



# Fence and Wall Placement

## Q1. I want to put up a fence on my property. Do I need the City's approval?

A1. Yes. A zoning permit is required for fences and walls that are higher than 30 inches. A site plan (overhead view) is also required. The site plan must show the exact locations and dimensions of all property lines, existing buildings, driveways, streets and alleys, and the proposed location and height(s) of the fence.

If your property is located in an historic district, the fence must also be approved by the City's Historic Preservation Officer. Both the zoning permit and historic preservation review can be done at the Planning Department. The zoning permit fee is \$22. If all the necessary information is provided, a fence permit review can usually be done while you wait.

## Q2. Why does the Zoning Ordinance regulate fences?

A2. The Zoning Ordinance ensures that fences will be properly placed on the property and maintain "clear vision areas" at street and driveway corners.

## Q3. Are there height limits for fences?

A3. Yes, the maximum height of a fence or wall ranges from 30 inches to 6 feet, depending on whether it is located in the front, side or rear yard, whether the fence could obstruct the view of motorists and pedestrians, and whether the fence material is solid or open. See the illustrations on the back of this information sheet.

## Q4. What's a solid fence and what's an open fence?

A4. A solid fence is one constructed of materials that block the passage of light. (Also known as an "opaque" fence.) Chain link, wrought iron and certain picket or board fences are considered open fences. For a picket or board fence to be considered an open fence, the boards and spaces between the boards must be of equal width.

## Q5. How high can a fence be in my rear or side yards?

A5. The maximum height of a fence in the rear or side yards is 6 feet, and can be either a solid or open fence. **There is an exception for side yards on certain properties!**

**Exception:** If the front yard of your property is 10 feet or less in depth (measured from the front property line to the front of your house), the first 5 feet of the side yards must meet the front yard height and materials requirements. *This can be tricky, so please consult with Planning staff before making any decisions!*

## Q6. How high can a fence be in my front yard?

A6. A solid fence may be up to 3 feet high. An open fence may be up to 4 feet high. Corner lots must comply with front yard fence requirements for the yards facing a street.

Fences in front yards must also comply with clear vision area requirements at street and driveway intersections. A fence in a clear vision area cannot be higher than 30 inches.

## Q7. Are there restrictions on the type of materials I may use?

A7. Yes. Ornamental metal, rot-resistant wood or other high quality, durable materials must be used for fences. The following fence materials are prohibited: slats in chain link fences, recycled materials, and any kind of barbed, razor, concertina, electrified or similar wire. Chain link is prohibited in front yards.

Masonry, clay, brick, stone or other appropriate materials must be used for walls.

Note - The finished side of the fence must face outward toward adjacent properties and the right-of-way. Fences must be maintained in good condition.

## Q8. Can the fence be at the property line?

A8. Yes, except at the street. Fences must be set back 1 foot from the street right-of-way. Determine the exact location of the property line to avoid conflicts with your neighbors. If you don't have a survey from the purchase of your home, a private land surveyor can conduct a survey and provide you with a scaled map of your property showing the lot lines, buildings and other site features.

## Q9. Do I need a building permit?

A9. Fence - no. Wall - maybe. A building permit is required for a retaining wall that is four (4) feet or more in height, as measured from the bottom of the foundation to the top of the wall. See the Development Center for more information.

## For More Information:

[www.grcity.us/planning](http://www.grcity.us/planning)

City of Grand Rapids Planning Department  
1120 Monroe Avenue NW, 3rd Floor  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

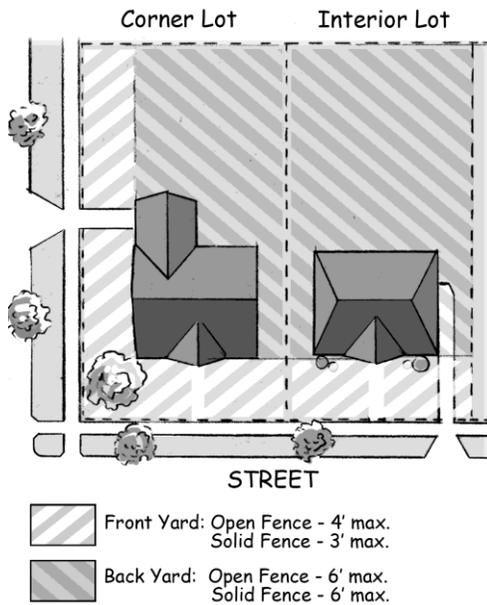
Telephone: (616) 456-4100 • FAX: (616) 456-4546

Email: [planning@grcity.us](mailto:planning@grcity.us)



Residential  
**Zoning FAQs**

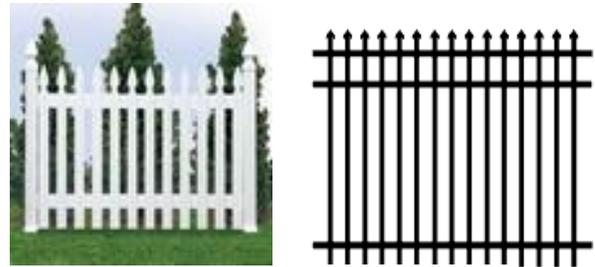
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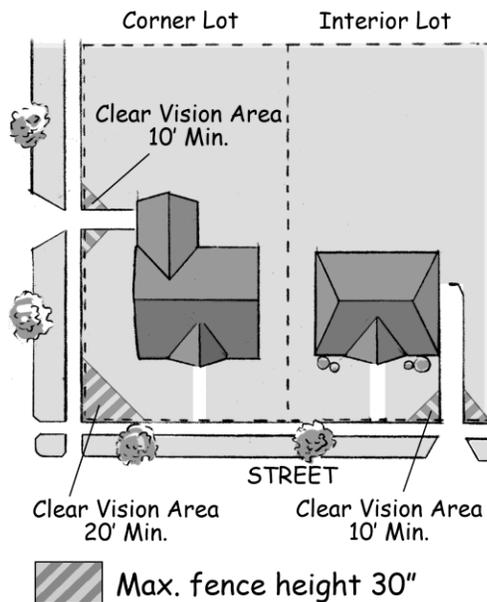
## Fence Height



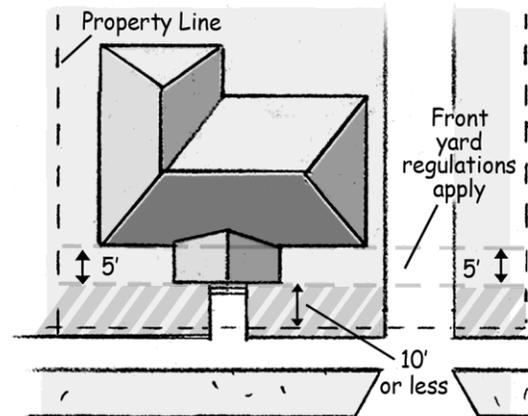
Types of Solid Fences



Types of Open Fences



## Clear Vision Areas



If the front yard of your property is 10 feet or less in depth (measured from the front property line to the front of your house), the first 5 feet of the side yards must meet the front yard height and materials requirements. *This can be tricky, so please consult with Planning staff before making any decisions!*

## Shallow Front Yard