



September 10, 2023

(By electronic transmission)
City of Alameda Planning Board
2263 Santa Clara Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501

Subject: Proposed Revisions to Zoning Code Fence Regulations (Item 5-B on Planning Board's 9-11-23 agenda).

Dear Boardmembers:

The Alameda Architectural Preservation Society (AAPS) has the following comments on the subject proposal:

1. **Do not replace the definition of “barrier” (which includes walls) with “fence”.** Walls should still be subject to the zoning requirements. Although the proposed definition of “fence” includes “walls”, reference to walls in the definition might be overlooked by members of the public and their contractors when building a wall and they therefore may assume that the wall is not subject to the zoning requirements. **We therefore recommend that the term “barrier” be retained, but the definition changed to delete “hedge” for the reasons stated in the staff report.** Alternatively, most references to “fences” could be changed to “fences and walls” perhaps with a definition of “wall” provided.
2. **Retain current rules for 4’ and 5’ front yard fences.** Under the current rules, the normal height of a front yard “fence” (including walls) is 3’, but a 4’ fence is allowed if *the entire fence* is “see-through style”, as defined. The proposal would only require the top foot of a 4’ fence to be see-through style.

Similarly, front yard fences can currently be increased to a 5’ height under current rules if *the entire fence* is see-through style and if the 5’ is approved by the Planning Director. The amendment would require only the top 2’ of the fence to be see-through style and eliminate the Planning Director approval requirement.

One of the most attractive features of Alameda neighborhoods compared to some portions of neighboring cities is the openness of the front yards, which is likely related to the existing requirements for low front yard fences. Low “see-through” fences also contribute to the historic look and feel of Alameda’s neighborhoods. **We therefore recommend that the above regulations remain unchanged (including the Planning**

Director approval for 5' fences), since allowing 4' and 5' fences with the bottom 3' being solid will result in a more walled-off look.

See the attached pages from the Guide to Residential Design which provide further explanation of the current regulations and includes the statement:

The design of the fence and the materials used should reflect the architectural style of the house and should be in proportion to its massing. It should be compatible with other fences in the neighborhood.

This statement may be intended to constitute the criteria for Planning Director approval of 5' fences.

Attached are photos of 4' and 5' high front yard fences with varying degrees of "see-through" treatment in the upper portions which may assist Planning Board evaluation of these proposals.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me at (510) 523-0411 or cbuckleyAICP@att.net if you would like to discuss these comments.

Sincerely,

Christopher Buckley, Chair
Preservation Action Committee
Alameda Architectural Preservation Society

Attachments: 1. Guide to Residential Design fence provisions.
2. Photos of 4' and 5' fences with varying degrees of "see-through style"

By electronic transmission:

cc: Allen Tai, Steven Buckley, Henry Dong, David Sablan, and Deidre McCartney
Mayor and City Council members
Historical Advisory Board
AAPS Board and Preservation Action Committee

From Guide to Residential Design

What do I need to know before installing a fence?

Note: Fences six feet or less in height do not require a Building Permit. However, they do need to comply with the Development Code requirements. See Alameda Municipal Code Section 30-5.14 for the complete regulations of fences and barriers.

Fences are typically installed around the perimeter boundary of a parcel, however they are not required. The design of the fence and the materials used should reflect the architectural style of the house and should be in proportion to its massing. It should be compatible with other fences in the neighborhood.

In residentially zoned areas, fences in the front yard may be three feet in height if they are of a solid material or four feet in height if they are a "see-through" material, such as a picket fence.

Fences in the rear yard may be six feet if they are of solid material and may be extended up to eight feet with see-through style fencing material.

With design review approval, front yard fences may be up to five feet if they are of see-through material and compatible with the building and the surrounding neighborhood. Also, arbors and other decorative fence elements may be approved through the design review process.

See-through style fencing material may be pickets, lattice or decorative wrought iron. Solid fences included "living fences" such as a hedge which is formed by shrubs or trees planted in a close row so that the foliage intermingles obscuring the trunk or main stem.

Chain-link material is not permitted in the front yard of any residentially zoned or developed property, but may be used in the rear and side yards under specified circumstances [see Section 30-5.14(f) of the

Alameda Municipal Code]. Barbed wire, razor wire or similar materials are not permitted as part of any fence or barrier.

Often the front property line of a lot is not at the edge where the sidewalk meets the landscaped area.

The exact location of the front property line can be ascertained by checking with the Permit Center. Even though this area is not part of your property, a fence may be installed with the approval of an Encroachment permit. Please check with the Permit Center for further details.

How should alterations to substantially altered buildings be treated?

Sometimes a building has been altered so thoroughly and competently that the resulting design is very attractive and the alteration itself has architectural significance. In these cases, it is quite appropriate for any future alterations to strive for consistency with the altered design rather than the original design. In such situations, this *Guide to Residential Design* allows the choice of alterations consistent with the altered design or restoration of the original or historic design. In other cases, past alterations merely detracted from the original design, in which case restoration of the original design is strongly encouraged where it is feasible.

- If a building has previously been covered with substitute siding, had its windows replaced, had ornamentation, porches or bay windows removed, or experienced other alterations, restoration of the building to a condition more closely resembling its original appearance is encouraged. The restoration can be based on old photographs of the building, silhouettes or “shadows” of removed trim pieces visible on the original siding or design treatments found on other buildings having the same architectural style. An extensive collection of old photographs is available at the Alameda Historical Museum along with information on the architects and designers of many older Alameda buildings.





