

'Bufferyards'

Reducing land use conflicts

Many communities around the country have established strong standards for landscape “buffers” and screens. That’s because landscaped areas, mature vegetation, fences and walls work to separate or lessen the impact of conflicting and adjacent land uses.

In an effort to further reduce land use conflicts, East Baton Rouge Parish revised its buffer standards in 1995. What is known as the “Bufferyard Ordinance” (Ordinance 10516) was adopted November 15, 1995, by the Metropolitan Council. It became effective January 1, 1996, and amended the City-Parish Landscape Ordinance. Both ordinances are now included in the Unified Development Code (UDC).

The bufferyard standards were developed by a committee representing the Baton Rouge Growth Coalition, local realtors, concerned citizens and the East Baton Rouge Parish Office of Landscape and Forestry. The Planning Commission Staff provided technical assistance for the committee’s tasks. The Bufferyard Committee was an extension of the Site Plan Review Committee, which revised Site Plan Review procedures in 1995.

The bufferyard provisions are applied as a part of the UDC's landscape regulations. The regulations apply to all new commercial, industrial, multi-family, religious, public, educational and institutional land uses, or any of these land uses that require a building permit because of an addition that amounts to more than 50 percent of the existing street facade. Facilities existing prior to the ordinance do not need to comply.

A landscape plan including bufferyards must be included with the building permit for all developments falling under the regulations of the UDC. The plan must be drawn in accordance with Louisiana horticulture law and should include all pertinent information for review by the Director of Landscape and Forestry, or a City-Parish Building Official.

What is a bufferyard?

The UDC defines a “bufferyard”: “A unit of land, together with a specified type and amount of planting thereon, and any structures which may be required between land uses to

eliminate or minimize conflicts between them. Shall not include any servitudes or rights-of-way unless approved by the person(s) in whose favor the servitude or right-of-way is granted and the Building Official.”

This definition supports a bufferyard process that allows the developer to achieve the maximum efficiency of the proposed site, while providing the highest level of compensation to the community.

Bufferyard requirements

Bufferyard requirements are outlined in a table, known as the “Table of Bufferyard Requirements,” which was developed by the Bufferyard Committee. The table refers developers and landowners to one or more of four different classifications of bufferyards, which are labeled Bufferyard A, Bufferyard B, Bufferyard C and Bufferyard D. The A, B, C and D classifications are based on the proposed land use and on the existing land use of abutting parcels, with A being the minimum buffer standards and D the maximum. (See Figure 1)

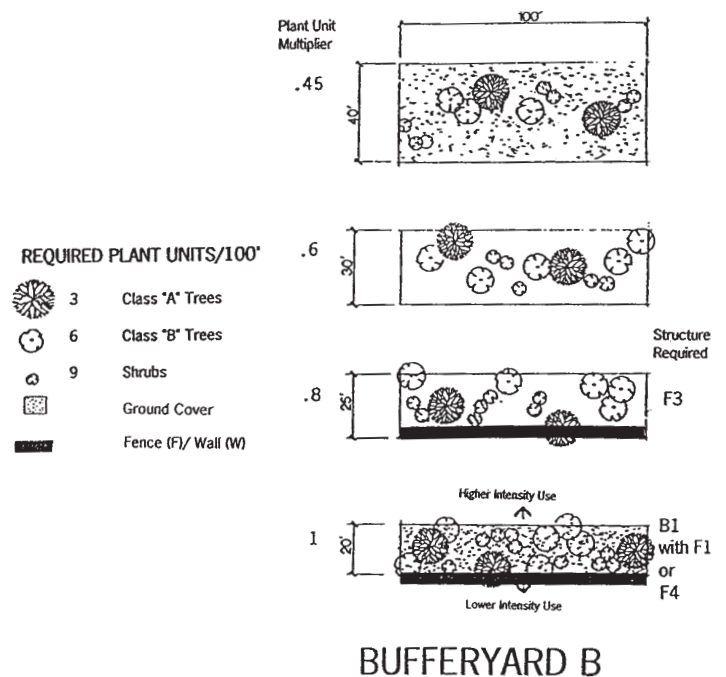


Figure 1: Bufferyard B (one of four bufferyard classifications).

For example, a proposed “Heavy Industrial” land use abutting an existing “Low Density Residential” land use must meet the requirements of Bufferyard D, according to the chart. (See Figure 2.) Bufferyard D requires additional size, planting and screening to minimize land use conflicts between the very different land uses. A proposed “Light Commercial” land use abutting a Low Density Residential, on the other hand, is referred to the Bufferyard B classification, which features smaller or less dense buffers.

Within each of the four bufferyard classifications, developers may choose one of four different options. The options are created for design flexibility and maximum utilization of a parcel. They are designed to be equivalent in terms of their effectiveness in eliminating the impact of adjoining uses.

The options vary in width and in the number of plants required per 100 linear feet. Each bufferyard option can fluctuate in width and in plant materials based on a factor called the “plant unit multiplier,” which multiplies the number of required plantings by an amount between .45 and 1.5. The required plantings are listed in the legends for the Bufferyard A, B, C and D classifications. Bufferyard A, for example, requires no “Class A” trees, five “Class B” trees and 8 shrubs per 100 linear feet. (Tree classifications and shrubs are defined in the Unified Development Code, Chapter 2, “Definitions.”)

The plant unit multiplier assures that smaller bufferyards contain more vegetation and screening than do larger or wider buffer areas. For example, a bufferyard option with a plant unit multiplier of .6 contains about half the number of plants as does a buffer with a 1.1 plant unit multiplier. The buffer with the 1.1 multiplier, however, will be smaller in width. When a computation using the plant unit multiplier results in a fraction of .5 or greater, the planting requirement should be rounded up to the next whole number.

The required Class A and B trees and shrubs, when assembled as required by the various bufferyard options, can visually create a screen of intended opacity.

Fencing and wall requirements

The bufferyard provisions require that fences are constructed in a “durable fashion with weather resistant wood and be of a consistent pattern.” Walls must be constructed in a “durable

fashion with a finished surface of brick, stone or other decorative masonry material approved by the Building Official.”

All materials used in construction should be designed and intended for such use. The City-Parish Director of Landscape and Forestry, however, may approve a fence or wall constructed of other materials, provided the other materials and finish generally create the same degree of opacity, durability and aesthetic compatibility with adjoining residential areas as does weather resistant wood.

The finished side of all walls and fences must face the common property line boundary. Walls or fences used for screening purposes cannot be less than three feet, or greater than eight feet in height. Fencing and wall restrictions can be waived if a building, fence or wall exists immediately abutting and on the opposite side of the property line.

Berm requirements

Berms must be planted with both shrubs and groundcovers, leaving no bare ground. Shrubs should be of a species that can be expected to materially screen the development site within two years of planting. The berm’s slope must be suitable for maintenance, soil stability and the type of plantings and groundcover, and the height must not be less than three feet. Nuisance vining plants that have a tendency to spread to other properties are not permitted as berm groundcovers. Combined fencing and berm height at any point must meet the minimum height requirements

Several of the options included in the Bufferyard A, B, C and D classifications include berm and fencing (or wall) schemes. Fencing alternatives are identified by the letter “F”; berms by the letter “B.” The designated berms B1 and B2 may be curvilinear in design.

Additional information

More information and details on the bufferyard regulations are available by telephoning the City-Parish Planning Commission at (225) 389-3144, or by visiting the Planning Commission offices, located at 1755 Florida Street, Baton Rouge, on the Third Floor. Information also may be obtained from the Office of Landscape and Forestry, telephone (225) 389-8835.

PROPOSED LAND USE	EXISTING LAND USE															
	LDR	MHDR		RECREATION		PARKING		CO			TCU			PSP	PUD	Light Industrial
		Medium Density	High Density	Public	Private		Office	Light Commercial	Heavy Commercial	Transmission TV/Radio	Utility Right-of-Way	Railways, Stations	Utility Production Sites		Planned Unit Development	
LDR	B	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
MHDR																
Medium Density	B	*	A	B	B	A	B	B	A	A	*	A	A	A	A	
High Density	C	A	*	B	A	A	A	A	A	A	*	A	A	A	A	
INDUSTRIAL																
Light Industrial	C	C	B	C	B	A	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
Heavy Industrial	D	D	D	D	C	B	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D

Note: The lightly shaded columns show the required bufferyard classification (Bufferyard D) for a proposed Heavy Industrial site adjacent to existing Low Density Residential.

Figure 2: Bufferyard Requirements.