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Amendment to Article 12 – Landscaping
Proposed by Bentley Marlow
8-E-23-OA– Reductions in Landscape Buffer Yards
Planning Commission
November 14, 2024

Prompted by the recently completed Urban Forest Master Plan, the City Tree Board, the local chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the City's Urban Forestry Division, are conducting a thorough review of the landscaping ordinance and the tree protection ordinance. They have also solicited input from involved members of the community and organizations like Scenic Knoxville. The final proposal will ultimately be vetted by the public, the Planning Commission and City Council.

For this reason, Scenic Knoxville is not in favor of a piecemeal approach to making changes to Article 12. We suggest that Mr. Bentley submit his suggestions for consideration by the committee that has already been reviewing this ordinance for the past several months.

We agree with Planning Commission staff and Plans Review and Inspections that the majority of the amendments proposed today be denied.

Planning staff **is** recommending approval of the amendment which eliminates the requirement for a residential use in a nonresidential district to install a Class B Buffer when it abuts a residential district. We recommend adoption of this amendment only if the residential use in a nonresidential district is a single story.

Buffers provide privacy for single-family homeowners who want to use their backyard for recreational purposes. No one wants to hold a family bar-b-que in their backyard and feel like dozens of residents of an adjacent multi-story residence are peering down on them.

Landscaping does not just beautify our city, although that's an important function. Landscaping blocks noise, lights or other nuisances. Trees and shrubs play a major role in mitigating the negative and harmful effects of accelerating climate change. Landscaping absorbs carbon dioxide and produces oxygen. It reduces flooding, curtails erosion, and improves water quality. By providing shade, and cooling the ambient temperature, it reduces the urban heat island effect. Shade reduces residents' air conditioning costs and makes walkability possible. Without shade, there is no walkability in the sweltering summer. Couple this with the fact that we're nearing the end of the hottest year on record.

Living near green space enhances people's mental health and well-being. People of all income levels, no matter where they live, deserve the benefits that nearby landscaping provides. Landscaping creates healthier and more equitable cities.

The Urban Forest Master Plan is a major initiative to plant more trees on both public and private property. Increased planting on private property is of particular importance in this plan. Just one of the many goals of this effort is to have four native shade trees visible from every window.

Reducing the standards for buffer yards would thwart this effort and be a step backwards. We should be looking for more places to plant trees, not fewer.