

# Fence and Hedge Guidelines

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The uniform pattern and relationships of front lawns, building setbacks and open spaces, street trees, fencing and sidewalks contribute to a collective impression of a historic district. When historic landscape features are removed or relocated, or elements that are not compatible with the site are introduced, site vistas are destroyed and the historic character of a district is diminished. One need only recall the great American elm trees that formed natural green canopies over the streets of so many Detroit neighborhoods up until the 1950s and how the disappearance of those trees had impacted the character of those neighborhoods to understand this concept.



Archival photographs depict the historic character of many Detroit neighborhoods as they once were. Victorian workmen's clapboard cottages and tiny front yards enclosed by wooden picket fences typified in neighborhoods like Corktown. Solid board fence walls spanned the narrow spaces between these closely packed houses. On streets such as Vinewood and Lafayette, deep open yards surrounded elegant turn-of-the-century brick mansions and were embraced by decorative cast iron fencing, erected close to the facade around flower gardens, or in great expanse, and at great expense, around the perimeter of the property, characteristically on brick foundation walls running between brick piers.

There was never, however, a strong fencing precedent in Detroit neighborhoods and after the turn of the century, much of the iron went the way of the war effort. What fencing remained went out of fashion as the Industrial Age introduced newer and more affordable materials. Attitudes changed and fencing became virtually non-existent after the 1920s, replaced by a move toward broad green, fenceless expanses. Yet, what little historic fencing remains or the lack of fencing that exists in our historic districts makes the same contribution as the elm trees did and has the same impact when removed, relocated or erected without historic precedence.

Today's homeowners in historic districts face challenges that require remedies that often differ from the historic dictates, i.e. what fencing may or may not have existed. The Design Guidelines for Fences and Hedges are proposed to offer the homeowner guidance in the introduction of new construction or replacement with new materials while protecting those elements of a historic district that have been identified as significant in defining the overall historic character of the neighborhood.

*For the purpose of these guidelines, fencing shall mean any living natural planting or man-made structure, not integral to any building, used as a barrier to define boundaries, screen off, or enclose a portion of the land surrounding a building.*

The recommendations of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* must be followed prior to the removal or the replacement or construction of any fencing element in the landscape of the historic district. Information about *The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines* can be obtained from the Historic District Commission office, however the key points follow.



### Where Historic Fencing Exists

- Do not remove historic fencing, walls, or other fence elements.
- Retain historic fencing materials including metal, brick, stone and wood and the masonry of walls. Maintain and preserve all historic features, including rails, posts and newels, finials, railings, columns and piers, coping and walls. Care for and appropriately maintaining historic hedging and living fencing. Each of these elements conveys architectural and historical character through texture, ornamentation and design



- Repair is preferred over replacement. Repair deteriorated sections of historic fencing and walls with materials of a matching design, texture, and color whenever possible. Replant areas of historic hedging with a matching species.

- Replace only portions of fencing exhibiting significant deterioration, leaving all sound portions intact. Substitute materials, such as aluminum for wrought iron, should be visually and physically compatible with the remaining historic fencing or wall material and should be installed only when in-kind replacement is unaffordable.
- Use materials that match existing sections of historic fencing or walls in material, detail, color, texture and height when carrying out limited replacement or repair projects. If an exact color or texture match cannot be made, a simplified design is appropriate.



- For masonry walls, do not replace sections of historic brick with brick that is substantially stronger. Repoint with an appropriate mortar mixture that is no harder than the original historic mixture. Repoint only those joints that are no longer sound; large-scale removal of mortar joints often result in damage to historic masonry. Match historic joints in color, texture, joint size and tooling when repointing.

- Use historic, pictorial or physical evidence to reconstruct severely deteriorated or missing fencing, walls, or fence elements.
- Fencing, walls or other landscape features that use new or salvaged material to create a conjectural or falsely historical appearance are inappropriate and should not be undertaken.
- The removal of existing historical fencing should only be undertaken as a last resort. Natural or architectural fence elements that are slated for reconstruction or replacement should be photographically documented prior to removal of any historic fabric.

## **Historic Hedges or “Living Fences”**

Hedges shall abide by the same rules governing other fencing types in historic district for heights and locations. Furthermore, the selected hedging plants shall be capable of growing at least one foot per year for the first three years, and shall be cared for so as to maintain a dense screen year-round. The following list of plant types shall be taken as only a guide for selecting appropriate hedging.

<b>SCIENTIFIC NAME</b>	<b>COMMON NAME</b>
<b>Evergreen</b>	
-Taxus (varieties & species)	Yews*
-Thuja occidentalis	American Arborvital
-Tsuga canadensis	Canada Hemlock
<b>Deciduous</b>	
- Berberis thunbergu (vars. & sp.)	Japanese Barberry*
- Euonymus alata compacta	Dwarf winged euonymus
- Euonymus radicans (semi- evergreen)	Winterscreeper
- Ligustrum milrense	Amur Privet*
- Ligustrum iboluum	Lbolium Privet
- Ligustrum obtusifolium	RegalPrivet* Regelianum
Viburnum lantana	Wayfaring Tree

\*Species deemed most appropriate to historic districts.

## **New Fencing - Approval by the Historic Commission**

Permits for fence construction must be obtained from the Building and Safety Engineering Department and are subject to review by the Historic District Commission. The Elements of Design for the historic district of the application (available from the Historic District Commission Office) will be considered and each application will continue to be reviewed on a case by case basis.

The Historic District Commission may allow exceptions to the stated guidelines if the Commission views such exceptions to be beneficial to the overall appropriateness of a fence application proposal.

Consideration will be given to recommendations adopted by certain districts that are not in conflict with established guidelines and municipal code.

- Fencing must be properly installed according to City of Detroit codes and regulations.
- New construction of fences or walls should be designed to minimize impact to the historic fabric and should be compatible with the site in setback, size and scale to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.
- New fences or walls should be differentiated from the old and should be designed to complement the style, design, color and material of the historic building(s) and its features.
- New fencing or walls should be removable without impairing the essential form and integrity of the historic property.



- Fencing other than lot line fences (e.g. dog runs, etc ... ) shall be located in such a way as to be concealed from public view from streets and alleys.
- No slats or other material may be inserted or attached to chain link or other open fencing.

**Any proposal for the installation of new or replacement fencing shall meet the following application considerations:**



**Allowable Types:**

- Wood –flat board, picket post & rail, etc. Stockade fencing is not allowed. Unpainted/ unfinished wood is not historically appropriate and must be painted or stained a color that complements the house
- Cyclone or chain-linkfencing
- Twisted wire with wood posts (wire mesh)
- Wrought iron, cast iron and aluminum replicating wrought iron
- Brick and stone –masonry foundations, piers and fence walls. The material of any masonry wall should be compatible with that of the building it abuts.
- Hedges – size, location, and height must conform to fence size, location, and height. See section entitled “historic hedges or living fences” on page 3

\* A single lot shall contain no more than two types of fencing material.

**Allowable Locations:**



Side yard and across side lots, at the front face of the house (set back line)

The side yard alone at the front face of the house, the back face or at a point between

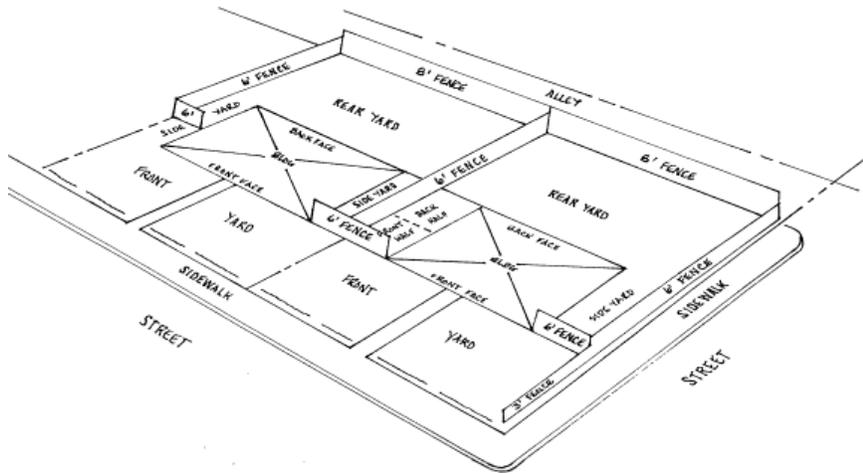
Rear yard, from the back face of the house to the rear property line (can be considered with the side yard as well)

Rear property line or alley line

Front yard fencing is not allowed except on a corner lot and then only from the front face of the house on the side of the public right of way to the front walk.

Established property line patterns and street and alley widths must be retained.

Front yard and full perimeter fencing will be allowed only in districts where such fencing has been shown to be contextual in that district’s Element of Design. Front yard fencing is allowed on corner lots along the walk adjacent to the side lot line from the front face of the house to the front corner (see below)



**Allowable Heights:**

6' side lot lines, at the front face of the house

8' rear property line

3' front yard -- applies only to corner lots on the side of the public right of way, otherwise front yard fencing is not allowed

**Allowable Colors:**

The color of the fence should complement the colors of the house

**Variations**

The Detroit Historic District Commission may allow variance to the previously stated guidelines if the Commission views such variance as beneficial to the overall appropriateness of a fencing proposal.

The Historic District Commission reserves all rights to amend or update this guideline or to deny the use of certain fencing if they are deemed inappropriate in any specific location.

Any questions pertaining to this guideline can be directed to the Historic District Commission Staff.

## **Sources for Guidance on Historic Materials and Landscape Features**

Under the National Park Service Home page Website, <http://www.nps.gov> and related service links:

***The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.***

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/rehabstandards.htm>

**The Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties, 1995**

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/secstan1.htm>

*Preservation Briefs 1-41*

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm>

*Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings.*

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/index.htm>

For publications available through the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office:

<http://www.sos.state.mi.us/history/preserve/shpopubs.htm>

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