

**POLK COUNTY  
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE  
STAFF REPORT**

<b>DRC Date:</b> January 29, 2026	<b>Level of Review:</b> 4
<b>PC Date:</b> March 4, 2026	<b>Type:</b> LDC Text Amendment
<b>BoCC Date:</b> April 7, 2026	<b>Case Numbers:</b> LDCT-2025-29
April 21, 2026	<b>Case Name:</b> Storage Yards
<b>Applicant:</b> Polk County	<b>Case Planner:</b> Erik Peterson, AICP

<b>Request:</b>	An LDC text amendment Chapter 2, Section 205, Table 2.1, adding a storage yard land use category; Chapter 3 Conditional Uses, Section 303, Criteria For Conditional Uses, adding conditions for storage yards; Chapter 4, Section 401.02, Table 4.3, Use Table For Standard Land Use Districts for the Ronald Reagan Selected Area Plan and Section 401.08, Table 4.01.08.01, Use Table for Southeast Polk Selected Area Plan adding a storage yard land use category; Chapter 10, Definitions, defining Storage Yards to allow for the outdoor storage of raw materials and finished goods as a primary use of property; providing for severability; providing an effective date.
<b>Location:</b>	n/a
<b>Property Owner:</b>	n/a
<b>Parcel Size (Number):</b>	n/a
<b>Development Area:</b>	n/a
<b>Nearest Municipality:</b>	n/a
<b>DRC Recommendation:</b>	Approval
<b>Planning Commission Vote:</b>	Pending Hearing

**The changes to Chapter 2, Section 205, Table 2.1, Use Table for Standard Land Use Districts are:**

- Addition of Storage Yards as a C2 (Level 2 Conditional Use) in Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2).

**The changes to Chapter 3, Section 303, Criteria for Conditional Uses are:**

- Add a Category for Storage Yards.
- Require Type “A” buffer along all rights-of-way, 25-foot right-of-way setback, and a 6-foot opaque fence along rights-of-way.
- Require a 100-foot setback, 6-foot opaque fence, and Type “C” buffer when abutting residential land use districts or residentially developed properties.
- Require a Type I intersection with a 50-foot radius at a minimum for access from a public road.
- Require entrance gates to be setback a minim of 80 feet from the right-of-way.
- Prohibit junk or distressed vehicles and waste or scrap materials.
- Require any bulk materials to be stored in containers.

**The changes to Chapter 4, Special Districts are:**

- Addition of Storage Yards as a C2 (Level 2 Conditional Use) in Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2) in the Ronald Reagan Parkway and Southeast Polk Selected Area Plans.

**The changes to Chapter 10, Definitions are:**

- Add a definition for Storage Yard.

## **Summary:**

Outdoor storage of vehicles, equipment, or materials is treated only as an accessory to other uses in the LDC. It is listed under Section 206.O and requires that the property be developed with a primary use with the storage being incidental and subordinate. This limits the amount of a property that can be dedicated to open storage to less than the area consumed by the primary use. Many businesses have sought vacant property in the County where vehicles such as construction trailers or goods such as drainage pipes could be stored for periods of time before they are deployed to other sites where they will be put in use. Staff have set out to create a category dedicated to the open storage of operable vehicles, equipment, machinery, or the storage of finished products and materials where there is no other use of the property. This new land use category will enable vacant industrial properties to become financially beneficial in a temporary or longer period. It will enable public infrastructure providers a place to stage projects and store materials for maintenance of utilities, drainage, and roadways. This new land use recommendation includes standards and conditions to ensure that such facilities do not become eyesores, cause damage to infrastructure, or evolve into other more undesirable uses in locations where they may not be compatible with surrounding uses.

## **Data and Analysis Summary**

There are benefits to allowing vacant industrial land to be temporarily used for the storage of materials and equipment because they can generate revenue for the owners and benefit other businesses by providing more efficient and less costly means of equipment and material storage. However, there should be guardrails in place to prevent unintentional consequences such as aesthetic decline and damage to infrastructure.

Staff have reviewed the land development regulations of 12 similar or abutting counties and Polk's two largest cities for how they regulate open storage of materials. Staff have identified properties in other jurisdictions that are dedicated to storage of materials and equipment. The majority of the jurisdictions surveyed have standalone designations for storage yards, and they are almost always limited to the most intense industrial districts. The recommended conditions and standards are consistent with the same requirements of these other jurisdictions.

This amendment applies to Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2) Future Land Use Map districts which are outside of the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern. Therefore, this amendment does not require a 45-day review by the Florida Commerce department.

Staff have reviewed sections of the Comprehensive Plan and Florida laws pertaining to the open storage of vehicles, equipment, or materials. There are no conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan or Florida Statutes in the implementation of this amendment. POLICY 2.113-A4: DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA for the IND district of the Comprehensive Plan does not specify restrictions on open storage. Neither does POLICY 2.116-A4: DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA for INST districts. These Policies are included in the Findings of Fact for reference.

## Findings of Fact

1. *The request is a Land Development Code text amendment to Chapter 2, Section 205, Table 2.1, Chapter 3 Conditional Uses, Section 303, Criteria for Conditional Uses, Chapter 10, Definitions, to allow, guide, and define a primary use category for the outdoor storage of vehicles, equipment, and materials.*
2. *This amendment applies to Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2) Future Land use Map districts outside of the Green Swamp and Selected Area Plans.*
3. *POLICY 2.113-A4: DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA for Industrial districts of the Comprehensive Plan states, "Development within an Industrial area shall conform to the following criteria:*
  - a. *Permitted uses include facilities for the processing, fabrication, manufacturing, recycling, bulk material storage, and distribution of goods, disposal yards, and limited retail commercial in accordance with Policy 2.113-A4.b. Other non-residential uses that produce significant amounts of noise, odor, vibration, dust, and lighting on and off-site may be permitted within an industrial district through conditional approval. Permitted uses also include any use found within a Business-Park Center.*
  - b. *Retail commercial uses within an industrial area shall be sized for the purpose of serving just the employees of, and visitors to, the industrial area, and shall be limited to a scale appropriate for that purpose. The maximum floor area ratio for commercial uses within an industrial area shall not exceed 0.25.*
  - c. *Industrial sites shall be designed to provide for:*
    1. *adequate parking to meet the demands of the use; and*
    2. *buffering where the effects of lighting, noise, odors, and other such factors would adversely affect adjacent land uses. Parking lots, loading areas, dumpsters, utilities and air conditioning units, signage, etc., are examples of facilities which may require special buffering provisions.*
  - d. *The maximum floor area ratio for non-commercial uses within an Industrial area shall not exceed 0.75 in the TSDA, 0.65 in the UGA, 0.50 in the SDA, and 0.50 in the RDA, unless developed as a Planned Development.*
  - e. *Retail sale of goods manufactured on the site of a business located within an Industrial area is allowed provided the operation is incidental and subordinate to the manufacturing activity conducted on site and does not exceed eight percent (8%) of the total floor area or 15,000 square feet, whichever is the lesser.*
  - f. *Where centralized water or wastewater services are not available, the maximum impervious surface ratio shall be reduced to afford better protection and function of well and septic tank systems and as required if within a Nutrient Restoration Plan Overlay.*
  - g. *Planned Developments within the Industrial district may be permitted a maximum floor area ratio up to 1.5 for innovative and attractive employment centers. Intensity increases shall be reserved for those uses that provide substantial economic income opportunities for the County and its residents. Intensity increases shall only be granted to parcels within the TSDA and UGA. The Land Development Code shall establish development standards and criteria for Planned Developments within the Industrial district.*
  - h. *Industrial districts shall be separated from existing schools and developed residential areas through physical separation, screening, buffering, or a combination thereof, consistent with the standards in the County's Land Development Code."*
  - i. *Workforce housing for unaccompanied workers in barrack, dormitory, or apartment units under specific design parameters listed in the Land Development Code not to*

*exceed an intensity of thirty-two (32) workers per acre or the limitations established by the Department of Health for water and wastewater usage, whichever allowed intensity is the lesser.*

4. *POLICY 2.116-A4: DEVELOPMENT CRITERIA for Institutional districts of the Comprehensive Plan states, "Institutional development shall conform to the following criteria:*
  - a. *Institutional uses include, but are not limited to: private and public-service structures. These commonly include:*
    1. *public and private educational facilities;*
    2. *government-administration buildings;*
    3. *public-safety structures (e.g. police and fire);*
    4. *cultural facilities (e.g. libraries, museums, and performing-arts theaters);*
    5. *health-care facilities e.g. hospitals, medical centers, clinics, nursing homes, adult day care centers, group homes, group living facilities, emergency shelters, residential treatment facilities .*
  - b. *Large institutional areas should be designed so that the more intensive uses are at the center of the development, with less intensive uses near the fringes.*
  - c. *Prior to site planning, the School Board, independent special districts and other governmental entities shall communicate to one another to pursue potential colocation of government services.*
  - d. *Commercial uses within institutional areas mapped on the Future Land Use Map Series shall be primarily for the purpose of serving the institutions within the area and shall be limited to a scale appropriate for that purpose.*
  - e. *Institutional sites shall be designed to provide for:*
    1. *Adequate parking to meet the present and future demands of the use.*
    2. *Buffering where the effects of lighting, noise, odors, and other such factors would adversely affect adjacent land uses. Parking lots, loading areas, dumpsters, utilities and air conditioning units, signage, etc. are examples of facilities which may require special buffering provisions.*
  - f. *Multi-family residential uses may be permitted at densities up to and including 15 dwelling units per acre as part of a Planned Development. Residential uses may be permitted according to the following:*
    1. *Residential uses shall only be established adjacent to or in conjunction with a university, college, vocational school or other similar educational institution.*
    2. *Residential development shall be intended to primarily meet the housing needs for students and facility members of the nearby educational institution*
  - g. *Recreational uses accessory to the institutional use or compatible with the location of the institutional district."*
8. *Planning staff have reviewed the land development requirements of 12 central Florida counties that bear commonalities with Polk and the two largest municipalities in the County. Staff found that nine (9) of the 14 jurisdictions list outdoor storage or storage yards as a principal use.*
9. *Of the 14 central Florida jurisdictions surveyed by staff, nine (9) required a six-foot opaque fence or better for screening for rights-of-way and residential between storage yards. Three required additional setbacks from rights-of-way. Two required additional setbacks from residential.*
10. *Impact fees will not be assessed for storage yards unless there are structures constructed.*

## **Development Review Committee Recommendation:**

The Land Development Division, based on the information provided with the proposed text amendment application, finds that the proposed text change request is **CONSISTENT** with the Polk County Land Development Code and the Polk County Comprehensive Plan. Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of LDCT-2025-29.

## **Analysis**

### **Demonstration of Need for the Amendment**

The Land Development Code (LDC) became effective September 1, 2000, and the Zoning Ordinance was repealed. Storage yards were permitted uses listed in Heavy Commercial (C-4) and General Industrial (GI) in the former zoning ordinance. With the adoption of the new LDC, the Board went away from open storage without a primary use established on a property. For 25 years, staff have deterred property owners from using vacant property only for storing equipment, machinery, products, or materials. There have even been code citations issued for it. This amendment will reverse direction on this practice but ensure that it is conducted in a safe and desirable way without detriment to the general public or County infrastructure.

Absorption of industrial properties takes a long time. Development of industrial parks spans decades. There are multiple factors that influence the demand for industrial property such as access to the needed utilities (water, wastewater, electric power, natural gas, fiber-optic cable, etc.), national and international economic conditions, and labor supply (quantity and quality). This is not so much the case in residential and commercial development, which is primarily driven by population growth. There are benefits to allowing vacant industrial land to be temporarily used for the storage of materials and equipment because they can generate revenue for the land holder during periods of low demand. It also benefits existing businesses by enabling them to use more of their primary site(s) for business activity and structures rather than compromising them with large portions dedicated to idle storage.

There can be downsides to allowing land to be used for idle storage of materials. They can easily become eyesores if not properly designed and maintained. Storage yards should be held to certain standards such as screening from common public view, protections for interface with abutting residential property, and protection of public infrastructure. Therefore, setbacks, screening, buffering, and sustainable access to public roads are necessities. There should also be guardrails in place to separate them from more intense and obtrusive uses such as salvage yards and aggregate storage. With proper standards in place, this amendment will be a benefit to businesses without detriment to County infrastructure or aesthetic.

### **Recommended Changes**

Staff recommend that there be only two districts where storage yards are permissible: Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2). Storage yards for public purposes are enabled by allowing it in INST-2 districts where the more intensive government uses are permitted. Policies in the Comprehensive Plan specifically limit and restrict outdoor storage in Business Park Center (BPC) and commercial districts. In those districts, outdoor storage is only allowed as accessory to another primary use.

It is important to prevent storage yards from becoming unsightly eyesores, so conditions are recommended to partially screen the yards and provide a more subtle appearance from roadways. Therefore, a 25-foot setback along with the standard roadway landscaping buffer and a 6-foot opaque fence are recommended. It is rare that IND districts directly abut residential areas. But when and if

they do, a more stringent buffering standard should apply as well as substantial setback distance. That is why staff recommends 100 feet of separation.

It is anticipated that the vast majority of what will be stored in these yards is large and heavy. Access and entrances should be designed and equipped to handle large vehicles and heavy loads. That is why a larger turning radius on the driveway entrance is recommended along with enough space so that a semi-tractor trailer can fully exit the right-of-way before stopping to unlock the gates that secure the site.

Strict limitations on the types of materials and equipment stored onsite are necessary to separate these uses from other more noxious land uses. Prohibitions on waste, scrap, and other discarded materials are specified. Bulk materials are only permitted if contained within containers either fixed or mobile ones.

### **Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Amendment**

#### *Who does it help?*

This amendment directly benefits landowners of industrial properties that are currently underutilized. It will provide them with the ability to earn rental income while awaiting a future industrial user. That extra income can potentially be applied towards paying for utility extensions to the sites so that they can attract a broader spectrum of industrial users. This can provide the County with more viable industrial properties for better economic development. This amendment provides for potential business expansions. It will allow existing business locations to expand their onsite operations by moving longer term storage of materials and equipment offsite. Collectively this amendment creates a more versatile business market.

#### *Who does it hurt?*

Indiscriminate outdoor storage of equipment and materials can lead to economic decline by fostering an appearance of blight upon a community. That is why this amendment comes with strict conditions for mitigating such adverse effects.

#### *What is the cost?*

Indiscriminate outdoor storage of equipment and materials can result in damage to public infrastructure if proper access and drainage are not required. The transport of heavy equipment and materials on and offsite must be accounted for in the design and construction of storage yards. This amendment has made a priority of proper access and protection of public infrastructure.

### **Regulatory History**

The first zoning ordinance (Ord. 1970-03) provided minimal directions to the use of industrial property. Overtime amendments were added to address industrial development behavior with such ordinances as Ord. 1971-08, which addressed setbacks and buffering of industrial uses and Ord. 1972-02 the first disposal yard ordinance that retroactively applied to existing salvage yards and solid waste management facilities at the time it was adopted.

In 1983, an entirely new zoning ordinance was adopted with many more specific land use categories. It specifically calls out Storage Yards in the Heavy Commercial (C-4) and General Industrial (GI) districts. With the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in 1991, storage yards became more limited

because of overriding development policies where C-4 and GI districts fell under BPC or commercial classifications in the plan. When the LDC was adopted in 2000, outdoor storage was only allowed in conjunction with other primary uses on a property.

### Limits of the Proposed Ordinance

This amendment applies to only Industrial (IND) and Institutional-2 (INST-2) districts. IND accounts for 0.72% of the total County area and INST-2 is only 0.59%. In the unincorporated area, IND is 0.84% and INST-2 is 0.69%. There are very few locations where IND abuts residential designated property. Where it occurs, the abutting residential area is typically unbuildable due to physical environmental limitations. There are some areas in which residential and IND districts are separated by roadways or railroad tracks.

There are no IND or INST-2 districts currently in the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern and the Comprehensive Plan does not allow for new ones created either. Therefore, there is no 45-day review by the Florida Commerce Community Planning Department Areas of Critical State Concern Program.

### Comparisons to other Jurisdictions

Staff commonly survey counties along the I-4 corridor for regulatory comparisons because they are most closely similar to Polk. Some of the abutting counties are reviewed along with the two largest cities within the County (Lakeland and Winter Haven). Alachua and Duval counties are also reviewed because of similar demographic and urban-rural mixtures to Polk County. This method of selection creates a survey of 14 total local jurisdictions. Polk County has a rare form of land use regulation with its direct connection between the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map and the zoning of use and structure types.

**Table 1**

<b>Jurisdiction</b> <i>(Code citation)</i>	<b>Are storage yards a standalone use?</b> <b>If so, what districts?</b>	<b>What development standards and conditions are required?</b>
<b>Alachua County</b> <i>Section 404.83</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Heavy Industrial (MS and MP) Administrative approval in MS BoCC approval in MP	Minimum 25-foot setback from all rights-of-way. Enclosed by a solid fence or wall not less than six (6) feet high.
<b>Brevard County</b> <i>62-1540 - 62-1544</i>	No. Even Industrial requires there to be buildings.	All storage requires a 6-foot-tall opaque fence.
<b>Duval County</b> <i>Section 656.322 &amp; 656.323</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Light Industrial Heavy Industrial	All storage requires a 6-foot-tall opaque fence.
<b>Hardee County</b> <i>Sec. 2.18.00</i>	No. All outdoor storage must be to the side or rear of buildings.	All outdoor storage shall be screened from off-site view.
<b>Highlands County</b> <i>Section 12.05.252</i>	Limited. Contractors Yard and storage of specific materials in Heavy Industrial (I-2) district	Same as for all industrial uses.
<b>Hillsborough County</b> <i>Section 2.02.02, 6.11.123</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Intensive Commercial (CI) and Manufacturing (M) districts and limited to agriculture equipment in agricultural districts	Same as for all industrial uses.
<b>Lake County</b> <i>Sec. 3.01.04.24</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Heavy Industrial (HM)	100-foot setback from residential districts. Also, screened from right-of-way or adjacent Parcels, Soil-like materials that generate dust shall be located in three-sided walled enclosures that are a minimum of ten (10) feet in height. The opening of the enclosure Shall

**Table 1**

Jurisdiction <i>(Code citation)</i>	Are storage yards a standalone use? If so, what districts?	What development standards and conditions are required?
		not be visible from rights-of-way or adjacent parcels.
<b>Manatee County</b> <i>Section 401, 531.36</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Outdoor Storage (Principal Use) General Commercial District (GC), Heavy Commercial District (HC), Light Manufacturing District (LM), Heavy Manufacturing District (HM)	Screened from the rights-of-way and adjacent property. Such screening shall be done with a solid fence or wall six (6) foot in height in industrial zoning districts, and eight (8) feet in height in commercial zoning districts.
<b>Orange County</b> <i>Section 38-1356</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Storage Yards Wholesale Commercial (C-3), Industrial I-1,2,3,4, &5 agriculture equipment in agricultural districts	Outdoor storage of articles, goods or materials shall not be permitted unless totally screened from right-of-way and adjacent properties. Display areas shall not be visible from the right-of-way or adjacent properties
<b>Osceola County</b> <i>Chapter 3, Article 3.9</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Industrial Restricted (IR), Industrial General (IG), Industrial Manufacturing (IM)	Open storage of stacked materials shall not exceed twenty (20) feet in height. Stacked material over ten (10) feet in height shall be set back fifty feet (50') from the perimeter boundary line. Entire site shall be contained within a solid fence, wall or opaque buffer a minimum ten (10) feet in height.
<b>Seminole County</b> <i>Sec. 30.14.9</i>	No.	Where outdoor storage, exterior equipment operation, or material handling abuts a residential district or is visible from a public right-of-way, an increase in opacity by 0.2 and a berm or evergreen hedge of sufficient height ensure that stored material is not visible shall be required as part of the applicable district boundary or street buffer.
<b>Volusia County</b> <i>Section 72-241</i>	No.	None
<b>City of Lakeland</b> <i>Sec. 5.15, and 2.3</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Industrial districts only. (I-1, I-2, I-3)	20-foot setback, screening and Type "A" buffer. 20-foot height limit, no goods intended for indoor use.
<b>City of Winter Haven</b> <i>Sec. 21-32, 21-92</i>	<b>Yes.</b> Heavy Commercial and Industrial Districts Contractor storage yard C-4, I-2, I-2 Petroleum and bulk storage I-2, I-2 Septic Tank storage I-2, I-2 Storage of sand/gravel/blocks I-2, I-2	6-foot fence or wall between roadways and residential districts.

Nine of the 14 jurisdictions in this survey list storage yards as a standalone use in their zoning and land use ordinances. All nine are allowed in industrial districts. Four of them allow them in heavy commercial districts. All nine requires either opaque fence or screening. Right-of-way setbacks varied among the nine. Three required setbacks of 20 feet or greater. Two of the jurisdictions limit the height of stored items. This seems impractical in the County’s IND district given the types of items could potentially be stored in them.

**Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan**

This amendment is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan because neither Industrial (IND) policies in Section 2.113-A nor Institutional policies in Section 2.116 have prohibitions or limitations on outdoor storage. However, POLICY 2.113-B-4.h regarding Business Park Center (BPC) states “Outdoor storage shall be screened from off-site view and significantly limited in respect to the floor area provided within enclosed structures.” This is why this is not proposed in BPC-1 or BPC-2 districts. Industrial district POLICY 2.113-A4.a states “Permitted uses include facilities for the processing, fabrication, manufacturing, recycling, **bulk material storage**, and distribution of goods,

*disposal yards, and limited retail commercial in accordance with Policy 2.113-A4.b. Other non-residential uses that produce significant amounts of noise, odor, vibration, dust, and lighting on and off-site may be permitted within an industrial district through conditional approval.”*

**Consistency with the Florida Statutes**

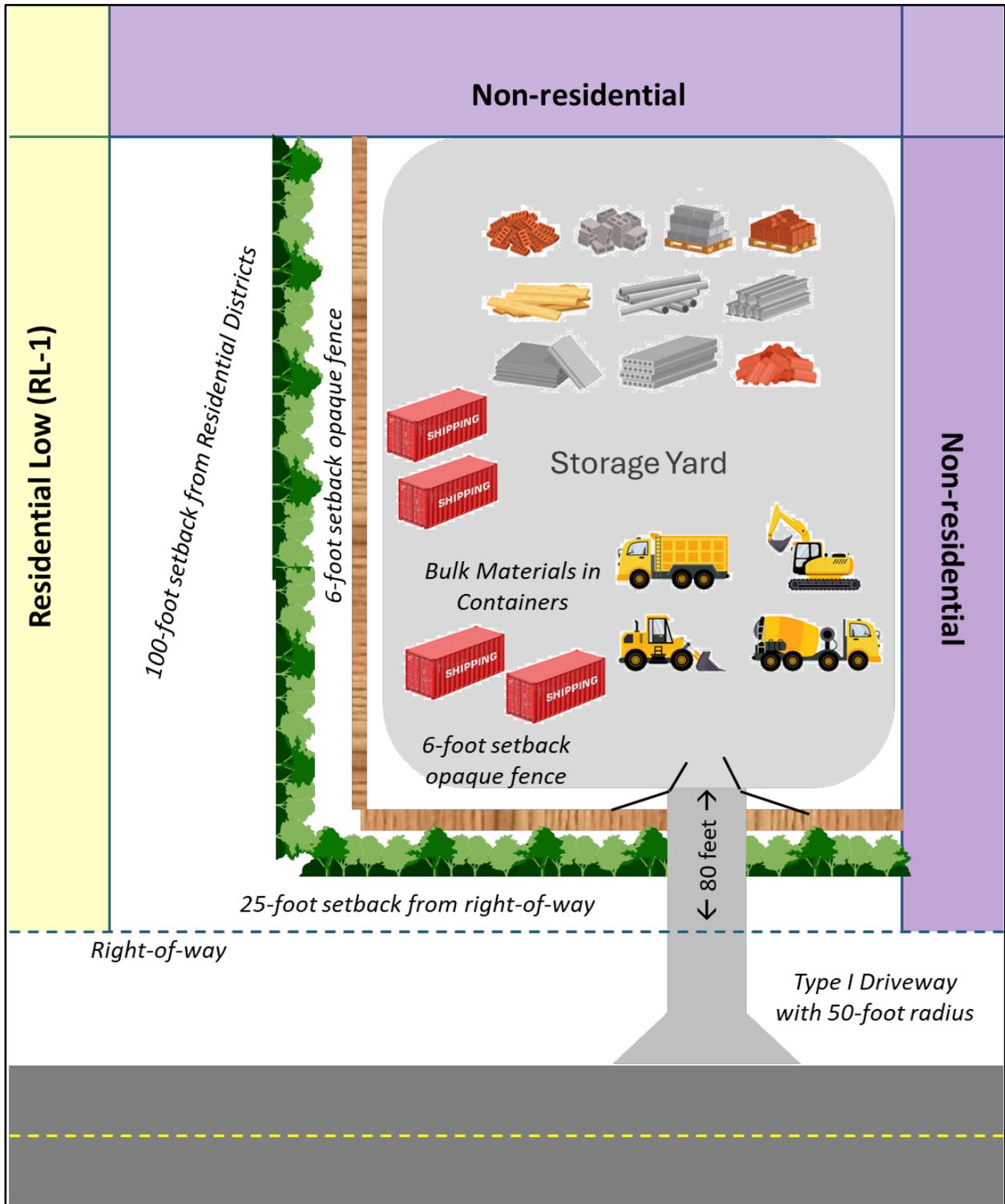
The Florida Statutes addresses many types of outdoor storage specifically addressing certain items such as petroleum, billboards, chemicals, and hazardous materials. They do not directly conflict with this proposed amendment. These laws will still apply regardless of the County ordinances.

**Comments from Other Agencies:** None.

**Exhibits**

Exhibit 1 – Outdoor Storage Standards Infographic

**Draft Ordinance:** under separate attachment



# Outdoor Storage Standards Infographic