

Landscape Standards



Facts to Know

INTRODUCTION:

The following landscaping standards apply to all new development within Commerce City. For purposes of these standards, new development refers to the development of any lot, including the construction of building additions, additional structures, additional parking facilities or lots, vehicle drive areas or any other impervious surface, on any previously developed properties.

LANDSCAPE UPGRADE:

Landscaping conditions as approved by a landscape plan on sites developed prior to the year 2009 may be continued until such time as a change in gross floor area is requested, or when a change of use is proposed. Upon such increase or change, the existing landscaping shall be upgraded as provided in the Landscaping Upgrade table below if such landscaping does not already meet the current requirements. A change of use is considered to occur under any of the following circumstances:

1. A new development review process is required (such as a use-by-permit);
2. There is a change in square footage of the structure and/or use;
3. There is a change to the parking area requirements that results in expansion, excavation and/or resurfacing of the parking area; or
4. There is a change proposed in drainage, circulation, landscaping, noise, or lighting at the site.

LANDSCAPE UPGRADE TABLE	
Building Addition (Gross Floor Area- GFA)*	Landscape Area Upgrade
0- 25% change in GFA; or change in use with no increased GFA	Upgrade area by 25% of base standard
26-50% change in GFA	Upgrade area by 50% of base standard
Over 50% change in GFA	Upgrade area by 100% of base standard

*For the purposes of this table, outdoor display shall be treated as GFA.

The amount of landscaping necessary to satisfy the percentage of upgrade shall be calculated by first determining the total amount of landscaping required under the full provisions of the land development code. The upgrade percentage shall then be applied to the total to determine the extent of the required upgrade.

The landscaping upgrades required in the previous table shall be accomplished in the following order of priority unless otherwise determined by the city:

1. Landscaping around the perimeter of the site adjacent to public rights-of-way.
2. Landscaping in required buffer areas.
3. Landscaping within the parking areas; then
4. Other landscaping interior to the site.

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GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS:

Topsoil. To the maximum extent feasible, topsoil that is removed during construction activity shall be conserved for later use on areas requiring re-vegetation and landscaping.

Soil Amendments. The soil in areas that have been compacted or disturbed during construction or other activities shall be thoroughly loosened. Organic soil amendments shall also be thoroughly incorporated into the soil at a rate of a minimum of five cubic yards per one thousand square feet of landscape area and be tilled to a depth of at least six inches.

Plant Materials. Plant materials should be selected from the city’s approved plant list and landscaping specifications. Prohibited species referenced in these specifications are not allowed in the city.

Plant Quality. All plants shall be A-Grade or No. 1 Grade, free of any defects, and shall be of normal health, height, leaf density, and spread appropriate to the species as defined by American Association of Nurserymen Standards.

Plant Size. The caliper of deciduous trees shall be measured six inches above the base. Plant material sizes shall meet the following requirements:

Minimum Plant Size Requirements	
Plant Type	Minimum Size
Shade Tree	2-inch caliper
Evergreen	6-foot height
Ornamental Tree	1.5-inch caliper
Shrubs	5 gallon
Ornamental Grasses	1 gallon

Grading. Prior to the installation of the required landscaping and irrigation, all proposed landscape areas shall be graded to allow for proper site drainage.

Installation. All landscaping shall be installed according to sound horticultural practices in a manner designed to encourage quick establishment and healthy growth. All landscaping in each phase shall either be installed or the installation shall be secured with a letter of credit, escrow or performance bond for 125 percent of the value of the landscaping prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy for any building in such phase.

Maintenance. Trees and vegetation, irrigation systems, fences, walls and other landscape elements shall be considered as elements of the project in the same manner as parking, building materials and other site details. The applicant, landowner or successors in interest shall be jointly and severally responsible for the regular maintenance of all landscaping elements in good condition. All landscaping shall be maintained free from disease, pests, weeds and litter, and all landscape structures such as fences and walls shall be repaired and replaced periodically to maintain a structurally sound condition.

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Replacement. Any landscape element that dies or is otherwise removed shall be promptly replaced based on the requirements of the land development code.

Irrigation. All landscape areas shall include adequate, permanent, automatic irrigation of all plant material, except certified xeric landscaping that does not require permanent irrigation for survival once established. In such case, the landscape plan must provide for temporary irrigation to ensure the proper establishment of the xeric elements.

PROHIBITED PRACTICES AND ELEMENTS:

Monoculture. The extensive use of a single species of trees or shrubs shall be limited as outlined in the table below to minimize the potential for disease or pests to strike a particular species resulting in significant same-species loss:

Number of Plantings	Maximum Use of Same Species
10-19	50%
20-39	33%
40-59	25%
Over 60	15%

Native Grass Applied as Seed. Primary landscape areas, including detention or retention ponds when incorporated into the landscape design, shall not utilize a dry-land seed mix as landscape coverage. The use of native grasses from seed is restricted to remote, low-use, low-visibility areas of a lot, and those areas not paved or formally landscaped, such as areas designated for future phases of development.

Artificial Turf. Partial or entirely synthetic material designed and manufactured to simulate living turf grass shall be prohibited, with the exception of public or private recreation fields.

LANDSCAPE PLANS:

Landscape plans are required for the following development applications and are subject to the review procedures for the type of development application involved: conditional use permit, development plan, PUD permit, use-by-permit, variance, height exception, and zoning or rezoning.

The landscaping, as planted, must comply with the approved landscape plan. Amendments to an approved landscape plan must be approved in writing by the city.

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LANDSCAPE AREAS:

Landscape areas shall include all areas on a site that are not covered by buildings, structures, paving or impervious surface. They may include the following elements:

1. Turf grass. High-use areas should be planted with irrigated turf grass. Non-irrigated, shortgrass prairie grasses or other adapted grasses that have been certified as Xeriscape landscaping, may be established in remote, low-use, low-visibility areas.
2. Planting beds. Shrub and ground cover planting beds shall be separated from turf grass with edging, curbing, or stone borders and shall have open surface areas covered with mulch.
3. Detention and Retention Ponds. Detention and retention ponds may be used as long as they are physically, functionally, and visually integrated into landscape uses through the use of topography, building and parking lot placement, plantings, permanent water features, recreational or open space amenities, or other methods. Slopes shall not exceed a 4:1 ratio or be flatter than 2 percent.
4. Drainage Zones. Areas that are irrigated by runoff water and that may support wetlands and native species adapted to riparian conditions. All drainage conveyance, detention, and retention areas should be landscaped using a “naturalized” palette of materials that reduce irrigation water use and encourage habitat development.
5. Hardscape. Hardscape areas also may include, by way of example but not by way of limitation, the following types of areas: plazas, basketball courts, pools, tennis courts, playgrounds, or similar recreational areas or uses. Vehicle drive or parking areas shall not be considered hardscape.
6. Tree lawns. Tree lawns landscaped in connection with development in accordance with the standards contained later in this packet.

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MINIMUM REQUIRED MATERIALS:

The following table lists the minimum requirements that must be included in all landscape areas:

Development Type	Landscape Area	Trees	Shrubs	Material	Turf	Mulch	Tree Lawn	Additional Requirements
Multi-Family	Entire yard	Minimum of 1 deciduous tree and 1 evergreen tree per two units.	Minimum of 6 shrubs per two units; 50% must be deciduous.	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	Minimum Open Space Requirement. See section 21-4310.
Commercial or Industrial under 5 acres	Entire yard	1 for every 600 sq. ft. of landscape area	1 for every 300 sq. ft. of landscape area	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	20-foot depth of landscaping from ROW required for industrial uses
Commercial or Industrial greater than 5 acres	Entire yard	1 for every 1200 sq. ft. of landscape area	1 for every 300 sq. ft. of landscape area	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	20-foot depth of landscaping from ROW required for industrial uses
Public or Institutional	Entire yard	2 for every 600 sq. ft. of landscape area	2 for every 300 sq. ft. of landscape area	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	
Mixed-Use	Entire yard	2 for every 600 sq. ft. of landscape area	2 for every 300 sq. ft. of landscape area	Landscape area must contain 75% live plants	Max of 50% of landscape area	Two types required	Yes-spaced 40 feet apart along all property street frontages	Urban hardscape substitutions allowed

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SPECIAL LANDSCAPE TREATMENT AREAS:

Additional landscaping beyond the minimum standards shown in the previous section are required in certain areas of a development. These include buffer zones between dissimilar zone districts, stormwater detention or retention areas, parking lots, and public rights-of-way. The specific additional landscaping requirements for each of these special areas are shown in the following sections.

Buffer Zones: Buffer zones are required on properties in the MHP, R-3, R-4, C-1, C-2, C-3, MU-1, I-1, I-2, and I-3 districts when they adjoin properties in certain zoning districts as set forth in the tables below. The second table specifies the requirements for each buffer zone type listed in the first table.

Buffer Type by Zoning District or Land Use

Zoning District of Proposed Use	Adjacent Zoning District or Land Use: AG, R-1, R-2	Adjacent Zoning District or Land Use: MHP, R-3, R-4	Adjacent Zoning District or Land Use: C-1, C-2, C-3, MU-1, I-1	Adjacent Zoning District or Land Use: I-2, I-3
MHP, R-3, R-4	Type A	Type A	Type A	Type C
C-1, C-2, C-3, MU-1, I-1	Type B	Type A	N/A	Type B
I-2, I-3	Type C	Type C	Type B	N/A

Buffer Type Requirements

Feature	Buffer Zone "A"	Buffer Zone "B"	Buffer Zone "C"
Width in feet of buffer zone	10	15	20
Required trees – every 100 feet	3	5	8
Required shrubs – every 100 feet	5	8	10

Evergreen trees are required for buffer zone Types B and C, while either deciduous or evergreen trees may be used in buffer zone Type A. The existence of access ways or driveways within a buffer zone will not reduce the minimum requirements for trees and shrubs. Trees and shrubs planted as part of the buffer requirement cannot be used to meet any other landscaping requirement.

The buffer zone requirements of this section apply whether or not the property in the adjacent zoning district as set forth in the first table is developed. When agricultural districts are considered for buffer requirements, the future land use designation in the Comprehensive Plan shall be used to determine buffer requirements.

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Detention and Retention Areas: Detention or retention ponds may be permitted within buffer zones as long as they do not hamper the intent of the buffer to provide screening from adjacent uses.

Ponds must be designed to replicate a natural environment, with the edges and landforms of the pond sculpted to filter and soften views of the pond, and a wide variety of trees and shrubs clustered around the basin. **One deciduous or evergreen tree and 10 shrubs are required per 50 feet of pond perimeter**, as measured along the top of the bank, excluding the designated overflow area. The required landscaping shall be planted in a natural, random pattern, not limited to the top of the pond bank. Trees must be planted above the freeboard line of the pond. Shrubs planted below the freeboard line of the pond must be tolerant of wet or moist soil conditions.

Where deep ponds with steep slopes are needed, a 42-inch wrought-iron or other decorative fence style is required to be placed around the perimeter of the pond for public safety.

Parking Lot Landscape Standards: The perimeter of all parking areas must be landscaped with at least 1 tree and 5 shrubs for every 30 linear feet along a street, right-of-way, or abutting another property. The width of this buffer is determined by the table on the next page. Perimeter parking area landscaping may be including with other buffer requirements, as applicable.

Abuts a local street	Abuts a collector street or another parking area	Abuts an arterial street
Minimum 5 feet	Minimum 10 feet	Minimum 15 feet

Parking lots with six or more spaces also must be screened from abutting uses and from the street. Screening must consist of a fence, wall, planter, earthen berm, plant material, or a combination of such elements, each of which shall have a minimum height of 36 inches. If the abutting land use is residential, the screening must consist of a wall or fence in combination with plant material.

In the interior of parking lots, landscape islands must be placed at least every 15 parking stalls, and must have minimum dimensions of 8 feet by 10 feet. The landscape islands must each have at least 1 tree and 6 shrubs per parking row. Additional requirements for large parking lots with more than 6 consecutive rows of parking can be found in Sec. 21-7541 of the Land Development Code.

[IMAGE OF PARKING LOT LANDSCAPING]

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Right-of-Way Landscaping: The following standards apply for landscaping in or near public rights-of-way.

Wherever the sidewalk is detached or separated from the street by a planting strip (tree lawn), canopy shade trees chosen from the Approved Plant List shall be planted at 30- to 40-foot spacing in the center of all such tree lawn areas. Larger maturing trees should be placed 40 feet apart and smaller maturing trees may be placed 30 feet apart. In addition to canopy shade trees, the tree lawn planting design shall consist of turf grass and automatic irrigation system. Tree lawn planting designs in industrial areas may propose plant materials other than turf grass.

Wherever the sidewalk is attached to the street, canopy shade trees shall be established in an area ranging from 3 to 7 feet behind the sidewalk at 30- to 40-foot spacing. If the attached sidewalk is 10 feet or greater in width, canopy shade trees shall be established in planting cutout areas of at least 16-square feet at 30- to 40-foot spacing.

For either type of sidewalk configuration, no tree shall be planted closer than eight feet from any driveway or alley, nor in such a manner that its eventual growth would cause interference with or obstruction to any improvements installed for public benefit. Ornamental trees shall be planted in substitution of the canopy shade trees where overhead lines and fixtures prevent normal growth and maturity.

[IMAGES OF DETACHED SIDEWALK, ATTACHED SIDEWALK, AND TREE CUT-OUTS]

For right-of-way landscaping along state or federal highways or arterial corridors in the Northern Range (including East 96th Avenue, East 104th Avenue, East 120th Avenue, Highway 2, High Plains Parkway, and Tower Road), please contact the Planner of the Day to discuss specific requirements.