripline or ≥ 10 ft. radius, whichever is greater; no grading, trenching, storage, or vehicle traffic is permitted inside the fence.
4. Credits for preservation. Each healthy tree ≥ 8 in. DBH retained counts toward new-tree requirements, per [Table 71-Q](#).

TABLE 71-Q TREE PRESERVATION CREDITS	
Existing Tree Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)	Count As
8 to 17 in.	2 new trees
18 to 23 in.	3 new trees
≥ 24 in. (Landmark trees)	4 new trees

F. Tree removal and replacement.

1. Removal of any Protected or Landmark Tree requires a permit.
2. Replacement is calculated on total diameter removed:
 - a. Protected Trees – replace 50% of removed DBH (inch-for-inch).
 - b. Landmark Trees – replace 100% of removed DBH.
1. Replacement stock: deciduous 2.5-in. caliper minimum; evergreen 8 ft. tall minimum.
2. If the site cannot physically accept all required inches, pay an in-lieu fee of \$200 per 2.5-in. caliper (or equivalent) to the Tree Fund.

G. Landscape planting standards.

1. Front-yard planting by zoning district:
 - a. NE: ≥ 2 understory trees or 1 understory tree + 10 shrubs.
 - b. GN & NP-M: ≥ 1 understory tree or 10 shrubs.
 - c. Existing healthy trees may satisfy these counts.
2. Suburban Commercial (SC) & Industrial (I) Districts
 - a. Minimum landscaped area: 15% of gross lot area.
 - b. Minimum 2 shrubs per 250 sq. ft. and 2 trees per 500 sq. ft. of required landscape area; cover beds 100% with living groundcover or mulch.
 - c. At least 25% of landscaping must lie along lot lines if abutting a different zoning district.

- d. Outdoor storage and waste areas within 15 ft. of a lot line must be screened by a continuous 6-ft. opaque fence, wall, or evergreen hedge.
- 3. Street trees, parking lots, and internal landscaping.
 - a. Street frontage. 1 canopy tree per 40 linear ft. of new public or private street.
 - b. Parking lots. 1 landscape island with a canopy tree per 12 spaces; islands minimum 9 × 18 ft. and curbed with openings for infiltration.
 - c. Internal plantings may count toward the lot-wide tree totals.
- 4. Clearances between trees and objects are required per [Table 71-R](#).

TABLE 71-R TREE CLEARANCES	
Horizontal	
2 ft.	from walks and curbs (in wells or planters)
3 ft.	from swales
5 ft.	from underground utilities
6 ft.	from one-story eaves
8 ft.	from two-story eaves
Vertical	
8 ft.	above walks
13 ft.	above drives and streets

- 5. Prohibited material.
 - a. Plants with hazardous thorns within 2 ft. of front or side-street lot lines.
 - b. Artificial plants or artificial turf except on athletic fields.
 - c. Species listed as “invasive or noxious” by the State of Michigan or subsection [L](#).

H. Exemptions.

- 1. Dead or imminently hazardous trees (documented by photo or arborist letter).
- 2. Species classified as invasive by the State of Michigan.
- 3. Emergency work by public utilities.
- 4. Active commercial orchards or Christmas-tree farms.
- 5. Routine pruning that follows ANSI A300 and removes ≤ 25% of live crown in one season.

I. Species selection and diversity.

- 1. Follow the Recommended Species List in subsection [M](#), excerpted from the Tree Maintenance Program, as amended by resolution.
- 2. Diversity goal: no more than 20% of any one genus or 10% of any one species within a development phase.
- 3. To reduce over-representation, no additional maples may be planted until the citywide maple share falls below 30%.

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J. Maintenance and warranty.

1. Applicants must guarantee survival of new plant material for two growing seasons; dead plantings must be replaced at the applicant's cost.
2. For large projects requiring financial guarantees, the City shall inspect replacements before releasing any bond or letter of credit.

K. Enforcement and penalties.

1. Violation is a municipal civil infraction; fines per municipal Schedule of Fees plus required tree replacement.
2. Illegal removal of a Landmark Tree requires 200% inch-for-inch replacement or equivalent in-lieu fee.
3. The Administrator may issue stop-work orders for continued non-compliance.

L. Prohibited species list.

1. The following species shall not be planted within the City and, if present, should be removed when practical:
 - a. Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*)
 - b. Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
 - c. Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*)
 - d. Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*)
 - e. Callery/Bradford Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*)
 - f. Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)
 - g. Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)
 - h. Any species listed as "Prohibited" or "Restricted" under Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Part 413.

M. Recommended species list.

1. The recommended species list is in [Table 71-S](#). The City Commission may, by resolution, add to or revise this list to address pests, climate trends, or inventory data without amending the text of this section.

TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
American Elm	Ulmus americana	Valley Forge; Princeton	Yes	Vase	50 to 70	70 to 90
American Hornbeam	Carpinus caroliniana		Yes	Upright	20 to 30	20 to 30
American Linden	Tilia americana		Yes	Rounded	30 to 50	50 to 80
American Yellowwood	Cladrastis kentukea		No	Rounded/ Vase	20 to 50	40 to 50
Bald Cypress	Taxodium distichum		No	Pyramidal	25 to 35	60 to 80
Blackgum	Nyssa sylvatica		No	Pyramidal / Oval	25 to 35	65 to 75
Bur Oak	Quercus macrocarpa		Yes	Upright Oval / Spreading	40 to 60	60 to 70
Cockspur Thornless Hawthorn	Crataegus crusgalli var inermis		Yes	Rounded	10 to 25	10 to 15
Crabapple	Malus spp.	Sugar Tyme; Prairie Fire; Various	No	Rounded	20 to 25	20 to 25

TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
Cucumbertree magnolia	<i>Magnolia acuminata</i>	Various	No	Pyramidal	20 to 35	40 to 70
Dawn Redwood	<i>Metasequoia glyptostroboides</i>		No	Upright Pyramidal	20 to 30	60 to 80
Eastern Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>		Yes	Rounded	40 to 50	60 to 70
European Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>	Fastigiata; Various	No	Oval	20 to 30	10 to 30
Ginkgo	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>	male trees only	No	Round / Pyramidal	30 to 60	50 to 75
Golden Raintree	<i>Koelreuteria paniculata</i>		No	Rounded	30 to 40	30 to 40
Green hawthorn	<i>Crataegus viridis</i>	Winter King	No	Upright Vase to Spreading	15 to 20	10 to 15
Hybrid Elm	<i>Ulmus X</i>	Patriot; Triumph; Accolade	No	Vase	30 to 45	40 to 60
Japanese Tree Lilac	<i>Syringia reticulata</i>	Ivory Silk	No	Oval to Rounded	15 to 20	20 to 30
Katsura tree	<i>Cercidiphyllum japonicum</i>		No	Upright to Pyramidal	30 to 40	30 to 40
Kentucky Coffeetree	<i>Gymnocladus dioica</i>		No	Upright to Rounded	40 to 70	50 to 70
Kousa dogwood	<i>Cornus kousa</i>		No	Rounded / Vase	15 to 30	15 to 30
Little-leaf Linden	<i>Tilia cordata</i>	Greenspire	No	Pyramidal to Rounded	30 to 40	40 to 60
London Planetree	<i>Platanus x acerifolia</i>	Bloodgood; Various	No	Pyramidal / Rounded	50 to 70	75 to 90
Northern Red Oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>		Yes	Rounded	60 to 80	50 to 60
Pin Oak	<i>Quercus palustris</i>		Yes	Upright Pyramidal / Oval	40 to 50	60 to 80

TABLE 71-S RECOMMENDED SPECIES LIST

COMMON NAME	BOTANICAL NAME	CULTIVAR	NATIVE	SHAPE	MATURE SPREAD (FT.)	MATURE HEIGHT (FT.)
Red Horsechestnut	Aesculus x carnea	Briotti; Ft. McNair	Hybrid	Upright / Oval	30 to 40	60 to 80
Redbud	Cercis canadensis	Various	Yes	Rounded	15 to 25	15 to 30
River Birch	Betula nigra		Yes	Upright / Oval	30 to 40	40 to 60
Serviceberry or Juneberry	Amelanchier x grandiflora	Autumn Brilliance; Princess Diana	Hybrid	Rounded	10 to 15	10 to 25
Silver Linden	Tilia tomentosa		No	Broad Columnar	30 to 50	50 to 70
Swamp White Oak	Quercus bicolor		Yes	Upright Oval / Rounded	50 to 60	50 to 70
Sweetgum	Liquidambar styraciflua		Yes	Pyramidal / Oval	35 to 50	60 to 75
Sycamore	Platanus occidentalis		Yes	Pyramidal / Rounded	50 to 70	75 to 90
Thornless Honeylocust	Gleditsia triacanthos var inermis	Various	Yes	Rounded	30 to 70	30 to 70
Tuliptree	Liriodendron tulipifera		Yes	Pyramidal / Oval	35 to 50	70 to 90
Zelkova	Zelkova serrata	Green Vase; Village Green	No	Vase	40 to 50	60 to 80

Sec. 71-29 Fencing standards

- A. Construction of a fence requires a zoning compliance permit issued by the zoning administrator prior to construction.
- B. When erected on a lot line, all of the fence and any of its supporting structures must be contained within the lot.
- C. Chain link, barbed wire, razor wire, and electrically charged fences are not permitted.
- D. Fences may not exceed four feet in height in the front yard and may not exceed six feet in height in all other yards.