

ARTICLE 10: NONCONFORMITIES

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ARTICLE 10 NONCONFORMITIES

10-1 General

A nonconforming situation occurs when, on the effective date of this Ordinance, an existing lot or structure or use of an existing lot or structure does not conform to one or more of the regulations applicable to the district in which the lot or structure is located. Among other possibilities, a nonconforming situation may arise because a lot does not meet minimum acreage requirements, because structures exceed maximum height limitations, because the relationship between existing buildings and the land (in such matter as density and setback requirement) is not in conformity with this Ordinance, because signs do not meet the requirements of this Ordinance, or because land or buildings are used for purposes made unlawful by this Ordinance.

Unless otherwise specifically provided for in this Ordinance and subject to the restrictions and qualifications set forth in the remaining sections of this Article, nonconforming situations that were otherwise lawful on the effective date of this Ordinance may be continued. Whenever this Ordinance refers to the effective date of this Ordinance, the reference shall be deemed to include the effective date of any amendments to this Ordinance if the amendment, rather than this Ordinance as originally adopted, creates a nonconforming situation. It shall be the responsibility of the property owner to demonstrate that a nonconformity was legally established, with assistance as reasonable and appropriate from City staff to access City records.

Amended June 6, 2022

10-2 Nonconforming Lots

A. Single Lot of Record with Lot Area and/or Lot Width Nonconformity

1. When an undeveloped lot has an area or width which does not conform to the dimensional requirements of the district where located, but such lot was approved and of record at the time of adoption of this Ordinance or any subsequent amendment which renders such lot nonconforming, then such lot may be used for a use permitted in the district where located, provided that the setback dimensions and other requirements, except area or width, are complied with.
2. In residential zones, the lot may be used for used for a public purpose or facility, with all development standards applying, but otherwise only a single-family dwelling shall be permitted on the nonconforming lot.

Amended June 6, 2022

3. Nothing contained herein exempts a lot from meeting the applicable provisions of the Alamance County or Orange County Environmental Health Department regulations.

B. Lots with Contiguous Frontage in One Ownership

1. When two or more adjoining and vacant lots of record with contiguous frontage are in one ownership at the time of the adoption of this Ordinance or subsequent to adoption and said lots individually have a lot area or lot width which does not conform to the dimensional requirements of the district where located, such lots shall be combined to create one or more lots that meet the standards of the district where located.
2. Nothing contained herein exempts the contiguous lots considered as a single buildable lot or lots from meeting the applicable provisions of the Alamance County or Orange County Environmental Health Department regulations.

C. Reduction of a Lot of Record

A lot of record reduced to less than the required area, width, or setback dimensions shall become a nonconforming lot of record if this reduction is the result of any of the following:

1. Condemnation or purchase by a local or state government agency;
2. Land dedication by the property owner that is accepted by the City or State.

Amended June 6, 2022

D. Lot of Record with Setback Nonconformity

When the use proposed for an undeveloped nonconforming lot is one that is conforming in all other respects except that the applicable setback requirements cannot reasonably be complied with, then the entity authorized by this Ordinance to issue a permit for the proposed use (the Zoning Administrator, City Council, or Board of Adjustment) may allow deviations from the applicable setback requirements if it finds that:

1. The property cannot reasonably be developed for the use proposed without such deviations;
2. The deviations are necessitated by the size or shape of the nonconforming lot;
3. The applicant has complied with the setbacks to the maximum extent practicable; and
4. The property can be developed as proposed without any significantly adverse impact on surrounding properties or the public health or safety.

Amended June 6, 2022

10-3 Nonconforming Use of Land

A. Continuance of Nonconforming Use of Land

Any nonconforming use legally existing at the time of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance may be continued so long as it remains otherwise lawful subject to conditions provided in this Section.

B. Conditions for Continuance

Such nonconforming use of land shall be subject to the following conditions:

1. No nonconforming use shall be changed to another nonconforming use unless such use is determined to be of equal or less intensity. In determining whether a nonconforming use is of equal or less intensity, the Board of Adjustment shall consider:
 - (a) Probable traffic of each use;
 - (b) Parking requirements of each use;
 - (c) Probable number of persons on the premises of each use at a time of peak demand;
 - (d) Off-site impacts of each use, such as noise, glare, dust, vibration or smoke and other impacts on surrounding properties or the public health or safety.
2. The number of dwelling units in a nonconforming residential use shall not be increased.
3. No such nonconforming use shall be moved in whole or in part to any portion of the lot or parcel other than that occupied by such use at the effective date of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance.
4. If any nonconforming use of land ceases for any reason for a continuous period of more than 180 days, any subsequent use of such land shall be a permitted use in the district in which such land is located. Recontinuance of any nonconforming use must be with the clear intent of being continuous and permanent.
5. The resumption of a nonconforming use of land shall not be permitted if such nonconforming use is superseded by a permitted use for any period of time.
6. No additional structure(s) not conforming to the requirements of this Ordinance shall be erected in connection with such nonconforming use of land.

C. Extension, Enlargement or Replacement of a Nonconforming Use

1. Except as provided for in subsections 2 through 5, no nonconforming use shall be extended, enlarged, or replaced.
2. Any single-family residential nonconforming use (which may be a manufactured home) may be enlarged or replaced with a similar single-family residential structure of the same size or of a larger size, so long as the enlargement or replacement is constructed in such a manner as to comply with the North Carolina Building Code and does not create new nonconformities or increase the extent of existing nonconformities with respect to setback requirements.

(Amended February 13, 2012)

3. A nonconforming use may be extended throughout any portion of a completed building that, when the use was made nonconforming by this Ordinance, was manifestly designed or arranged to accommodate such use. However, a nonconforming use may not be extended to additional buildings or to land outside the original building unless specifically authorized in accordance with subsection 6.
4. A nonconforming use of open land may not be extended to cover more land than was occupied by that use when it became nonconforming, except that a use that involves the removal of natural materials from the lot (e.g., a sand pit) may be expanded to the limits of the site plan upon which the mining permit was granted if ten percent or more of the natural materials had already been removed on the effective date of this Ordinance.
5. The volume, intensity, or frequency of use of property where a nonconforming use exists may be increased and the equipment or processes used at a location where a nonconforming use exists may be changed if these or similar changes amount only to changes in the degree of activity rather than changes in kind or use and no violations of other Sections of this Ordinance occur.

10-4 Nonconforming Structures

A. Continuance of Nonconforming Structure

Any nonconforming structure legally existing at the time of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance may be continued so long as it remains otherwise lawful. Such structures are encouraged to receive minor repairs and routine maintenance necessary to maintain the structure and its surroundings in a safe condition and protect against hazards.

Amended June 6, 2022

B. Conditions for Continuance

Such nonconforming structures shall be subject to the following conditions:

1. No nonconforming structure may be enlarged or altered in any way which increases its dimensional deficiencies; however, any nonconforming structure or portion thereof may be altered to

decrease its dimensional deficiencies. Any enlargement of the structure shall conform to the current dimensional requirements.

2. In the event of damage by fire or other causes to the extent exceeding 60% of its tax value prior to such damage as established by the Building Inspector, reconstruction of a nonconforming structure shall be permitted only in compliance with the dimensional provisions of this Ordinance.

Amended June 6, 2022

3. In the event of damage by fire or other causes to the extent causing less than 60% of its tax value prior to such damage as established by the Building Inspector, reconstruction of a nonconforming structure shall be permitted provided it is constructed:

- (a) In the same manner in which it originally existed subject to compliance with the requirements of the NC State Building Code; and

- (b) In compliance with the dimensional requirements.

Amended June 6, 2022

4. No nonconforming structure shall be moved or relocated unless it is made to comply with the dimensional and use requirements of the district in which it is relocated and with the requirements of the NC State Building Code.

C. Preservation of Safe or Lawful Conditions

Nothing in this Ordinance shall prevent the strengthening or restoration to a safe or lawful condition any part of any building declared unsafe or unlawful by the Building Inspector or other duly authorized official.

10-5 Miscellaneous Nonconforming Situations

A. Nonconforming Situation Resulting From Governmental Acquisition

Any lot reduced in size by municipal, city or state condemnation or purchase of land, or by land dedication of the property owner that is accepted by the City or State, shall obtain nonconforming lot or building status to the extent that said condemnation or purchase causes noncompliance with any provisions of this Ordinance.

Amended June 6, 2022

B. Nonconforming Parking & Landscaping Created By Change of Use

Whenever a change of use that does not involve the enlargement of an existing structure is proposed for a lot on which the parking and/or landscaping requirements of this Ordinance for the proposed new use cannot be met due to insufficient lot area, the proposed change of use shall not be regarded as an impermissible extension or enlargement of a

nonconforming situation. However, the permit-issuing authority shall require that the parking and/or landscaping requirements be satisfied to the extent possible utilizing the lot area that is available and may require that satellite parking space and an alternative landscaping plan be obtained.

Amended June 6, 2022

10-6 Nonconforming Projects

All nonconforming projects on which construction was begun at least 180 calendar days before the effective date of this Ordinance as well as all nonconforming projects that are at least ten percent completed in terms of the total expected cost of the project on the effective date of this Ordinance may be completed in accordance with the terms of their permits, so long as these permits were validly issued and remain unrevoked and unexpired. If a development is designed to be completed in stages, this Section shall apply only to the particular phase under construction. In addition, as provided in NCGS 160D-108, neither this Ordinance nor any amendment to it shall, without the consent of the property owner, affect any lot with respect to which a building permit has been issued pursuant to NCGS 160D-1110 prior to the enactment of the Article making the change so long as the building permit remains valid, unexpired, and unrevoked.

10-7 Nonconforming Signs

A. Continuance of Nonconforming Signs

1. Signs in existence on the effective date of this Ordinance which do not conform to the provisions of this Ordinance, but which were constructed, erected, affixed or maintained in compliance with all previous regulations, shall be regarded as nonconforming signs. Although it is not the intent of this Ordinance to encourage the continued use of nonconforming signs, nonconforming signs shall be allowed to continue and a decision as to the continued existence and use or removal of such signs shall be controlled as follows:
 - (a) No nonconforming sign shall be changed to another nonconforming sign.
 - (b) No nonconforming sign shall have any changes made in the words or symbols used or the message displayed on the sign unless the sign is specifically designed for periodic change of message.
 - (c) No nonconforming sign shall be structurally altered so as to change the shape, size, height, type or design of the sign other than to make the sign a conforming sign.

Amended June 6, 2022

- (d) No nonconforming sign shall be re-established after the activity, business or use to which it relates has been discontinued and such sign shall be removed. For nonconforming signs promoting multiple businesses or uses, this requirement shall apply when 50% or more of the

businesses or uses have ceased activity within a 24-month window of time.

Amended June 6, 2022

- (e) No nonconforming sign shall be re-established and all remains of the sign must be removed after damage or destruction, if the estimated expense of repairs exceeds 60% of the estimated total value of the sign at the time of destruction, as determined by the Building Inspector. If damaged by less than 60%, but repairs are not made within three months of the time such damage occurred, the nonconforming sign shall not be allowed to continue and must be removed.

Amended June 6, 2022

- (f) No nonconforming sign shall be relocated unless it is brought into conformance with the requirements of this Ordinance, except in the case of a condemnation or other governmental action. In such case, the sign can be relocated, provided that the new location of the sign does not create a safety concern (such as interfere with a traffic management sight triangle).

Amended June 7, 2021

- (g) Normal maintenance and repair of a nonconforming sign is permitted providing the shape, size, height, type or design of the sign is not altered.

Amended June 6, 2022

- 2. Any nonconforming sign that is structurally altered, relocated or replaced shall immediately be brought into compliance with all the provisions of this Ordinance.
- 3. Any nonconforming sign which
 - (i) is a menace to the public safety,
 - (ii) has been abandoned, or
 - (iii) which has not been properly maintained, including cleaning and painting of painted surface areas and replacement of damaged parts, shall be removed after due notice has been given by the Zoning Administrator.

B. Violations of Nonconforming Sign Provisions

The Zoning Administrator shall order the removal of any sign maintained in violation of the provisions of this Section for which removal procedures are herein prescribed, accordingly: the Zoning Administrator shall give ninety days written notice to the owner or lessee to remove the sign or to bring it into compliance with this Ordinance. If the owner or lessee fails to remove

the sign within ninety days after the ninety-day written notice has been given, the Zoning Administrator or his duly authorized representative may institute removal proceedings according to the procedures specified in NCGS 160D-404.

Amended June 7, 2021

C. Bringing Nonconforming Signs into Compliance

1. No permit for addition, expansion, new construction, or change of use on a site shall be issued by the City until any nonconforming signs on the property comply with current ordinance requirements.
2. Notwithstanding the previous subsection, a property owner may petition the Board of Adjustment to grant a deviation to allow the continued display of a legal nonconforming sign if the Board of Adjustment determines that the applicant has demonstrated the following through a quasi-judicial process:
 - a. The sign was legally established;
 - b. The sign makes a meaningful positive contribution to community appearance;
 - c. The sign is structurally sound and does not pose a danger to the public health, safety, or welfare.

Amended June 6, 2022

10-8 Nonconforming Site Features

A. Definition

A nonconforming site feature is any obstruction within a required sight distance triangle or any off-street parking, landscaping, perimeter and streetyard buffer, or screening that was lawfully established before the effective date of this Ordinance, or a subsequent amendment thereto, but does not comply with the sight distance triangle standards or the off-street parking, landscaping perimeter and streetyard buffer, or screening standards applied by this Ordinance or the subsequent amendment. The lack of required sight distance triangle, off-street parking, landscaping, perimeter or streetyard buffer, or screening also shall constitute a nonconforming site feature.

B. Continuation of Nonconforming Site Features

Nonconforming site features may be continued subject to the following limitations:

1. For development existing (or for which a vested right had been established) before the effective date of this Ordinance, nonconforming site features created by a change in regulations may continue to exist, and structures comprising such nonconforming site features may be reconstructed in accordance with the provisions in Section 10-4 if demolished or destroyed.

2. For all other nonconforming site features, no action shall be taken that increases the degree or extent of the nonconforming site feature, and no nonconforming site feature shall be extended, expanded, enlarged, or otherwise altered, unless the site feature thereafter conforms to all current requirements of this Ordinance.

C. Upgrading of Nonconforming Site Features with Substantial Remodeling of Structures

If an application is filed for a Building Permit for the remodeling of one or more structures on a site containing nonconforming site features, and the cumulative costs of any such remodeling over the past five-year period (as shown on Building Permit applications) exceeds 50 percent of the current assessed value of the structures, the nonconforming site features shall be upgraded in conjunction with the remodeling to conform to all current standards of this Ordinance.

D. Upgrading of Nonconforming Site Features with Substantial Expansion of Structures

If an application is filed for a Building Permit for the expansion of one or more structures on a site containing nonconforming site features, and the cumulative increase in such structures' floor area over the past five-year period (as shown on Building Permit applications) exceeds 50 percent of the current floor area of the structures, the nonconforming site features shall be upgraded in conjunction with the expansion to conform to the current standards of this Ordinance.

E. Upgrading of Nonconforming Site Features with Substantial Expansion of Outdoor Operations, Storage, and Display Areas

If outdoor operations, storage, and display areas are being expanded on a site containing nonconforming perimeter or streetyard buffers or screening of such outdoor areas, and the increase in the gross square footage of all such outdoor areas exceeds 50 percent of the current area used for outdoor operations, storage, and displays, the nonconforming buffers and screening shall be upgraded in conjunction with the expansion to conform to the current standards of this Ordinance.

F. Compliance to Maximum Extent Practicable

Where full compliance with the requirements of this section is precluded by a lack of sufficient developable area due to the size of the lot, the layout of existing development, or the presence of significant wetlands, floodplains, watercourses, or other significant environmental constraints on development, the applicant shall comply with the requirements of this section to the maximum extent practicable, as determined by the Planning Director.

Amended June 6, 2022