



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development

Diane M. Sugimura, Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 4, 2010

TO: Councilmember Richard Conlin, Regional Development and Sustainability Committee

FROM: Dave LaClergue, Urban Designer

RE: Council Bill 117060 – Utility landscaping and screening amendments

In response to direction from the City Council DPD is proposing amendments to the Land Use Code to clarify and strengthen standards intended to help facilities such as solid waste transfer stations and utility services uses to better fit in the surrounding neighborhood. Utility services uses include electrical substations, combined sewer overflows (CSOs), pumping stations and trolley transformers. DPD’s proposal focuses on establishing appropriate setbacks, screening, and landscaping provisions for these uses. The proposed standards would vary among zones, consistent with the character intended to be achieved by different designations.

Note that transfer stations and utility services uses are reviewed by the Seattle Design Commission, and these uses also require approval by City Council in some zones. So, while the proposed code changes would establish a new baseline for the provision of landscaping and screening, Design Commission recommendations and/or Council review may result in different or additional provisions.

Transfer stations

DPD proposes to apply the Seattle Green Factor to transfer stations. Green Factor is a landscape scoring system that encourages a desirable mix of conventional landscape features (trees, shrubs, groundcovers) with strong incentives for tree preservation, native plants, green roofs and walls, permeable paving, rainwater harvesting, and landscaping visible to the public.

DPD is recommending that a score of 0.40 would be required. Additional provisions would allow landscaping provided on separate adjacent parcels to count toward meeting the required score. This provision responds to uncertainty about the eventual site program at NRDS. The proposal would add standards to the two zones where transfer stations are either permitted or planned and is summarized as follows:

Zone	Current standards	Proposed additional standards
Industrial Commercial; and Industrial General	15' triangular front setback if abutting residential lots, blank facades limited to 60'.	0.40 Green Factor minimum score is required; may include landscaping provided on multiple adjacent parcels related to a single facility. View-obscuring screening required if abutting or across the street from a residential zone



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Utility Services Uses

Utility services uses are facilities that transfer or deliver power, water, sewage, stormwater runoff, and similar substances; these include electrical substations, combined sewer overflows, pumping stations, and trolley transformers. Facilities falling into this use category range widely in terms of parcel size, purpose, and program constraints or needs.

Most utility services uses face rights-of-way with a fence or wall. These can create a negative visual impact, especially when blank. DPD’s proposal focuses on treatment of these walls, requiring landscaped setbacks and/or architectural detailing where appropriate. Proposals for each zone are based on the intent of the zone and potential impact to surrounding uses, and on consistency with standards for other uses in that zone. Specifics are summarized as follows:

Zone	Current standards for utility service uses	Proposed additional standards
Single-Family	Treated as institutions, minimum 5-10' setback on structures, no setback for fences and free-standing walls. Landscaping must “integrate the [substation] with adjacent areas.” (23.44.022).	Minimum 10' landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls; Director may modify to accommodate special needs and achieve intended screening performance.
Lowrise, Midrise & Highrise	7-foot average setback for structures with a 5-foot minimum. No setback for fences and free-standing walls 6' and shorter. 0.50 Green Factor required for midrise and highrise, 0.60 proposed for lowrise. Utilities not specifically addressed.	7-foot average landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls; Director may modify to accommodate special needs and achieve intended screening performance.
Commercial and Neighborhood Commercial	15' triangular setback for structures, no setback for fences 6' and shorter (23.47A.014). 0.30 Green Factor. Utilities not specifically addressed.	5' landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls OR architectural detailing or similar features approved by the Director.
Seattle Mixed	Setbacks limited (30% on Ped streets, 12' deep on others). If used, landscaping is required (23.48.024). Blank facades limited to 15-30' in length. Utilities not specifically addressed.	5' landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls OR architectural detailing or similar features approved by the Director.
Downtown	Setbacks limited to 10' deep maximum, blank facades limited to 15-30'. Utilities not specifically addressed.	5' landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls OR architectural detailing or similar features approved by the Director.
Industrial	IB: 5' setback required if across from residential lots. IC: 15' triangle required if abutting residential lots. Blank facades no greater than 60'. Utilities not specifically addressed.	If abutting or across the street from residential lots: 5' landscaped setback between ROW and fences/free-standing walls OR architectural detailing or similar features approved by the Director.

Thank you for considering this legislation. I am available to answer any questions you may have.