



Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development

Planning Division

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To: Plan Commission

From: Planning and Zoning Staff

Re: Select Urban Forestry Task Force Recommendations

The recently adopted report of the [Urban Forestry Task](#) Force includes recommendations to evaluate specific changes in the zoning code to enhance growing environments and increase canopy cover and tree health. Three specific changes to the zoning code discussed in the report listed and discussed below.:

- Zoning and Site Plan Review Recommendation #6:
Building setback allowances have been reduced in urban areas to increase density. These policies have likewise reduced areas for potential tree plantings in critical areas. The city should consider the loss of potential trees due to this zoning condition as a detriment to the public value of the city streets. The city should develop zoning policies that encourage, not prevent, the provision of street trees or trees on privately developed properties.
- Zoning and Site Plan Review Recommendation #7:
In the zoning code, amending landscape applicability standards should be considered to bring more legal nonconforming site plans up to current landscape standards.
- Zoning and Site Plan Review Recommendation #9:
The City Forester should recommend an adequate soil volume to be included within landscape zoning requirements for parking lot trees and general landscape plans.

Building Setbacks:

Several zoning districts in Downtown, Mixed Use and Commercial, and Employment categories have no minimum setback front setback (see attached map for reference). While this successfully brings buildings and associated activity closer to the street, in certain contexts it limits the growing environment for street trees. One issue with shallow building setbacks is tree limbs growing into buildings, which can be particularly problematic when elevated outdoor spaces such as balconies or terraces are present.

Certain streets with narrow sidewalks and terraces, like South Park Street, have very few options for street trees. So long as there is sufficient terrace space, trees can still be planted with zero-setback buildings, but smaller or more columnar shaped trees may be used to minimize conflicts. One approach to address this could be to increase the minimum front and side street setback to five feet. A large setback would

provide more growing room for trees, but do so at the expense of reducing development potential and creating an inconsistent streetfront, perhaps detracting from the pedestrian character of Madison's main streets. With a five foot sidewalk, a (narrow) five foot terrace and a five foot front setback, street trees would have approximately 12 to 13 feet from trunk to building edge. Assuming a circular dripline, an increased setback from zero to five feet in these situations would allow for three times the growing area/canopy coverage from a single tree.

On streets with much wider terraces, West Washington Ave or the Capitol Square for example, the impact of a zero-setback building on street trees is minimal. In this context, the additional setback may only reduce the allowable building envelope without significant benefit. A more context-sensitive approach could be to map setbacks, as just occurred on Langdon Street. While this could achieve more tailored results, it would be time intensive and take far longer to implement.

A hybrid approach may be to examine the sidewalk and terrace width and to define a setback from those features. A potential zoning update following this concept might be no required setback, except where the distance between the curb and the property line is less than 15 feet, in which case a five foot setback would be required. This could help be more context-specific without the additional staff time that would be required to map specific setbacks on each street.

Staff supports further exploration of a small setback requirement in downtown, mixed-use, and employment areas to support more space for the street tree canopy.

Applicability of Landscape Standards:

Until 1984, the City did not require any landscaping in parking areas, and large legal-nonconforming parking areas are perhaps the most visible absence of tree canopy. Current zoning standards are adequate for new parking areas, but many legacy parking areas remain unchanged from their original permitted state. This intent of this is to bring more parking areas into compliance with current standards, requiring 5% of the parking area to be converted to landscape islands or rows with trees. The current applicability standards are as follows:

The entire development site must be brought up to compliance with this section unless all of the following conditions apply, in which case only the affected areas need to be brought up to compliance:

- 1. The area of site disturbance is less than ten percent (10%) of the entire development site during any ten-(10) year period.*
- 2. Floor area is only increased by ten percent (10%) during any ten-(10) year period. (Am. by ORD-15-00033, 4-8-15)*
- 3. No demolition of a principal building is involved.*
- 4. Any displaced landscaping elements must be replaced on the site and shown on a revised landscaping plan.*

In many cases, large parking areas are not brought into compliance because the majority of improvements are maintenance, remodeling or re-tenanting. Ownership lines complicate the process, since what may appear to be a single development site may not be. An example of this might be Pasqual's on East Washington. After being vacant for many eight years following the closure of a previous restaurant, the building was extensively renovated and a new outdoor patio was added for Pasqual's. The outdoor patio itself was not sufficient to trigger full site compliance, and most of the adjacent parking is on a separate parcel.

How a requirement for full landscape compliance could discourage or encourage property investment is up for debate, and would likely have varied impact on properties in different contexts. The relatively high cost of full site compliance might discourage a property owner for pursuing relatively minor site investments such as the addition of bike parking, as the total cost of improvements may not be worth the required investments. In some cases, it could expedite later redevelopment phases to avoid sunk costs of landscaping in parking areas that will soon be redeveloped.

On balance, staff believes that the current 10% disturbance threshold for bringing site landscaping into compliance is adequate regarding the threshold for.

Soil volume and zoning requirements:

The Urban Forestry Task Force discussed soil volume standards as a method of ensuring improved growing environments for trees, particularly in parking areas or other constrained planting sites. Soil volume standards could be incorporated into the landscape section, but there is no clear way for zoning and building inspection staff to ensure subsurface improvements are made in accordance with the plan.

One concept embedded in the landscape section is the requirement for plans on sites over 10,000 square feet be created and stamped by a registered landscape architect. This recognizes landscape design professionals have a more in depth knowledge of the different growing environments required in different contexts than plan or zoning staff would, and trusts these will be designed accordingly. In many instances, the involvement of a landscape architect ends when the plans are approved. Landscaping elements are often installed by general contractors and there is no opportunity to confirm that plant materials were installed consistently with the landscape plans, except what is visible above ground, and even this type of inspection by staff is largely complaint driven. Staff believe that requiring a formal sign-off or acknowledgement from the landscape architect stating the landscape elements were installed in compliance with the approved plan will ensure better oversight of sub-surface conditions, and result in better growing environments than creating a single soil volume standard overseen by zoning staff.

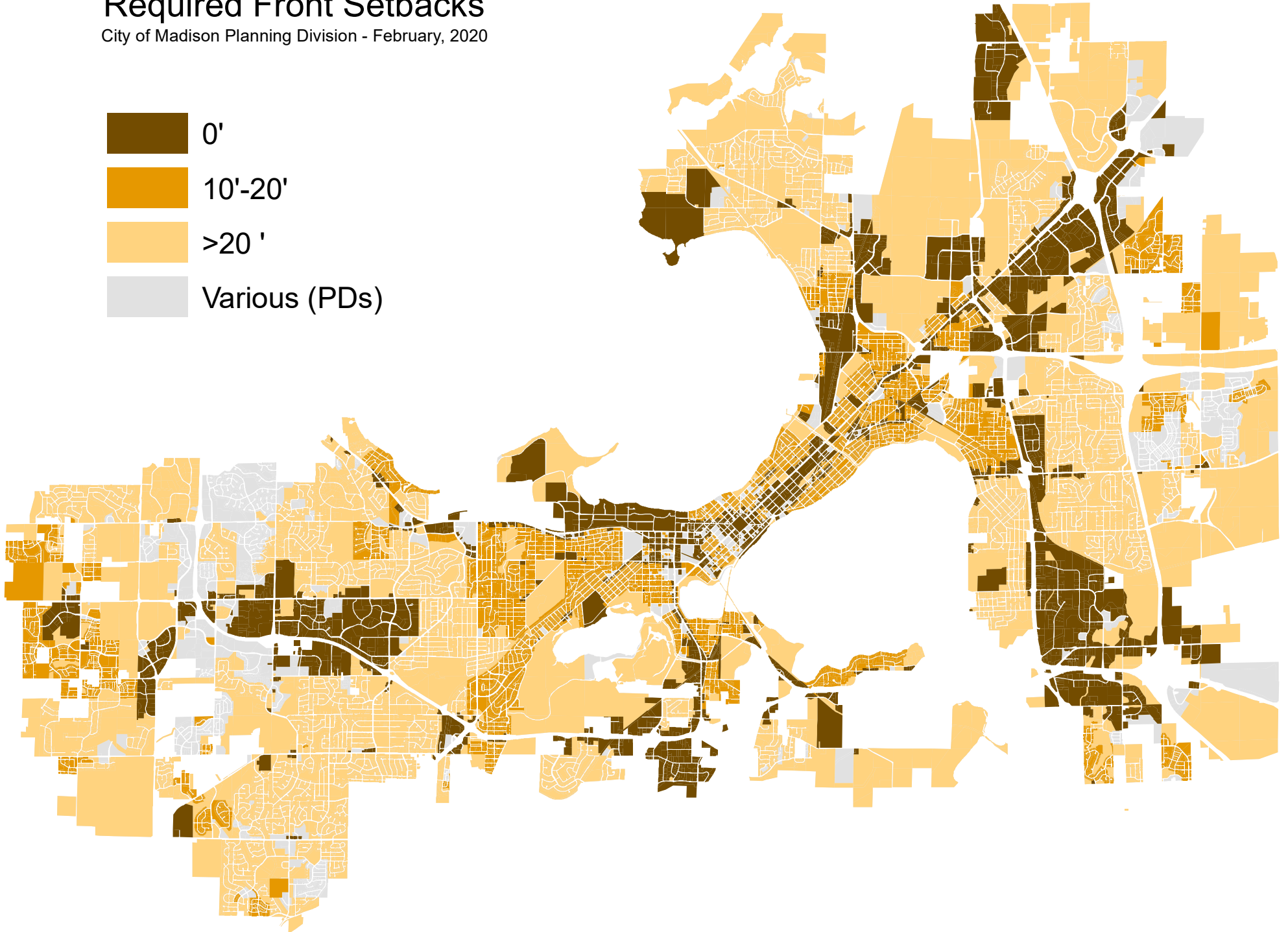
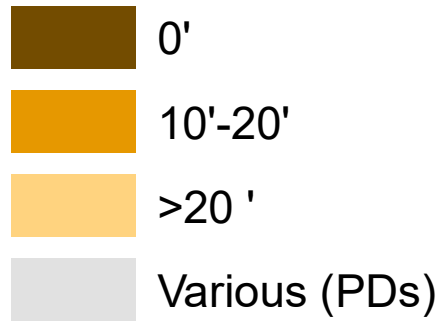
Staff supports the concept of a new requirement in the zoning code for post-construction verification by a registered landscape architect working as part of the development team.

NOTE: To see a video of a staff overview of the Urban Forestry Task Force Report to the Common Council, please go to this [link](#), and begin at minute 56 (presentation and questions take approximately 30 minutes):

<https://media.cityofmadison.com/Mediasite/Showcase/madison-city-channel/Presentation/340c4d35db00419d8088e97087ebb0a31d>

Required Front Setbacks

City of Madison Planning Division - February, 2020



| Zoning District | | Maximum Lot Coverage | Front Yard Setback (ft.) |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
| RESIDENTIAL | | | |
| SR-C1 | Suburban Residential - Consistent 1 | 50% | 30 |
| SR-C2 | Suburban Residential - Consistent 2 | 50% | 30 |
| SR-C3 | Suburban Residential - Consistent 3 | 60% | 25 |
| SR-V1 | Suburban Residential - Varied 1 | 60%-90% | 25 |
| SR-V2 | Suburban Residential - Varied 2 | 60%-90% | 25 |
| TR-C1 | Traditional Residential - Consistent 1 | 50% | 20 |
| TR-C2 | Traditional Residential - Consistent 2 | 65% | 20 |
| TR-C3 | Traditional Residential - Consistent 3 | 75% | 15 |
| TR-C4 | Traditional Residential - Consistent 4 | 65% | 20 |
| TR-V1 | Traditional Residential - Varied 1 | 70%-90% | 20 |
| TR-V2 | Traditional Residential - Varied 2 | 70%-90% | 20 |
| TR-U1 | Traditional Residential - Urban 1 | 75%-90% | 15 |
| TR-U2 | Traditional Residential - Urban 2 | 75%-90% | 15 |
| TR-R | Traditional Residential - Rural | 15% | 50 |
| TR-P | Traditional Residential - Planned | 75%-90% | 15 |
| MIXED-USE AND COMMERCIAL | | | |
| LMX | Limited Mixed Use | 75% | 0 |
| NMX | Neighborhood Mixed Use | 75% | 0 |
| TSS | Traditional Shopping Street | 85% | 0 |
| MXC | Mixed Use Center | 85% | 0 |
| CC-T | Commercial Corridor-Transitional | 85% | 0 |
| CC | Commercial Center | 85% | 0 |
| DOWNTOWN AND URBAN | | | |
| DC | Downtown Core | 100% | 0 |
| UOR | Urban Office Residential | 75% | 15 |
| UMX | Urban Mixed Use | 90% | 0 |
| DR1 | Downtown Residential 1 | 75% | 15 |
| DR2 | Downtown Residential 2 | 80% | 10 |
| EMPLOYMENT | | | |
| TE | Traditional Employment | 85% | 0 |
| SE | Suburban Employment | 75% | 0 |
| SEC | Suburban Employment Center | 75% | 25 |
| EC | Employment Campus | 85% | 0 |
| IL | Industrial Limited | 75% | 0 |
| IG | Industrial General | 75% | 0 |
| SPECIAL | | | |
| A | Agriculture | 5% | 30 |
| UA | Urban Agriculture | 15% | 15 |
| CN | Conservancy | 5% | 30 |
| PR | Parks and Recreation | 100% | 30 |
| AP | Airport | 75% | 20 |
| CI | Campus Institutional | 85% | 0 |
| PD | Planned Development | As Approved | As Approved |
| PMHP | Planned Mobile Home Park | As Approved | As Approved |
| ME | Nonmetallic Mineral Extraction | 100% | 30 |

Prepared by City of Madison Zoning staff for reference, February, 2020