

Oconee County Landscape and Buffer Standards Working Draft

CHAPTER 32 UNIFIED PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

ARTICLE []. LANDSCAPE AND BUFFER STANDARDS

Sec. 32-[]. Purpose.

This article establishes minimum landscaping, screening, and buffer standards for development in the unincorporated areas of Oconee County. These standards are intended to reduce conflicts between adjoining uses, preserve existing vegetation when it can meet the required standard, and provide clear requirements for installation and maintenance.

Sec. 32-[]. Applicability.

- (a) Except as provided in this section, this article applies to:
 - (1) New commercial, office, institutional, civic, and industrial development;
 - (2) New multifamily and student housing development;
 - (3) Major residential subdivisions where a buffer is required by this article;
 - (4) Planned developments, mixed-use developments, and group developments;
 - (5) Uses or development expressly made subject to this article by Chapter 38; and
 - (6) Expansion, redevelopment, or change in use as provided below.
- (b) Routine maintenance or repair that does not increase floor area, parking area, developed area, or intensity of use does not require an existing site to be brought into compliance with this article.
- (c) When an existing development or developed area is expanded by less than [50 percent cumulatively within three years], this article applies to the area of expansion and the improvements that serve that area.
- (d) When an existing development or developed area is expanded by [50 percent or more cumulatively within three years], the site shall comply with this article to the extent related to the proposed work and allowed by applicable vested-right and nonconforming-use provisions.
- (e) A change in use must comply with any landscaping, screening, or buffer requirement that applies to the new use.
- (f) An individual detached single-family dwelling is exempt unless another provision of this Code expressly requires a buffer or landscape area.
- (g) This article does not regulate an agricultural operation or forestry activity where local regulation is prohibited by South Carolina law. Solar energy systems shall comply with applicable state law and any County standard lawfully applicable to the system.

Sec. 32-[]. Landscape plan.

- (a) An applicant shall submit a landscape plan with the application for any development that requires landscaping, screening, or a buffer under this article.
- (b) The plan shall show, as applicable:
 - (1) Property lines, easements, and rights-of-way;
 - (2) Buildings, parking areas, driveways, and other developed areas;
 - (3) Existing vegetation to remain and any vegetation proposed for credit;
 - (4) Required landscape and buffer areas;
 - (5) The type, number, and installation size of proposed plants;
 - (6) Fences, walls, berms, and other screening;
 - (7) Utilities, drainage facilities, and utility easements;
 - (8) Tree and vegetation protection areas; and

- (9) Any other information needed to show compliance with this article.
- (c) A licensed design professional shall prepare any portion of a landscape plan that South Carolina law requires that professional to prepare.
- (d) Required landscape and buffer areas shall be shown on the approved site or development plan. Work shall follow the approved plan unless the Planning Director approves a revision under this article.

Sec. 32-[]. General landscape requirements.

- (a) Required landscaping shall be located on private property and outside a public right-of-way unless the agency responsible for the right-of-way gives written approval.
- (b) Required landscaping shall not block sight distance or interfere with utilities, drainage, pedestrian or vehicle access, or fire and emergency access.
- (c) Plants shall have enough space for normal growth and maintenance.
- (d) A required landscape area may contain trees, shrubs, groundcover, native grasses, turf, preserved natural vegetation, or other living plant material suited to the purpose of the area.
- (e) Existing healthy vegetation may satisfy all or part of a landscape or buffer requirement when it provides the required width, planting quantity, and screening.

Sec. 32-[]. Plant material.

- (a) Plant material shall be suitable for the climate and growing conditions of Oconee County and for the place where it will be planted.
- (b) Unless an irrigation system is provided, required plants shall be able to survive on natural rainfall after establishment. The owner shall provide enough water during establishment to keep the plants healthy.
- (c) Required trees shall be at least 2.5 inches in caliper when planted unless this article requires a different size.
- (d) Required shrubs shall be at least three-gallon size when planted unless this article requires a different size.
- (e) When four or more trees are required within one landscape area, no more than 50 percent may be the same species. A fraction shall be rounded up to the next whole tree.
- (f) Artificial plants may not be used to meet a landscaping or screening requirement.
- (g) A plant listed as an invasive plant or plant pest under applicable South Carolina law may not be used to meet a requirement of this article.
- (h) Native plants and other noninvasive plants adapted to the South Carolina Upstate are encouraged.
- (i) A plant installed beneath an overhead utility line shall have a mature height suitable for that location.

Sec. 32-[]. Existing vegetation and landscape credit.

- (a) Healthy, noninvasive vegetation within a required landscape or buffer area shall be preserved when it meets the purpose and requirements of that area.
- (b) Existing vegetation that provides the required width and screening may satisfy all or part of the requirement. Supplemental planting is required only where the existing vegetation does not meet the standard.
- (c) An existing large-maturing tree at least six inches DBH or an existing understory tree at least two inches DBH may count as one required tree when it is located within the required landscape area and protected during construction.
- (d) Existing vegetation may not be removed solely to install new landscaping when the existing vegetation meets or exceeds the applicable standard.
- (e) If vegetation used for credit dies or is removed, the owner shall replace it with the number and type of plants for which credit was given.

Sec. 32-[]. Foundation and street-front landscaping.

- (a) Foundation landscaping. A building foundation that is visible from a parking area shall have a planting area next to the building. The required number of plants shall be calculated as follows:

$$PR = L \div 3$$

PR means the number of required plants. L means the length, in feet, of the building foundation visible from the parking area.

- (1) The result shall be rounded to the nearest whole number. A fraction of 0.5 or more shall be rounded up.
 - (2) Each tree provided within the foundation planting area counts as two required plants.
 - (3) Plants may be grouped or distributed within the planting area to accommodate entrances, utilities, drainage, and building features.
- (b) Street-front landscaping. A street-front landscape area shall be provided along each street right-of-way adjoining the development.
- (1) The landscape area shall be located on private property, outside the right-of-way, and shall be at least ten feet wide.
 - (2) Driveways and approved access crossings are excluded from the landscape area.
 - (3) At least one large-maturing shade tree shall be provided for each 40 linear feet, or fraction thereof, of street frontage. At least one tree is required for each street-front landscape area.
 - (4) Shrubs, groundcover, understory plants, native grasses, turf, or preserved natural vegetation shall cover the remaining area.

The following figures reproduce the applicable Appendix A examples. They illustrate the standards but do not replace the ordinance text. If a figure conflicts with the text, the text controls.

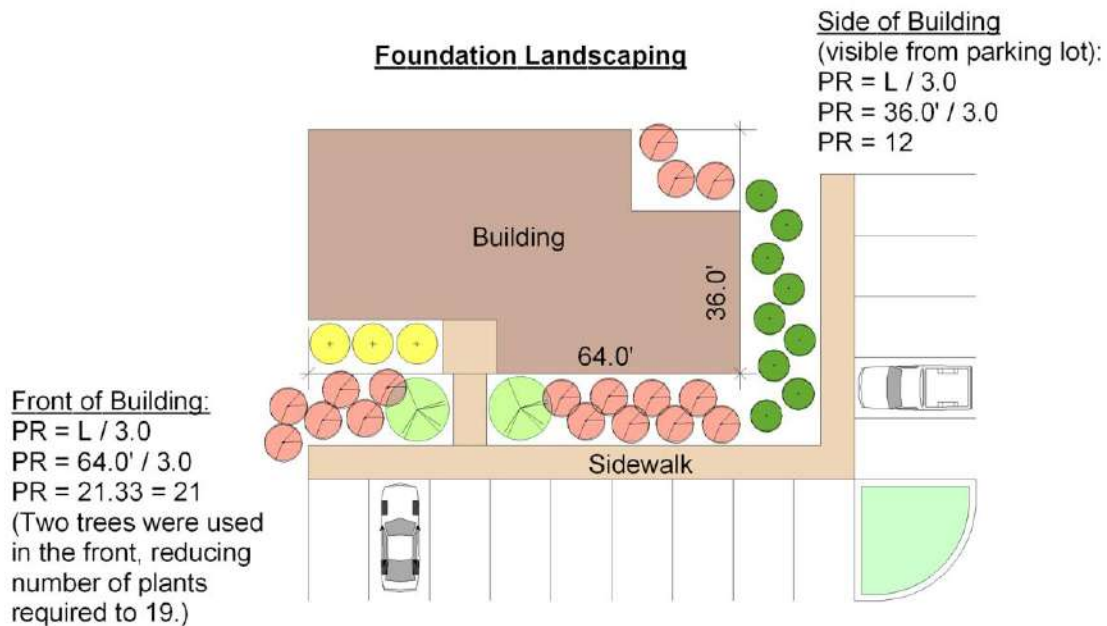


Figure 1 Foundation landscaping example from Appendix A

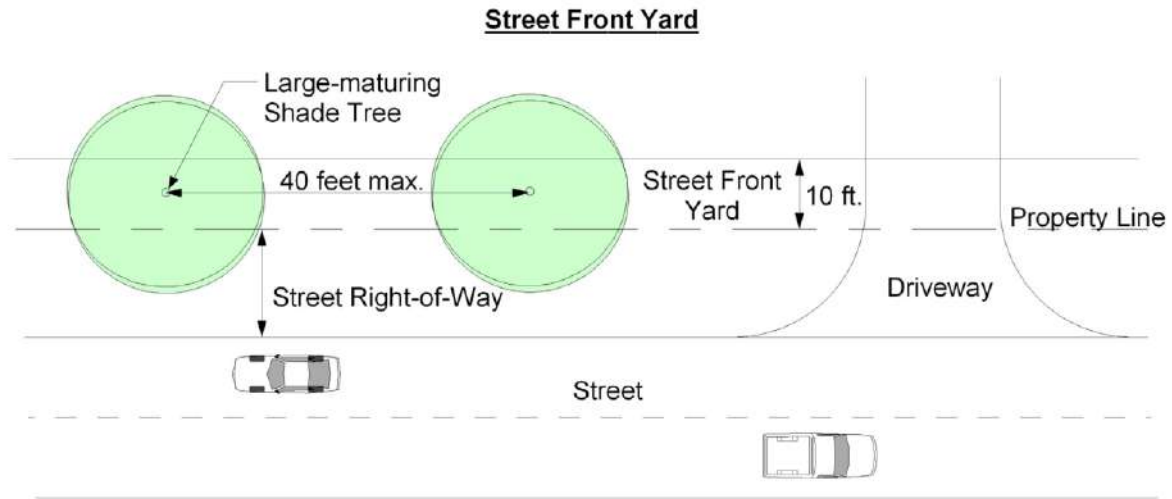


Figure 2 Street-front-yard landscaping example from Appendix A

Sec. 32-[]. Parking-area landscaping.

- (a) This section governs landscaping within and around a parking lot or other vehicular-use area. Parking ratios, paving, circulation, and other parking design standards are governed elsewhere in this Code.
- (b) A parking lot or vehicular-use area shall have a landscaped perimeter at least 15 feet wide along each side that adjoins a property line or street right-of-way.
- (c) The perimeter shall contain at least one large-maturing tree for each 50 linear feet and enough evergreen shrubs or other evergreen plants to form a screen at least four feet high at maturity.
- (d) When parking is located between the principal building and the primary road, the required perimeter shall be 25 feet wide.
- (e) A landscaped island shall be provided after each ten parking spaces in a continuous row and at each end of a parking bay.
- (f) Each island shall have an interior planting area at least nine feet wide and 15 feet long and shall contain at least one large-maturing shade tree. The remaining area shall contain shrubs, groundcover, native grasses, or turf.
- (g) When the impervious parking area is 10,000 square feet or more, interior landscape areas shall equal at least ten percent of the impervious parking area.
- (h) For each 500 square feet of required interior landscape area, the applicant shall provide at least one large-maturing shade tree and 15 shrubs.
- (i) Existing trees may receive credit under the existing vegetation section when they are located within a protected landscape area.
- (j) Landscape areas may be used for stormwater infiltration when the design complies with applicable stormwater requirements and does not harm required plants.

Interior Parking

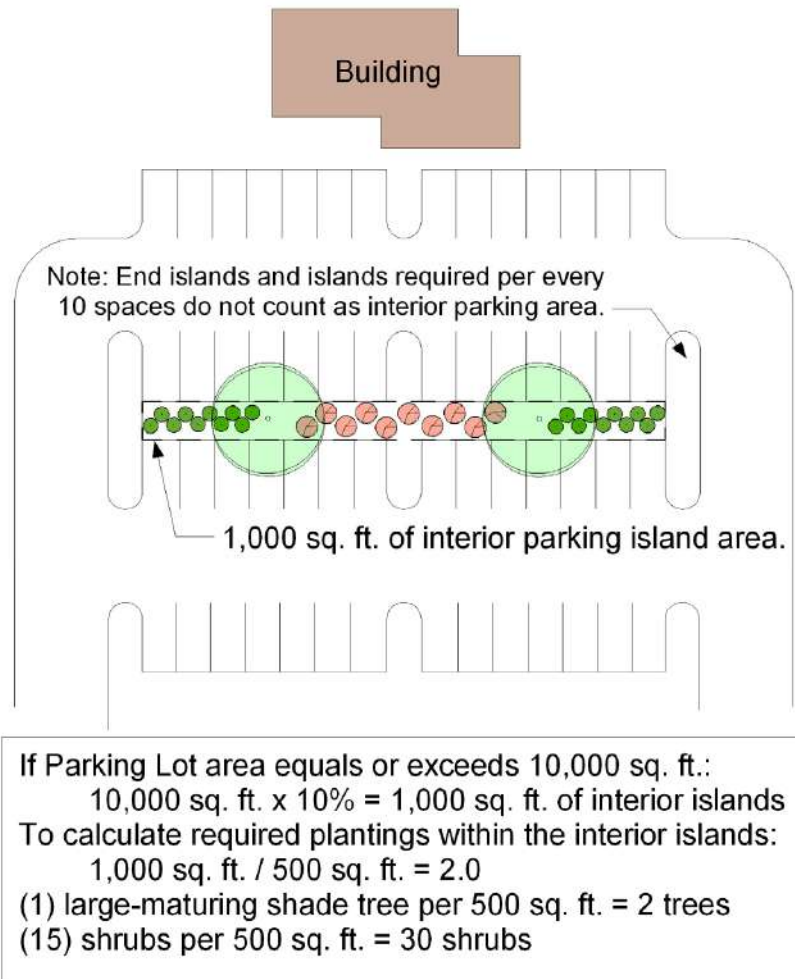


Figure 3 Interior parking landscaping example from Appendix A

Parking Islands

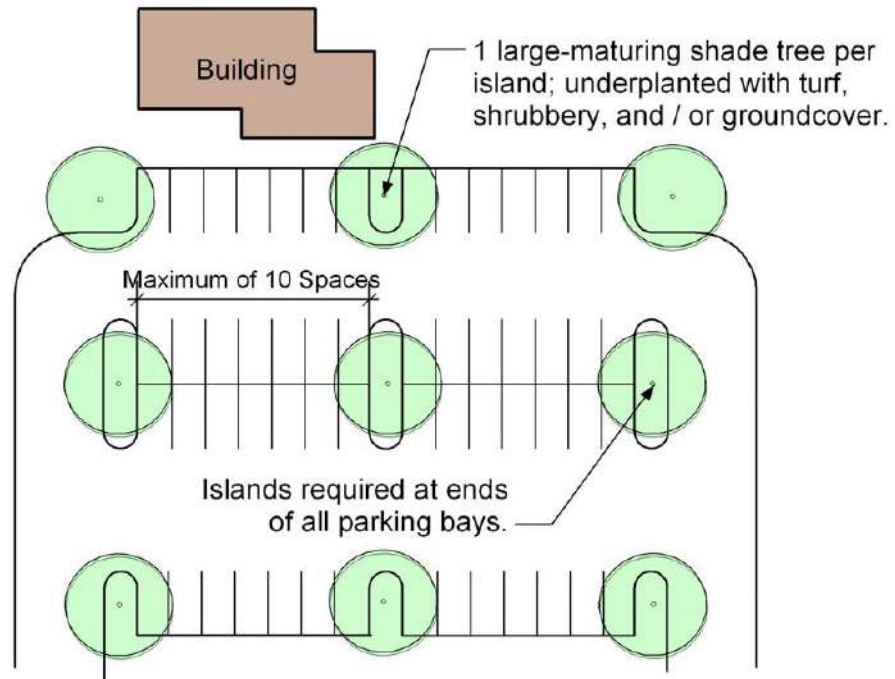


Figure 4 Parking-island example from Appendix A

Sec. 32-[]. Buffer types.

Table 1 establishes two ways to meet each buffer type. The developer may use either option. Option 1 provides a wider, planting-based buffer. Option 2 permits a narrower buffer only when the additional planting or structural screening shown in the table is provided. Existing vegetation may receive credit under this article.

Buffer type and option	Minimum width	Large-maturing trees per 100 feet	Understory trees per 100 feet	Small evergreen trees per 100 feet	Evergreen shrubs per 100 feet	Required structural screening
TYPE A LIMITED SEPARATION Low-density landscaping that defines an edge and provides partial visual separation.						
Option 1	15 feet	3	3	—	8	None
Option 2	10 feet	3	4	—	10	None
TYPE B MODERATE SCREENING Landscaping that provides spatial separation and reduces, but does not fully block, visual contact.						
Option 1	20 feet	3	4	—	10	None
Option 2	15 feet	3	4	—	10	Four-foot solid wall or fence, or evergreen hedge four feet high and three feet wide at maturity
TYPE C SUBSTANTIAL SCREENING Landscaping and screening that block visual contact at lower levels and separate materially different uses.						
Option 1	35 feet	5	6	6	25	None
Option 2	25 feet	3	3	6	20	Four-foot solid wall or fence, or evergreen hedge four feet high and three feet wide at maturity
TYPE D HIGH-IMPACT SEPARATION A wide buffer that blocks visual contact up to six feet and provides strong separation from industrial or other high-impact development.						
Option 1	50 feet	5	6	10	25	None if existing or installed vegetation provides the required screen
Option 2*	35 feet*	5	6	10	25	Six-foot solid wall or fence, or evergreen hedge six feet high and three feet wide at maturity

Table notes

1. Plant quantities apply to each 100 linear feet of buffer. For a shorter or longer buffer, quantities shall be calculated proportionally. A fraction of 0.5 or more shall be rounded up; a fraction below 0.5 shall be rounded down.
2. Large-maturing trees may substitute for required understory trees on a one-for-one basis.
3. Plants need not be equally spaced. They shall be arranged to provide effective screening and healthy growth.
4. A wall or fence shall comply with the buffer design and screening section. An evergreen hedge shall form the required screen within five years after planting.
5. Where an existing wall, fence, hedge, or natural screen on the adjoining property meets the required height and screening standard, the Planning Director may credit it toward the structural screening requirement after confirming that it is permanent and maintainable.

6. Existing woodland within a Type D buffer shall be retained where it provides effective screening. The listed planting quantities apply where existing vegetation is insufficient.
7. * Where Chapter 38 or another provision requires a 50-foot industrial buffer, the width may not be reduced. Type D Option 2 may be used as the planting and screening arrangement, but the full 50-foot width remains required.

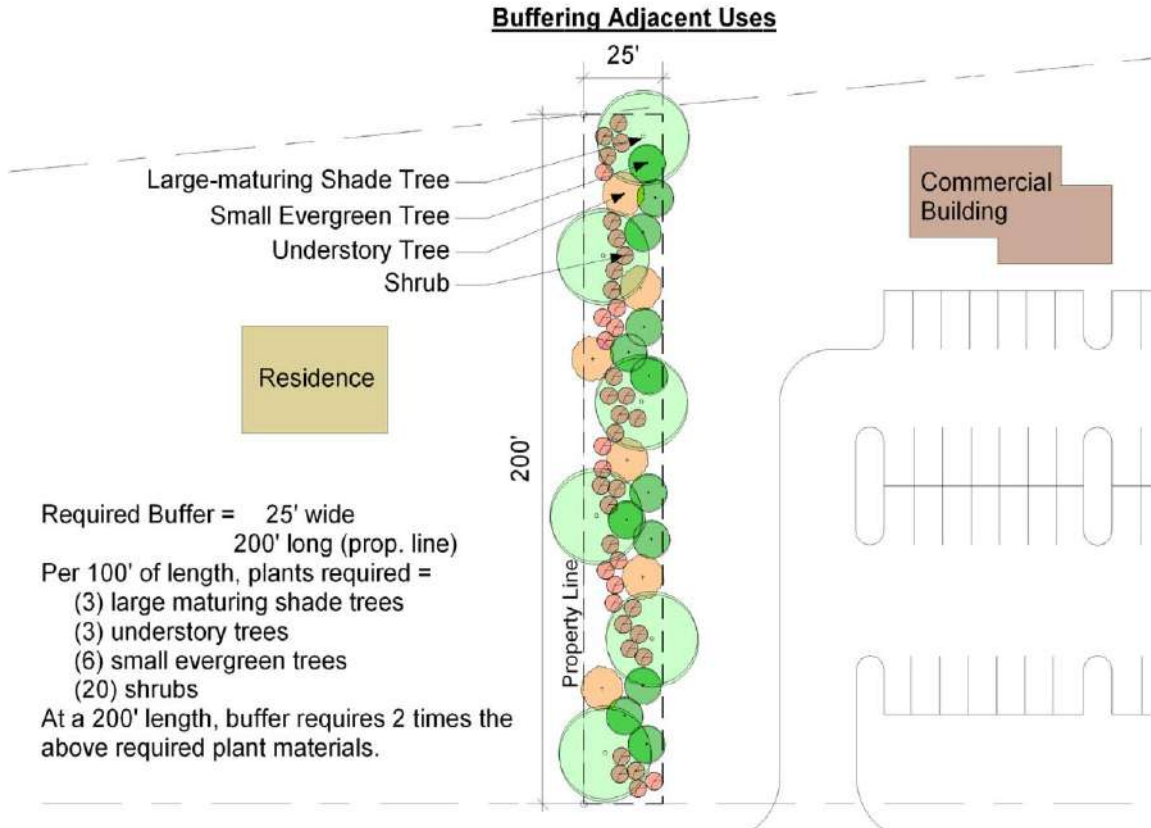


Figure 6 Appendix A adjoining-use buffer example corresponding to the proposed Type C Option 2 standard

Sec. 32-[]. Buffer applicability matrix.

The following buffer applies along a common property line. A dash means that this article does not require a transitional buffer between the listed uses. Another provision of the Code may still require one.

Proposed development	Adjacent detached single-family	Adjacent multifamily or other residential	Adjacent commercial office or institutional	Adjacent industrial
Major residential subdivision	A	A	—	C
Multifamily housing	C	B	—	C
Student housing	C	B	—	C
Manufactured-home park	C	B	—	C
Office institutional or civic	C	B	—	—
Commercial or service	C	B	—	—
Industrial use	D*	D*	C*	—

* A 50-foot Type D buffer applies where Chapter 38 or another provision requires a 50-foot industrial buffer. Planning Commission direction is needed on whether industrial development outside the Industrial District should use Type C or Type D.

Sec. 32-[]. Buffer design and screening.

- (a) Existing vegetation may satisfy a buffer requirement when it provides the required width and screening. New plants shall be added only where the existing vegetation leaves a gap or does not meet the required planting quantity.
- (b) Evergreen plants shall be used where year-round screening is required. Plants shall be spaced according to their mature size and arranged to limit gaps.
- (c) A wall, fence, berm, or combination may supplement required vegetation. It may not reduce the required buffer width unless approved under the alternative compliance section.
- (d) A wall or fence used for required screening shall be durable and maintained in good condition. Landscaping shall be placed on the side facing the adjoining property or road when needed to reduce the visual impact of the wall or fence.
- (e) A berm used for screening shall:
 - (1) Have side slopes no steeper than three horizontal feet to one vertical foot unless a licensed professional designs and certifies a steeper slope;
 - (2) Be stabilized against erosion;
 - (3) Be landscaped or permanently vegetated; and
 - (4) Not direct drainage onto adjoining property.

Sec. 32-[]. Activities within a buffer.

The following are allowed within a required buffer when they do not materially reduce the required screening:

- (1) Utility lines and minor utility facilities;
- (2) Stormwater conveyance facilities designed to preserve the screening function;
- (3) Driveways and access connections allowed by this article;
- (4) Walkways, trails, and passive recreation improvements;
- (5) Fences and walls;
- (6) Clearing needed for required sight distance;
- (7) Maintenance and replacement of required vegetation;
- (8) Removal of dead, diseased, hazardous, or invasive vegetation; and
- (9) Emergency work needed to protect life or property.

Vegetation removed for an allowed activity shall be replaced where needed to restore the required screening.

Sec. 32-[]. Screening of service areas.

- (a) An outdoor loading area, refuse collection area, dumpster, or ground-mounted mechanical unit that is visible from adjoining residential property or a public right-of-way shall be screened.
- (b) The screen may be an opaque masonry wall, durable opaque fence, evergreen planting, or a combination of these materials.
- (c) The screen shall be at least one foot taller than the object being screened. Evergreen plants used as the required screen shall provide the required screening when planted.
- (d) A gate or service opening shall be located and designed to preserve screening while allowing necessary access.

Sec. 32-[]. Protection during construction.

- (a) The approved plan shall identify each natural buffer and each area of existing vegetation used for landscape credit.
- (b) Before land-disturbing activity begins, the applicant shall mark each protected area with visible construction fencing or another method approved on the plan.
- (c) Construction equipment, materials, fill, excavation, and grading are prohibited within a protected area unless the approved plan allows the activity.
- (d) Vegetation damaged or removed contrary to the approved plan shall be replaced in an amount sufficient to restore the required landscaping or screening.

Sec. 32-[]. Installation and surety.

- (a) Required landscaping and screening shall be installed before final approval or issuance of a certificate of occupancy, as applicable.
- (b) No certificate of occupancy shall be issued until the landscaping is completed as certified by an on-site inspection. If weather or planting conditions prevent installation, the applicant may provide a bond, irrevocable letter of credit, or other surety acceptable to the County in an amount equal to 125 percent of the approved installation cost.
- (c) Planting secured by surety shall be completed within 270 days. The Planning Director may extend the deadline when planting during that period would be inconsistent with accepted horticultural practice.
- (d) The County shall release the surety after the required landscaping is installed and approved.

Sec. 32-[]. Maintenance.

- (a) The property owner is responsible for maintaining required landscaping, screening, walls, fences, and berms.
- (b) Required landscaping shall remain healthy and shall continue to provide the required screening.
- (c) Dead, diseased, severely damaged, or missing required plants shall be replaced during the next suitable planting season with plants that meet the original requirement.
- (d) Landscape areas shall be kept free of trash and debris.
- (e) Pruning may not permanently damage required plants or reduce the required screening.
- (f) Plant growth shall be controlled so that it does not block sight distance or interfere with utilities, drainage, or pedestrian and vehicle travel.

Sec. 32-[]. Alternative compliance.

- (a) The Planning Director may approve an alternative landscape, buffer, or screening plan only after making written findings that the alternative:
 - (1) Provides landscaping, screening, and separation equal to or greater than the required standard;
 - (2) Preserves more mature vegetation or responds to existing topography;
 - (3) Addresses a utility easement, unusual lot shape, drainage facility, existing development pattern, or similar site condition;
 - (4) Does not reduce sight distance, emergency access, or public safety;
 - (5) Does not increase impacts on adjoining property; and
 - (6) Can be permanently maintained.
- (b) An alternative plan may not authorize a prohibited use, waive a requirement of state or federal law, or reduce a natural vegetative buffer required by Chapter 38.

Coordination With Chapter 38

The Lake Keowee and Jocassee natural vegetative buffer shall remain in Chapter 38 Article 11. The following coordination language is proposed for that article:

Compliance with Chapter 32 landscape or transitional buffer standards does not replace or reduce a natural vegetative buffer required by this section. Preserved natural vegetation may receive credit toward a Chapter 32 requirement only when it provides the required screening and the credit does not authorize disturbance prohibited by this section.