Walls and Fences

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE H-2 DISTRICT

Walls and fences are traditional ways of defining residential yards by delineating property lines and of separating public and private outdoor space. These may take the form of retaining walls, low stone walls, wrought-iron fences, wood picket fences, and privacy fences, many of which are important in helping to define the character of the H-2 District.

**IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS...**

Walls and fences are important space-defining features of many residential neighborhoods in the H-2 District.

Walls and fences provide an opportunity to extend the architectural style or character of a building into the surrounding landscape.

Hedges and other plant materials often can help soften the enclosure provided by a wall or fence.

**GUIDELINES FOR PRESERVATION AND REHABILITATION**

- Recommended actions or treatments are indicated by √.
- Actions or treatments not recommended and other warnings are indicated by X.

**Retaining Existing Features**

Identify and keep all important features and characteristics of historic wall fences, including:

- textured masonry,
- distinctive profile,
- craftsman-like details,
- decorative coping,
- distinctive gates and steps, and
- traditional bonding pattern and mortar joint profile.

**Materials**

√ Use traditional or traditional-appearing materials to build walls and fences, such as:

**DEFINITIONS**

Coping: The protective cap or top of a wall, often of concrete or stone.

Picket: A partial column or post engaged with a wall.

Picket fence: A fence formed of wood or metal pickets, generally spaced a uniform distance apart, that provides varying degrees of visual screening or enclosure.

Privacy fence: A fence formed of boards or pickets arranged in a solid or overlapping manner to provide visual screening.

Streetscape: The overall appearance of buildings, signs, lights, plantings, and other elements along a street.

**Historic fences such as this one should be retained.**
• unpainted brick,
• unpainted stone,
• painted wrought or cast iron,
• painted wood,
• combinations of masonry with wood or metal,
• aluminum and other metals that mimic the appearance of iron or worked metal,
• ornamental wire, and composite materials

Pictured are examples of appropriate masonry walls and walls combined with iron fencing and plants.

X Do not use synthetic fence materials that do not have the appearance of wood or other traditional materials.
✓ Retain and maintain existing boundary hedges whenever possible that contribute to the character of a property or the historic district.
✓ Build retaining walls, where necessary, of stone, reinforced or fully bonded brick, or masonry veneer over reinforced concrete block. Decorative concrete block that matches that used in the district is also acceptable. Logs and railroad ties may be appropriate for edging planting beds or for landscape steps, but should not be used for retaining walls that will be visible from the street.

X Do not use incompatible fencing such as split rail, plastic, fiberglass or plywood fences, or concrete or concrete block walls within the historic district. The use of chain link fences at rear yards is acceptable as long as the fence is coated. The installation of chain link fencing on front or side yards is prohibited, as is the installation of “raw” or untreated chain link fencing, regardless of location. Where incompatible fence materials exist, owners are encouraged to remove them whenever feasible, either when making repairs or undertaking a comprehensive rehabilitation.

Height
✓ Use walls that range in height from 1'-0” to 4'-0”. The recommended height for retaining walls used with or without fencing, or freestanding walls, is 2'-6,” however walls may be built higher due to topographical issues.
✓ Fence heights are mandated by the Zoning Ordinance.

Other Design Considerations
✓ Choose a fence design that relates to the character of your house or building. In addition, if both picket and privacy fences are used, make sure that the designs relate to each other.
✓ Respect the character of the streetscape when deciding:
  • whether or not to use a wall or fence,
  • what materials are appropriate to your house and neighborhood, and the height, location, and design of the wall

Shown are examples of appropriate metal fences.

The stone construction shown here is an appropriate model for district retaining walls.

✓ Give fencing in a front yard an open design by using a simple iron or wood picket design.
✓ Ensure that wood fence posts either have a solid cap or are sloped to shed water and prevent deterioration.

![Examples of appropriate wooden picket fences.](image)

✓ Choose a compatible profile and appearance for wood fence posts that are in the same plane as the pickets. Posts located behind the line of pickets and which are not a major visual element may be of a simpler design as long as they shed water.

✓ Size picket fence elements appropriately.

![Appropriate picket spacing.](image)

Metal pickets should be spaced 3” to 6” apart. Wood pickets should be 1-1/2” to 3-1/2” wide with a space between the pickets ranging from one-half to equal to the picket width.

DEFINITIONS

**Picket**: A partial column or post engaged with a wall.

**Picket fence**: A fence formed of wood or metal pickets, generally spaced a uniform distance apart, that provides varying degrees of visual screening or enclosure.

**Pier**: A column, typically square in shape, that supports a concentrated weight above.

**Streetscape**: The overall appearance of buildings, signs, lights, plantings, and other elements along a street.

✓ Keep walls in a front yard low in height (2’-6” or less) or combine them with picket fencing placed between solid piers.

✓ Consider planting vegetation adjacent to walls and fences to soften their appearance.

✓ Fences should be two sided or oriented so that the posts, rails, and braces face *into* the property and the finished side or pickets face the street or the adjacent neighbor.

![Fence appropriately oriented](image)

This fence is appropriately oriented so that the finished side is toward the street and the structural side is toward the interior of the yard. Its low height is appropriate for its front yard placement.

✓ Where fences are seen from the street, they should be painted an appropriate color. Metal fences should be black or dark green; wood fences should be white, dark green, or a color taken from the building color scheme—provided it is subdued in character.

![Fence subdued color](image)

The color of this fence is appropriately subdued and in sympathy with that of the adjoining building.

✓ Fences in front of the front building line should be painted in a manner consistent with the house.

X Do not use wood privacy fences in a residential front yard. Alternatives include:

- wood picket fences,
- hedges or shrubs,
- decorative metal fences, and other plantings.
√ If used, modular wall systems should be indistinguishable in appearance from historic walls.

Χ Do not allow fences or walls to conceal or visually overpower nearby buildings.

√ Fences on slopes should be stepped for consistency or should be designed to conform to the slope itself.

**Maintenance**

√ Repoint brick or stone walls that have deteriorated mortar. See *Masonry Features and Walls* for information on proper repointing techniques.

√ Prevent water damage to masonry walls by properly grading the ground at their base and by maintaining wall caps or copings.

√ Replace missing items from cast- or wrought-iron fences by finding suitable replacements in a salvage yard or by having them recast.

Shown are examples of appropriate privacy fences.

This iron fence is a good example of a period appropriate fence that is properly stepped.

Shown is an appropriate privacy fence at the rear of this dwelling.

*The two configurations on the left are appropriate for the installation of privacy fences; the one on the right is not.*