

ARTICLE 16

NONCONFORMITIES

Section 16.01 Intent.

It is the intent of this Section to provide for the regulation of legally nonconforming structures, lots of record, sites, and uses; and to specify those circumstances and conditions under which such nonconformities shall be permitted to continue. It is necessary and consistent with the regulations prescribed by this Ordinance that those nonconformities that adversely affect orderly development and the value of nearby property shall not be permitted to continue without restriction.

The regulations of this Ordinance are designed to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare by regulating the future use of land through appropriate groupings of compatible and related uses. The continued existence of nonconformities is inconsistent with the purposes of which such regulations are established, so the gradual elimination of such nonconformities is generally desirable.

The regulations of this Article and Ordinance are intended to permit such nonconformities to continue without specific limitation of time, while restricting extensive further investments that may make them more permanent. This Article is further established to:

1. Regulate the use and development of nonconforming lots; the completion, alteration, and reconstruction of nonconforming structures; the redevelopment and improvement of nonconforming sites; and the maintenance, extension, and substitution of nonconforming uses.
2. Specify the limited conditions and circumstances under which nonconformities shall be permitted to continue.
3. Establish standards for determining whether a use is nonconforming and whether a nonconforming use has ceased to occupy a particular zoning lot.
4. Recognize that certain nonconformities may not have a significant adverse impact upon nearby properties or the public health, safety, and welfare. Accordingly, this Article establishes a “preferred class” of nonconforming uses that distinguishes between nonconforming uses that are not desirable and should be eliminated, and those that may be perpetuated and improved in a manner that protects adjacent properties and the character of the district.

Section 16.02 Scope.

Except as otherwise provided in this Article, any nonconforming lot, use, site or structure lawfully existing on the effective date of this Ordinance or subsequent amendment thereto may be continued so long as it remains otherwise lawful. All nonconformities shall be encouraged to convert to conformity wherever possible and shall be required to convert to conforming status as required by this Article.

Section 16.03 Nonconforming Structures.

Nonconforming structures shall be allowed to continue after the effective date of this Ordinance or amendments thereto, subject to the following conditions:

A. Expansion Restricted.

A nonconforming structure may be altered in a manner that does not increase or intensify its nonconformity. Alterations to a nonconforming structure that would increase or intensify nonconformity shall be prohibited.

B. Normal Repairs and Maintenance.

Normal repair, maintenance or replacement of interior non-bearing walls, fixtures, wiring, plumbing or heating and cooling systems in nonconforming structures may be permitted in accordance with applicable code requirements, provided that the cost of such improvements does not exceed one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the state equalized value of the structure at the time such work is proposed.

1. If a nonconforming structure becomes physically unsafe or unlawful due to a lack of repairs and maintenance or is declared by the Chief Building Official of Sanilac County to be unsafe or unlawful by reason of physical condition, it shall not thereafter be restored, repaired or rebuilt except in conformity with the regulations of the district in which it is located.
2. This Article shall not prevent work required for compliance with the provisions of the State Construction Code enforced by the Sanilac County.

C. Buildings under Construction.

Nothing in this Article shall require a change in the plans, construction or designated use of any building or structure for which construction was lawfully begun prior to the effective date of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance, provided that such work shall be completed within 365 calendar days of the effective date.

D. Damaged or Unsafe Structures.

Nothing in this Ordinance shall prevent the reconstruction, repair or restoration and the continued use of any nonconforming structure damaged by fire, collapse, explosion, acts of God or acts of public enemy, provided that the expense of such reconstruction shall not exceed one hundred fifty percent (150%) of the state equalized value of the structure immediately prior to the damage.

1. Application for a building permit for such reconstruction shall be made within 365 calendar days of the date of such damage, and all work shall be completed within the building permit approval period.
2. The lot and damaged structure shall be adequately secured from unauthorized access to the Zoning Administrator's satisfaction. The damaged structure shall be protected against further damage from the elements.

3. Where pending insurance claims require an extension of time, the Zoning Administrator may grant one (1) extension of up to 365 calendar days, provided that the property owner submits a certification from the insurance company attesting to the delay.
4. If a nonconforming structure becomes physically unsafe or unlawful due to a lack of repairs or unsecured exposure to the elements or is declared by the Chief Building Official of Sanilac County to be unsafe or unlawful by reason of physical condition, it shall not thereafter be restored, repaired or rebuilt except in conformity with the regulations of the district in which it is located.
5. Nonconforming single-family dwellings and customary accessory structures shall be exempt from this Section, provided that application for a building permit shall be made within 365 days from the date of damage or destruction.

Section 16.04 Nonconforming Lots.

Existing lots of record that are not in compliance with the dimensional requirements of this Ordinance shall only be used, developed or improved in accordance with the following:

A. Lot Division and Combination.

A lot of record shall not be divided in a manner that would increase its nonconformity, cause an existing structure or site improvement to become nonconforming or create one or more nonconforming lots. Where possible, nonconforming lots of record shall be combined to create lots that comply with the dimensional requirements of this Ordinance.

B. Use of Nonconforming Lots.

Use of a nonconforming lot of record shall be subject to the regulations of this Ordinance for the district where it is located. In any district in which single-family dwellings are permitted, notwithstanding limitations imposed by other provisions of this Ordinance, a single-family dwelling and customary accessory structures may be erected on any single lot of record at the effective date of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance.

1. This provision shall apply even though such lot fails to meet the requirements for minimum lot area or lot width generally applicable in the district.
2. Use of a nonconforming lot shall conform to all other yard dimensions and other use and dimensional standards for the district in which such lot is located.
3. Public water and sanitary sewer service shall be provided to the dwelling.

Section 16.05 Nonconforming Sites.

The purpose of this Section is to encourage improvements to existing sites in the City that were developed before the site design standards of this Ordinance were established or amended. This Section establishes standards for prioritizing improvements to existing sites that are intended to gradually bring the site into compliance with current Ordinance standards.

Nonconforming sites may be improved or modified without a complete upgrade of all site elements, subject to the following conditions:

1. A nonconforming site shall not be improved or modified in a manner that increases its nonconformity.
2. The proposed site improvements shall resolve public safety deficiencies, pedestrian/vehicle conflicts, and improve emergency access.
3. The proposed site improvements shall address at least two (2) of the standards specified in Section 12.01L (Standards for Site Plan Approval).
4. The scope of any additional site improvements requested by the Planning Commission shall be in reasonable proportion to the scale and construction cost of proposed building improvements, expansions or other improvements.
5. A reasonable timeline for completion of site improvements to an existing nonconforming site may be approved as part of any plan approval. Failure to complete improvements in accordance with an approved timeline shall be deemed a violation of this Ordinance.

Section 16.06 Nonconforming Uses.

All nonconforming uses that have been designated as “preferred class” by City action shall not be subject to the requirements of this Section, but rather shall be subject to the provisions of Section 16.07 (Preferred Class Designations). Nonconforming uses not designated as “preferred class” shall be allowed to continue after the effective date of this Ordinance or amendments thereto, subject to the following:

A. Compliance with Other Applicable Standards.

Nonconforming uses shall be maintained in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, regulations and codes, other than the specific use regulations for the zoning district where the use is located.

1. The owner, operator or person having beneficial use of land or structures occupied by a nonconforming use shall be responsible for demonstrating compliance with this requirement.
2. Failure to do so, or failure to bring the use into compliance with current laws, ordinances, regulations and codes within 180 days of their effective date, shall constitute grounds for the City to seek court approval to terminate or remove the use at the owner’s expense.

B. Expansion Prohibited.

Nonconforming uses shall not be enlarged, increased in intensity, extended to occupy a greater area of land or floor area or moved in whole or in part to any other portion of the lot or structure.

C. Cessation.

A nonconforming use that ceases for a period of more than 365 calendar days or is superseded by a conforming use shall not be resumed. If a structure associated with a nonconforming use is removed or damaged by any means to an extent that the repair cost exceeds the state equalized value of the property, the nonconformity shall be deemed removed. All subsequent uses shall conform to the use provisions of this Ordinance.

Section 16.07 Preferred Class Designations.

It is the intent of this Section to establish a “preferred class” designation that the Planning Commission may approve for certain nonconforming uses, subject to the following:

A. Procedure.

The procedure for considering all preferred class nonconforming designations shall be as follows:

1. **Application.** Applications for consideration of a preferred class designation for a nonconforming use may be initiated by the owner, operator or person having beneficial use of the lot occupied by the nonconforming use. The application shall include a detailed description of the use and the reasons for the request.
2. **Public hearing.** A public hearing shall be held for all requests for a preferred class nonconforming designation in accordance with the procedures set forth in Section 12.03 (Public Hearing Procedures).

B. Conditions for Approval of a Preferred Class Designation.

Subsequent to a public hearing, the Planning Commission may grant a preferred class designation upon finding that all of the following conditions exist:

1. **Use standards.**
 - a. The nonconformity does not significantly depress the value of nearby properties.
 - b. The use does not adversely impact the public health, safety, and welfare.
 - c. The use does not adversely impact the purpose of the district where it is located.
 - d. No useful purpose would be served by the strict application of Ordinance requirements that apply to the nonconformity.
2. **Signage.** The Planning Commission may require that signage associated with the use be brought into compliance with Article 9 (Signs).
3. **Plan for site improvements.** The Planning Commission may require that a site plan be submitted for review per Section 12.01 (Site Plan Review), which

addresses the site improvement priorities listed in Section 16.05 (Nonconforming Sites).

4. **Other conditions.** The Planning Commission may attach conditions to the approval to assure that the use does not become contrary to the purpose of this Article and Ordinance; or to the public health, safety, and welfare.

C. Effect of Approval of a Preferred Class Designation.

Preferred class nonconformities may perpetuate and expand in accordance with an approved site plan, subject to the provisions of this Section, and any conditions of approval. Preferred class nonconforming structures may be perpetuated, expanded, improved or rebuilt if damaged or destroyed, in accordance with an approved site plan and subject to the provisions of this Section and any conditions of approval.

D. Effect of Denial of a Preferred Class Designation.

An application for a preferred class designation that has been denied by the Planning Commission may not be appealed to the Zoning Board of Appeals, but may be resubmitted for Planning Commission consideration after a minimum of 365 calendar days have elapsed from the date of denial.

E. Cessation of Preferred Class Nonconforming Uses.

The preferred class designation shall be deemed removed when the principal structure occupied by a preferred class nonconforming use is permanently removed or when a preferred class nonconforming use is replaced by a conforming use. All subsequent uses shall conform to the use provisions of this Ordinance.

F. Rescinding Approval of a Preferred Class Designation.

Failure of the owner, operator or person having beneficial use of a lot occupied by a preferred class nonconforming use to maintain or improve the site in accordance with the provisions of this Section, an approved site plan or any conditions of approval shall be grounds for the Planning Commission to rescind the preferred class designation. Such action shall be subject to the following.

1. **Public hearing.** Such action may be taken only after a public hearing has been held in accordance with the procedures set forth in Section 12.03 (Public Hearing Procedures), at which time the owner, operator or person having beneficial use occupied by a preferred class nonconforming use shall be given an opportunity to present evidence in opposition to rescission.
2. **Determination.** Subsequent to the hearing, the decision of the Commission with regard to the rescinding of approval shall be made and written notification provided to said owner, operator or person having beneficial use occupied by a preferred class nonconforming use.

G. Existing Dwellings in Non-Residential Districts.

Single-family dwellings so existing and used in non-residential zoning districts before the effective date of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance are hereby designated as preferred class nonconforming uses. Such dwellings and accessory structures may be used, repaired, expanded, altered or replaced if destroyed, subject to the following:

1. Use, repair, expansion, alteration, or replacement of the dwelling or accessory structures shall conform to all applicable dimensional and use standards of the R (Single-Family Residential) District.
2. The use, dwelling, and accessory structures shall be maintained in conformance with all other applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, regulations, and rules.

Section 16.08 Nonconforming Use Determinations.

This Section is intended to provide reasonable standards for determining whether a use is nonconforming and whether a nonconforming use has been removed, discontinued or otherwise ceased to occupy the land or structure in question. The Zoning Administrator shall be responsible for determining whether a use is conforming, nonconforming or unlawful in the zoning district where it is located. When there is a question or dispute about the status of a particular use, such determinations shall be made by the Zoning Board of Appeals, subject to the following:

A. Standards for Determining that a Use is Nonconforming.

The Zoning Board of Appeals shall determine that a use is nonconforming upon finding that the following three (3) statements are true:

1. **The use does not conform to the purpose and use regulations of the district where it is located.**
2. **The use is in compliance with all other applicable federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, regulations, and codes.**
3. **Evidence from a minimum of three (3) of the following sources demonstrates that the use was lawfully established prior to the effective date of adoption or amendment of this Ordinance:**
 - a. Local, county or state government files or records, including, but not limited to permits, inspection reports, dated photographs or notarized statements of government officials, agents, representatives or employees.
 - b. Dated telephone directories or similar dated records that provide information about the occupants or uses located on a street by address or lot number.
 - c. Utility records, including, but not limited to providers of water, sewer, electric, natural gas or telecommunications service.

- d. Dated advertising or other information published in a newspaper or magazine, including, but not limited to advertisements, articles, features or photographs that address the use of the land in question.
- e. Dated aerial photos from the State of Michigan, Sanilac County or other sources accepted by the Zoning Board of Appeals.
- f. Other relevant information, including, but not limited to date-stamped photographs, diary or log entries, affidavits or notarized statements.

B. Standards for Determining that a Nonconforming Use has Ceased.

The Zoning Board of Appeals shall determine that a nonconforming use has been removed, discontinued or otherwise ceased to occupy the land or structure in question upon finding that a minimum of three (3) of the following six (6) statements are true:

- 1. **Local, county or state government files or records show that the nonconforming use has ceased.** Such evidence may include, but shall not be limited to permits, inspection reports, dated photographs or notarized statements of government officials, agents, representatives or employees.
- 2. **Dated telephone directories or similar dated records that provide information about the occupants or uses located on a street by address or lot number, show that the nonconforming use has ceased.** Such evidence may include, but shall not be limited to entries that show the address associated with the use as vacant or occupied by another use, show the telephone number associated with the use as disconnected or in use at another location.
- 3. **Utility records, including, but not limited to providers of water, sewer, electric, natural gas or telecommunications service, show that the nonconforming use has ceased.** Such evidence may include, but shall not be limited to records indicating that the address of the use is vacant or occupied by another use, the utility service associated with the use has been disconnected or the business, organization or individual associated with the use has moved to another location.
- 4. **Dated advertising or other information published in a newspaper or magazine show that the nonconforming use has ceased.** Such evidence may include, but shall not be limited to advertisements, articles, features or photographs that address the use of the land in question.
- 5. **Dated aerial photos from State of Michigan, Sanilac County or other sources as accepted by the Zoning Board of Appeals show that the nonconforming use has ceased.**
- 6. **Other relevant information shows that the nonconforming use has ceased.** Such evidence may include, but shall not be limited to date-stamped photographs, diary or log entries, affidavits or notarized statements.

Section 16.09 Unlawful Uses.

Any use that is not a conforming use in the district where it is located or determined to be a nonconforming use, shall be considered an unlawful use established in violation of this Ordinance.

Section 16.10 Change of Tenancy or Ownership.

There may be a change of tenancy, ownership or management of any existing nonconforming lot, structure, site or use, provided that there is no change in the nature or character of the nonconformity.

Section 16.11 Recording of Nonconforming Uses.

The Zoning Administrator shall prepare and keep a record of all known nonconforming uses in the City, which shall include the names and addresses of the owners of record and any occupants, the legal description of the zoning lot occupied by the use, and the nature and extent of use.

Section 16.12 Cessation of Nonconformities by City Action.

The elimination of nonconforming structures and uses shall be considered to be for a public purpose and for a public use. The City may acquire private property by purchase, condemnation or other means for the removal of nonconforming uses. The cost of acquiring the private property may be paid from general funds or assessed to a special district, as provided in the City and Village Zoning Act (P.A. 207 of 1921, as amended). The City Council may institute proceedings for condemnation of nonconforming uses and structures under the power of eminent domain in accordance with applicable Michigan statutes.

