



Memorandum

To: Planning Commission
From: Thomas Dansie, Director of Community Development
Date: August 29, 2025
Re: Buffer Zone Requirements Between Residential and Commercial Uses

Executive Summary

Land Use and Town Appearance Sub-Goal F1 of the General Plan directs the Planning Commission to develop enhanced screening and buffering standards for new commercial development adjacent to residential uses. This memo outlines the general purposes of landscape buffers, provides best practices from other communities, and suggests options for the Planning Commission to consider.

Purpose of Landscape Buffers

Landscape buffer zones, as part of land use regulations, are areas designated to separate different land uses, often with the goal of reducing noise, visual impacts, and other nuisances between adjacent properties. They are typically landscaped with vegetation and may also include fences or other barriers. The specific regulations for buffer zones vary by jurisdiction. They are typically required when a non-residential use (e.g. commercial or industrial) is adjacent to a residential use.

Landscape buffers seek to accomplish the following general objectives.

- *Minimize conflicts between land uses.* Buffer zones help to mitigate potential issues that can arise when incompatible land uses are adjacent, such as noise from commercial or industrial areas disturbing residential areas.
- *Screen the view of undesirable elements of a development.* Fencing and vegetation can be used to obstruct the view of mechanical equipment, trash receptacles, parking, or other undesirable elements of a commercial development.
- *Enhance visual appeal.* Landscaping can create a more aesthetically pleasing transition between different land use types.
- *Reduce noise and light pollution.* Vegetation and solid fencing/walls can absorb noise and screen out light from adjacent properties, improving the quality of life for residents on adjacent properties.
- *Protect sensitive areas.* In some cases, buffer zones are used to protect sensitive natural resources or habitats from the negative impacts of development.

Best Practices from Other Communities

A number of other communities require buffer zones between residential and commercial uses. Common elements of these buffer zones include the following.

- *Required width.* The minimum width of a buffer zone often varies depending on the nature of the adjacent land uses. For example, a buffer of 10 feet might be required between light commercial (e.g. professional offices) and residential uses, while a buffer of 35 feet or more might be required between heavy commercial (e.g. high volume retail) and residential areas.
- *Planting requirements.* Specific types and sizes of plants may be required within the buffer zone, often including a mix of trees, shrubs, and groundcover. Depending on the nature and purpose of the buffer zone different types and quantities of vegetation may be required.
- *Fence or wall requirements.* In some cases, solid fences or walls may be required in addition to landscaping to provide a more effective barrier.
- *Parking and other use restrictions.* Parking and other uses may be prohibited within the buffer zone to ensure its effectiveness as a barrier.
- *Maintenance requirements.* Regulations may specify how the buffer zone should be maintained to ensure its effectiveness over time.

The following are specific examples of buffer zone regulations in other communities.

- *Draper, Utah.* Requires a 20-foot landscape buffer between commercial and residential uses, and a 30-foot buffer between industrial and residential uses, with specific planting requirements.
- *Salt Lake County, Utah.* Requires a landscaped buffer area at least 20 feet wide between non-residential and residential uses, with a minimum of one tree for every 25 linear feet of buffer.
- *Eagle Mountain, Utah.* Requires a buffer yard when a commercial, civic, or manufacturing use abuts a residential use, with specific planting requirements.
- *Morganton, North Carolina.* Extensive buffer zone requirements, depending on the nature of the zoning on two adjacent properties. This is perhaps the most detailed and comprehensive example of buffer zone requirements in this list. Reference the Morganton buffer zone requirements [here](#).
- *Pima County, Arizona.* Similar to Morganton, North Carolina. Extensive buffer zone requirements, depending on the nature of the zoning on two adjacent properties. Reference the Pima County buffer zone requirements [here](#).

Buffer Zone Options for Consideration

The Town code already has general provisions to buffer residential uses from commercial uses. These include the following:

- Increased side setback distances on commercial properties adjacent to residential properties (generally 20 feet instead of 10 feet).
- Increased setback from residential properties for outdoor recreational facilities (e.g. pools, athletic courts) on commercial properties (100 foot requirement), as well as screening requirement (minimum eight foot tall wall or twelve foot tall vegetative screen).
- Increased allowance for the height of a fence or wall on a side or rear property line between a commercial use and a residential use on an adjacent property (up to eight feet in height).

- Potential for the Planning Commission to require a wall or fence on a commercial project adjacent to a residential use.

The above standards provide a good foundation for more detailed and comprehensive buffer zone requirements. The Commission could build on this foundation in developing buffer zone requirements. The following questions can help the Commission begin discussion on buffer zone strategies for Springdale.

- Should there be one standard type of buffer zone required between all commercial uses and all residential uses? Or should there be several different types of buffer zones depending on the nature of the commercial and residential uses adjacent to each other (similar to the Pima County example)?
- Should there be options for different types of buffer zones that a developer can use to fulfill the buffer zone requirements? For example, a developer could have the option to develop either a narrower buffer with a solid fence / wall, or a wider buffer without a wall and with more vegetation.
- What uses should be allowed in a buffer zone? The Commission could allow passive uses that are not likely to have an impact on adjacent properties (e.g. stormwater detention).

Based on the Commission's responses to these questions staff will begin drafting options for buffer zone regulations.