

BUFFERING/SCREENING/ LANDSCAPING

Buffering, screening, and landscaping are techniques for separating land uses using either natural or human-made features that address visual, light, and sound impacts. Buffers and screens serve to reduce conflicts between incompatible land uses, minimize soil erosion, reduce storm water runoff, and enhance community appearance. In addition, buffers can provide pedestrians with a sense of security from automobile traffic. Screens are generally used to reduce visual impact using fences, walls, trees, or shrubs. Buffers are used to reduce light and sound impacts, using water, hills, berms, groupings of trees, or other landscaped features.

Planning and Regulatory Considerations

Buffering, screening, and landscaping requirements should be included in the zoning ordinance and applied where different land uses abut, to all large-scale and nonresidential developments, and to residential and nonresidential developments along transportation corridors. Requirements should be administered during the site plan review process.

KEEPING IT CONNECTED

Buffers can also protect the area adjacent to a shoreline, wetland, or stream, and help to treat storm water. Creating riparian buffers is integral to protecting the water quality of streams in urban areas.

Tools for Buffering/Screening/ Landscaping

- Include policies or guidelines in the community's master plan regarding the use and extent of landscaping in residential and nonresidential areas in the community.
- Classify land uses by impact according to size, scale, and environmental impact.
- Provide flexibility in landscape design requirements, e.g., specify the use of landscaping for screening based on degree of conflict between adjacent land uses.
- Require landscaping area between roadways and residential and nonresidential developments to reduce the visual impact from the road and enhance community character.

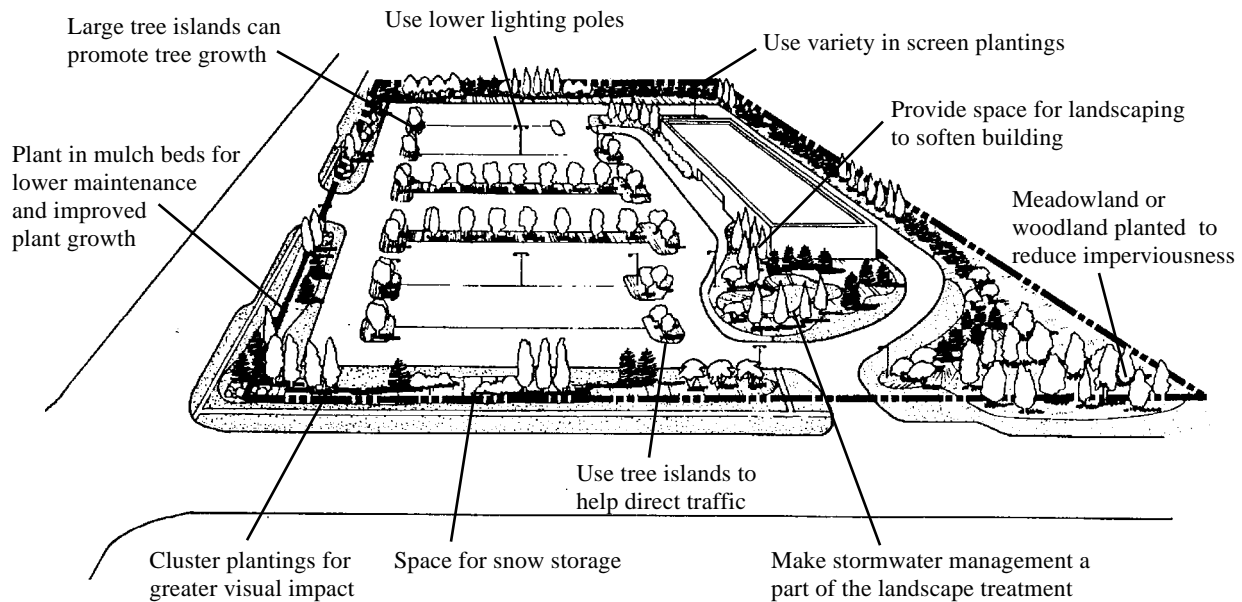


The Wal Mart (above) in Chesterfield Township utilized vinyl fencing between its commercial area and a nearby residential subdivision (below).



- Concentrate landscaping to increase its impact; dense planting can effectively reduce headlight glare and muffle road noise.
- Control traffic flow and speed through careful placement of landscaping, buffering, and screening.
- Require landscaped islands in parking areas for safety and visual appearance. Base buffering, screening, and landscaping standards on public safety and security measures.
- Require landscaping along nonresidential buildings to soften visual impact.
- Establish percentage of new development acreage to be set aside for landscaping.
- Provide standards for quantity, quality, types, and placement of plant materials.
- Establish minimum sizes and spacing according to the category of plant material.
- Require continued maintenance of all plant materials by the property owner through a site-maintenance agreement.

Figure 13
Buffering/Landscaping Preferred Approach



Source: SEMCOG.

- Maintain existing natural vegetation as much as possible, especially the more mature vegetation to provide immediate buffering and screening, and cross-reference with provisions in the woodland or tree preservation ordinance.
- Require deciduous and ornamental trees to provide shade.
- Encourage the use of regionally native plant species in landscaping.
- Review site-specific security issues for placing fences, walls, berms, and landscaping.
- Maintain or create greenbelts along roadways through setback and landscaping requirements.
- Require provisions for snow disposition, especially when landscape islands are required.

CASE EXAMPLE

Buffer Regulation

Community: Washington Township

Contact: Gary Kirsh, (586) 786-0010

This 15-foot-high evergreen berm is located between adjacent commercial and residential land uses. The berm serves as a screen to reduce the visual and sound impacts of this retail store such as the bright parking lot lighting and automobile lights and noise. The Octagon House is a historically significant home that has been converted into a township attraction. The berm also serves as a means of maintaining the character of the property immediately surrounding this landmark.



This berm separates historic property from commercial property in Washington Township.

Additional Resources

Center for Watershed Protection. *Better Site Design: A Handbook for Changing Development Rules in Your Community*. Ellicott City, MD. 1998.

Glick, Roger H., Thurow, Thomas L., Wolfe, Mary L. *Effectiveness of Native Species Buffer Zones for Nonstructural Treatment of Urban Runoff*. Diane Publishing. 2000.

Smith, Thomas P. *The Aesthetics of Parking*. Chicago, IL: American Planning Association, 1988.

Planning and Zoning Center, Inc. "Screening/Buffering/Landscaping." *Community Planning Handbook: Tools and Techniques for Guiding Community Change*. Michigan Society of Planning Officials. 1991.