

Comstock Township
21.50 – LANDSCAPING

Adopted 10/24/2016

21.51 - Statement of purpose.

The purpose of this Section is to identify the landscaping objectives by setting forth minimum yet flexible standards for required landscape areas for those uses requiring site plan review. The objectives of the landscape requirements work to accomplish the following:

- Increase compatibility between abutting uses including roads and to provide buffering between dissimilar land uses.
- Protect residential quality of life.
- Improve air quality, provide shade and reduce noise.
- Decrease wind velocity, reduce soil erosion and increase surface water retention.
- Reduce glare from buildings, cars, night lighting, and other sources.
- Screen unattractive features.
- Provide visual relief from monotonous features such as building walls, large parking lots and streets.
- Encourage use of native plants as they are well adapted to local conditions, reduce the need for fertilizers, pesticides and water, and are less expensive to maintain.

21.52 - Scope.

All uses subject to site plan review shall be landscaped in accordance with a plan meeting the requirements of this Section.

21.53 - General provisions.

- A. Portions of the site not devoted to floor area, parking, access ways or pedestrian use shall be landscaped with live plant material consisting of deciduous canopy and coniferous trees, understory trees, shrubs, ground cover, and grasses and maintained in a neat and orderly manner.
- B. A landscaping plan drawn to scale shall be submitted detailing the location, type and size of all plant material, berms, walls and fences, and their relationship to existing and proposed facilities, structures, pavement, and access points. It must be of sufficient detail for the reviewing body to determine conformity with this section. Plans shall be reviewed pursuant to this Section and Section 22 - Site Plan Review Procedures.
- C. Landscaping material and structures shall be placed in such a manner so as to not interfere with cross-visibility, public safety, or the safe movement of vehicles and pedestrians.

- D. Completion of landscaping shall coincide with the completion of the building or structure unless a later date is permitted in writing by the Township and a performance guarantee is provided, pursuant to Section 27.04.
- E. Any areas that become disturbed for any reason shall be restored in accordance with the original landscape plan unless approved otherwise in writing by the Township.

21.54 - Landscaping.

The landscaping terms contained in this Ordinance are defined as follows:

- Caliper – the trunk diameter of a nursery tree in inches measured at 12” above grade.
- Greenspace - Landscaped area around the perimeter of a lot.
- Ground Cover - Plant material that normally reaches a maximum height of not more than 18 inches.
- Shrub, Deciduous - A woody plant with several stems, smaller than a tree, that drops its foliage at the end of the growing season. Mature height ranges from three to 13 feet.
- Shrub, Evergreen - A woody plant with several stems, smaller than a tree, with foliage that remains green year round. Mature height ranges from three to 13 feet.
- Shrub, Low growing - A woody plant with several stems, sometimes referred to as dwarf, usually evergreen. Mature height ranges from 1½ to three feet.
- Tree, Canopy - Tall woody plant of a species that normally grows to an overall height of at least 50 feet, usually with one main trunk and many branches.
- Tree, Evergreen - woody plant of a species with foliage that remains green year round, usually with one main trunk and many branches. Normally grows to a height of at least 25 feet.
- Tree, Understory - woody plant of a species that normally grows to an overall height of at least 25 feet, usually with one main trunk and many branches. May be of an ornamental nature.
- Viewshed. The natural environment that is visible from one or more viewing points.

21.55 - Greenspace areas.

- A. The following table (Table 21A) indicates greenspace landscaping requirements stated in terms of depth of the greenspace as measured from the property line or right-of-way line, whichever is applicable, and the number and type of plant units required per 100 linear feet of greenspace. The clustering of plant material within a greenspace is encouraged.

Table 21A - Landscaping Requirements

Greenspace Depth and Plant Material Quantities per 100 Linear Feet

Greenspace Type	A	B	C	D	E
Minimum depth of greenspace (feet)	10	10	20	25	30
Canopy tree	1	2	2	3	4
Understory tree	2	4	3	6	6
Shrubs	-	-	4	9	12
Evergreen/ Conifer tree	-	2	-	2	4

B. Table 21B indicates the Greenspace Type required on properties based upon zoning and road classification. The letter designations indicated in Table 21B refer to the requirements and standards stated in Table 21A.

Table 21B -Greenspace Type

Zoning of Subject Site ¹	Adjacent Zoning or Road Classification									
	AGR	A-H	R-1A R-1B R-1C	RM RMH	O-1	B-1 B-2 B-3	LM LD M	OW	Arterial, Collector or Local	Private Street Easement
AGR ² A-H ²	C	C	C	B	A	A	B	A	C	A
R-1A ² R-1B ² R-1C ²	A	A	A	A	B	B	B	A	C	A
RM RMH	E	E	E	B	B	B	B	A	C	A
O-1	B	B	C	A	A	B	B	A	C	A
B-1	B	B	D	D	B	C	C	C	C	A
B-2 B-3	D	D	E	D	D	C	C	C	C	A
LM LD M	D	D	E	D	C	C	C	C	C	A
OW	-	-	A	-	-	-	-	A	-	-

- 1 Greenspace type for Special Exception Uses may be increased by the Planning Commission based upon review of the criteria of Section 4.13.
- 2 Criteria apply to permitted uses other than farms, single- or two-family dwellings, home occupations unless other determined necessary by the Planning Commission and uses accessory to single and two family dwellings.

- C. Berms - Landscaped undulating earthen berms not exceeding six feet in height, as measured from the grade of the abutting paved area, either existing or proposed, of the subject site, and 3:1 slope may be permitted within a required greenspace. Credit of up to 25 percent may be received against the required plantings in a greenspace by the use of berms three feet in height or greater in said greenspace.
- D. No off-street parking, storage, outdoor commercial or industrial ground activities, or structures shall be permitted in greenspace areas.

21.56 - Screening.

Whenever screening is required by this ordinance, one of the following methods or combinations thereof may be required by the Planning Commission based upon the specific character of the proposed use of the subject property and the nature of the surrounding property, shall be utilized, unless otherwise specified in lieu of the provisions of Section 21.55:

- A. A natural compact planting area of narrow upright evergreens planted at no greater lineal spacing than 3 feet on center or 4½ feet on center when planted on 45° alternate spacing, which maintain their density and screening effect throughout the year; and which shall be maintained in a neat and attractive manner commensurate with adjoining development. An alternate spacing and species plan may be presented provided that it can achieve a compact density which can serve as an immediate screen.
- B. A wall or fence of sufficient density or compactness to screen the structures and activities required to be screened from the view of occupants of adjoining premises or public highways, not less than 6 feet in height, and maintained in a neat and attractive manner commensurate with adjoining development. (See Section 4.06.4 for additional fencing regulations).
- C. A berm of not less than fifteen (15) feet in width and four (4) feet in height, landscaped with shrubs, evergreen trees, or small deciduous trees planted at not less than one (1) unit per every one hundred (100) square feet of surface area. The balance of the berm shall be covered with lawn, ground cover, bark or wood chips, boulders, cobble, river rock or any combination thereof.
- D. The Planning Commission shall have authority to approve an alternate form of screening if the Planning Commission determines that such alternate form of screening will, given the specific character of the proposed use of the subject property and the nature of the surrounding property, be adequate to accomplish the purposes of screening under this Ordinance and that allowance of such alternate form of screening shall not have a material adverse impact upon the owners and/or occupants of adjoining lands. The burden of proof to show these standards are satisfied shall be on the party seeking approval of such alternate form of screening.

21.57 - Plats/site condominiums.

The following section applies to all residential plats and site condominiums:

- A. Street trees along internal roadways: Each lot within a plat or site condominium shall be required to have at least one canopy tree for every 80 feet of road frontage or portion thereof. The planting of additional canopy trees along streets is encouraged. Trees shall be planted near the street but outside of the right-of-way of all internal roadways. Required street trees shall be planted when the lot or building site is developed, prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.
- B. Greenspace along external roadways: In order to preserve viewsheds on Township roads, plantings in compliance with Table 25B shall be provided.
- C. Existing trees and vegetation: To the extent feasible, existing trees and vegetation shall be left undisturbed through the course of development. Existing canopy trees may be credited toward satisfying tree planting requirements.
- D. Replacement: Required trees and plantings shall be maintained to ensure their survival. At the discretion of the Planning Commission, a performance guarantee may be required to ensure that proposed landscaping is maintained for a period of at least 18 months per Section 21.62. Such guarantee may take the form of an irrevocable letter of credit, certified check, cash escrow, or performance bond.

21.58 - Parking lots.

Parking lot landscaping shall be designed and situated to define safe access and circulation routes, provide shade and visual relief, and diminish the scale of large lots.

Landscape features, including end islands, peninsulas, and strips shall be installed in the interior of parking lots to delineate on-site circulation, ensure adequate sight distance at the intersection of aisles and interior roadways, and to prevent diagonal vehicular movement through parking lots. Features shall be designed with sufficient radii to ensure drivers are able to make 90-degree right turns without encroaching upon landscaping or adjacent traffic lanes.

- 1. Area Requirements based on the number of parking spaces are indicated in Table 21-C.

Table 21C Parking Lot Landscaping

Spaces	Land area per parking space
9 or less	10 square feet
10-49	15 square feet
51-99	25 square feet
100 +	30 square feet

- 2. Minimum size - the minimum size of any internal landscaped area shall be 300 square feet, with a minimum width of 15 feet. Landscaping islands larger than 300 square feet are encouraged to enhance visual effect as viewed from the abutting road.

3. Protection of Landscaping - Interior landscape areas shall be protected by the installation of a raised concrete or asphalt curb, anchored landscape timbers around the border, bumper blocks, or other suitable means. A minimum distance of three feet shall be established between proposed tree and shrub plantings and the backside of the curb or timbers to facilitate snow storage while protecting the plantings.
4. Required Plantings - The number and type of plantings shall be determined at a rate of one deciduous canopy tree and two low growing shrubs per 300 square feet of interior landscape area.

21.59 - Loading areas.

Loading areas shall be landscaped in such a manner as to screen the area from view of adjacent property, public right-of-way or private access easement. Plants, berms, walls, and/or solid decorative fencing may be used. When loading areas are adjacent to residentially zoned or used land, the screening must be a minimum of six feet high at installation.

21.60 - Rubbish disposal and recyclables facilities.

Rubbish disposal facilities including dumpsters and other commercial containers for waste and recyclable material shall be situated on a hard surface and enclosed by a solid wall or solid fence no less than six (6) feet in height on three sides. In addition, if the front of the disposal facility is visible from an adjacent property, public right-of-way or private access easement, six (6) foot high view obstructing doors shall be installed. Enclosure structures and gates shall be maintained in good repair at all times. The use of chain-link fencing with or without interwoven slats is not permitted.

Recyclable materials, such as pallets and bales, shall be situated and enclosed as described above unless waived by the reviewing body.

21.61 - Storm water retention areas.

Any fenced areas that are visible from an adjacent property, public right-of-way or private access easement shall be landscaped to screen them from view.

21.62 - Material requirements and maintenance.

- A. At least 50 percent of required canopy trees shall be native to Lower Michigan. At least 30 percent of all other required landscape material within each Plant Material Type shall be native to Lower Michigan. For a listing of species native to Lower Michigan, see MICHIGAN FLORA ONLINE at www.michiganflora.net.

- B. Hardy Plant Materials. All landscaping material shall be hardy to the area and appropriate to the situation in which it is proposed, free of disease and insects, and conform to the American Standard for Nursery Stock of the American Association of Nurserymen.
- C. Minimum Plant Size. Plant materials shall meet the minimum plant size requirements contained in Table 21D. Height of a plant is measured from the top of the root ball or top of the container soil to the top of the leader, the primary stem of the plant.

Table 21D Minimum Size

Plant Material Type	Size
Canopy Tree Single Stem	2" caliper
Canopy Tree Multi-stem Clump	10 feet (height)
Understory Tree	8' to 10' (height)
Evergreen Tree	5 feet (height)
Shrub Deciduous	24 inches (height)
Shrub Evergreen	18 inches (height)
Shrub Low growing	2 gallon pot

- D. Monoculture. The use of a single species is prohibited to increase the rate of plant survival. Except for plantings used for evergreen screening, no one species of tree or shrub may make up more than 50% of the total amount within each Plant Material Type.
- E. Species not permitted as required street tree plantings and that should be used with caution when placed in proximity to any existing or proposed building, structure, walkway, or parking area are listed in Table 21E. These species may be appropriate in buffer areas or for landscape restoration.

Table 21E – Species of Special Consideration

Botanical Name	Common Name
Acer negundo	Box Elder
Acer saccharinum	Silver Maple
Aesculus hippocastanum	Horse Chestnut
Ailanthus altissima	Tree of Heaven
Catalpa speciosa	Catalpa
Ginkgo biloba (Female)	Female Ginkgo
Populus spp.	Poplars, Cottonwood, Aspen
Liquidambar styraciflua	Sweet Gum
Salix spp.	Willows
Ulmus spp.	Elms

- F. Any species known to have structural weakness or excessive bearing of fruit or nuts should not be used in areas of vehicular or pedestrian traffic.
- G. Invasive species. To protect species indigenous to the Township, the use of invasive species which naturalize is not permitted. Those invasive species not permitted are listed on the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network at <http://www.misin.msu.edu/>.
- H. Maintenance. Landscape areas shall be maintained in a neat and orderly manner including mowing, fertilizing, pruning, and irrigation to promote optimum condition.
- I. Replacement. Withered and/or dead plant materials shall be replaced within a reasonable period of time but no longer than one growing season later.
- J. Shrubs shall be grouped within the required greenspace and parking lot landscape areas when appropriate for aesthetic value and ease of maintenance.

21.63 - Preservation of existing trees.

Credit shall be awarded for preserving canopy trees. By preserving canopy trees, tree planting requirements can be significantly reduced. The number of credits awarded for tree preservation shall be in accordance with Table 21F. Trees intended to be preserved shall be indicated on the landscape plan and type and size shall be noted. Tree protection fencing shall be required according to Section 21.65.

Table 21F – Tree Preservation Credits

Diameter of Preserved Tree*	Number of Trees credited
Over 24 inches	4
12 inches to 24 inches	3
8 inches to 11.9 inches	2
2 inches to 7.9 inches	1

*Diameter measured at 4' above ground level

21.64 - Preservation of existing native vegetation.

Credit shall be awarded for preserving existing vegetation native to Lower Michigan, including shrubs and grassland species. By preserving existing native vegetation, tree and shrub planting requirements can be significantly reduced. The number of credits awarded shall be determined by the Zoning Administrator based on existing species and the intended function of the required tree and shrub plantings.

21.65 - Tree protection prior to and during construction.

- A. Before development, the developer or builder shall erect tree protection fencing that will shield and protect all trees designated to be preserved. Fencing should be placed no closer than ten feet from the trunk of a tree or five feet beyond the drip line of a tree or group of trees, whichever is greater.
- B. Fencing shall be a minimum of 48 inches high.
- C. Tree protection fencing shall be maintained during construction and all construction materials, supplies, and equipment shall be kept out of the protected areas.
- D. Location of tree protection fencing must be shown on the approved landscape plan.

21.66 - Provisions for existing sites.

- A. Perimeter and parking area landscape requirements shall apply to all expansions, renovations, or alterations that increase the gross floor area. Each increase in gross floor area of one percent shall require the installation of a minimum of five percent of the landscaping for the total site.
- B. Landscape requirements for Parking Areas, Section 21.58 shall apply when expansions increase the number of parking spaces by 20 percent or at least ten parking spaces.
- C. When parking lots not in conformance with Section 21.50 are milled and resurfaced landscaping in accordance with Section 21.58 is encouraged.

21.67 - Exceptions.

- A. Additional Planting Requirements - For reason of conflicting uses, unfavorable topography, or other unique or extenuating physical circumstances, the reviewing body may increase required landscape plantings in any required greenspace if in its determination an increase is found necessary to reasonably achieve the spirit, purpose and intent of this Section.
- B. Reductions and Substitutions of Plantings - If a physical hardship exists or existing topography and vegetation are determined by the reviewing body to provide equal or better landscape and buffering effect, the reviewing body may approve modifications only to the planting requirements of Section 21.55. The reviewing body may require such alternate plantings and visual screens as hedges, fences, walls, and/or combination thereof which it deems necessary to ensure compliance with the spirit, purpose and intent of this Section.

21.68 - Greenspace within the public right-of-way and private access easements.

The land area lying between the required greenspace in the front yard of properties and the edge of pavement of a public or private access easement shall be neatly maintained with grass or groundcover.