

**APPENDIX "A"**  
**STANISLAUS COUNTY**  
**BUFFER AND SETBACK GUIDELINES**

# Stanislaus County Buffer and Setback Guidelines

## Purpose and Intent:

The purpose of these guidelines is to protect the long-term health of local agriculture by minimizing conflicts resulting from normal agricultural practices as a consequence of new or expanding non-agricultural uses approved in or adjacent to the A-2 (General Agriculture) zoning district.

The intent of these guidelines is to establish standards for the development and maintenance of buffers and setbacks designed to physically and biologically avoid conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural uses.

## Applicability:

These guidelines shall apply to all new or expanding non-agricultural uses approved by discretionary permit<sup>1</sup> in the A-2 zoning district or on a parcel adjoining the A-2 zoning district. Non-agricultural uses located within a Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) adopted Sphere of Influence (SOI) for an incorporated city shall be subject to these guidelines if the project site is located within 300 feet of any production agriculture operation, as defined by the Stanislaus County General Plan Agricultural Element, or the outer boundary of the SOI at the time of approval.

Buffer and setback requirements established by these guidelines shall be located on the parcel for which a discretionary permit is sought and shall protect the maximum amount of adjoining farmable land.

## Buffer Design Standards for New Non-Agricultural Uses:

- All projects shall incorporate a minimum 150-foot wide buffer. Projects which propose people intensive outdoor activities, such as athletic fields, shall incorporate a minimum 300-foot wide buffer. All buffers shall incorporate a solid wall and vegetative screen consistent with the following standards:

Fencing: A 6-foot high solid wall of uniform construction shall be installed along any portion of a buffer where the project site and the adjoining agricultural operation share a common parcel line.

Vegetative Screen: (*minimum standards*)

- Two staggered rows of trees and shrubs characterized by evergreen foliage extending from the base of the plant to the crown. Fast growing plants with a short-life span shall be discouraged.
- Trees and shrubs should be vigorous, drought tolerant and at least 6-feet in height at the time of installation.
- Plants shall have 50% to 70% porosity (i.e., approximately 50% to 75% of the plant is air space).
- Plant height shall vary in order to capture drift within 4-feet of ground application.
- A mature height of 15-feet or more shall be required for each tree.

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<sup>1</sup>For purposes of these guidelines discretionary permit shall mean any general plan amendment, community plan amendment, rezone, tentative map, parcel map, use permit (excluding single-family dwellings in the A-2 zoning district), or variance processed by the County Planning & Community Development Department.

- To ensure adequate coverage, two staggered rows shall be located 5-feet apart and consist of minimum 5 gallon plants at least 6-feet tall planted 10-feet on center. Alternative spacing between rows may be authorized to accommodate the needs of specific plant species.
- Permitted uses within a buffer area shall include: public roadways, utilities, drainage facilities, landscaping, parking lots and similar low human intensity uses. Walking and bike trails shall be allowed within buffers provided they are designed without rest areas.
  - Landscaping shall be designed to exclude turf areas which could induce activities and add to overall maintenance costs and water usage.

### **Buffer and Setback Design Standards for Expanding Non-Agricultural Uses:**

- Where existing development on a project site will allow, accommodation of a buffer as required for new non-agricultural uses shall be provided.
- Where existing development on a project site will not allow a buffer as required for new non-agricultural uses, fencing and vegetative screening as required for new non-agricultural uses shall be provided within the area available.
- A minimum building setback of 150-feet, measured from the property line of any adjoining property located in the A-2 zoning district, shall be required for any addition to an existing building or any new building associated with the expansion of a non-agricultural use.

### **Buffer and Setback Maintenance:**

- Projects subject to these guidelines shall be conditioned to require the property owner(s) be responsible for all aspects of on-going maintenance of buffers and setback areas. The property owner(s) shall be responsible for maintaining landscape plants in a healthy and attractive condition.
- A landowners association or other appropriate entity shall be required to maintain buffers to control litter, fire hazards, pests, and other maintenance problems when a project consists of multiple parcels which may be held under separate ownership.
- The property owner, landowners association, or responsible entity shall be responsible for maintaining landscape plants in a healthy and attractive condition. Dead or dying plants shall be replaced with materials of equal size and similar variety within 30-days of weather permitting.
- When buffers are required as part of a specific plan, the County may require dedication of buffer areas and formation of service district to insure long-term up keep and maintenance of the buffer.

### **Agricultural Transition:**

- The Board of Supervisors may authorize the abandonment and reuse of buffer areas if agricultural uses on all adjacent parcels within 150-foot radius of the project site have permanently ceased.

## **Alternative Buffer and Setback Design Standards:**

- Any alternative buffer and setback design standards proposed by a project applicant shall be reviewed and supported by the Stanislaus County Agricultural Advisory Board prior to consideration by the Stanislaus County Planning Department. In no case, shall the required standards be reduced, unless the proposed alternative is found to provide equal or greater protection to surrounding agricultural uses.

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