CITY OF SAN MATEO
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

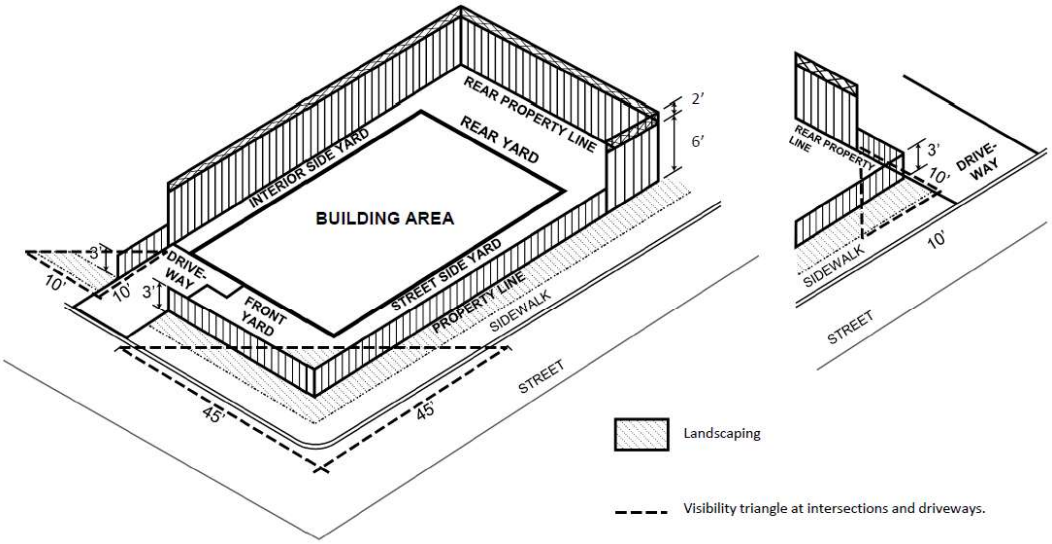
330 W. 20th Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94403
www.cityofsanmateo.org

FENCE REGULATION FAQS

- **What is this handout?** This handout contains answers to frequently asked questions for fences on private properties.

- **What is the maximum fence height?** **6 feet** for fences, walls, hedges and similar structures, with exceptions listed in the table below:

Fence Location	Maximum Height Limit
Front Yard and Street Side Yard	3 feet, except in the following cases: ▪ 3 ½ feet for fence or wall posts not wider than 1 foot ▪ 8 feet for entry structures (i.e. trellis) over pedestrian gates that are no more than 5 feet wide
Interior Side Yard and Rear Yard	8 feet, outside of required front or street side yards, if: ▪ 50% of the fence above 6 feet is open (i.e. lattice), and ▪ a building permit is issued with the neighboring properties' consent
Street Intersections and Driveways	3 feet when located in the visibility triangle[1] to provide for vehicular and pedestrian safety



1. **Visibility triangle**
   a. At street intersections, the visibility triangle is formed by lines measuring 45 feet from the intersection of curb lines, or pavement edge where no curb exists.
   b. At driveways, the visibility triangle is formed by lines measuring 10 feet from the intersection of the edge of driveways and the edge of the sidewalk closest to the private property.

Is a building permit or planning application required?

Building permits are required if the fence exceeds 7 feet tall per SMMC Title 23. Fences that are 7 feet or lower and comply with fence regulations do not require a permit. Some may require a Planning Application; see next section for more information.

What if I want to have a fence taller than City regulations allow? When is a planning application required?

Fences exceeding the height requirements are subject to approval of a Site Plan and Architectural Review (SPAR) Fence Exception Planning Application. The planning application forms are available online through this link: https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/1135/Planning-Resource-Documents. Note: Three specific criteria per SMMC 27.84.020 must be met in order for exceptions to be granted.

Do I need to notify my neighbors?

Fences that exceed the height limit and require a Planning Application must notice neighbors within a 500-foot radius, per SMMC 27.08.050. In addition, any fences that exceed the 6-foot height limit when built along the interior side and rear yard property lines require consent from adjacent neighbors for the building permit, per SMMC 27.84.010.c.

How is fence height measured on sloping lots?

Where the elevation between two adjacent lots is different, the height is measured from the upper lot ground level to the top of the fence, wall or post, per SMMC 27.84.015.

Are older, existing fences required to comply with these regulations?

Existing fences that are built before June 7, 1993 that do not comply with the current fence regulations are considered legal non-conforming and therefore permitted, per SMMC 27.84.025. Minor repairs, such as replacing one or two broken boards or routine maintenance that includes painting and staining are allowed for these existing fences. However, any major repair or replacement of the existing fence will require compliance with the current fence regulations.

Where can fences be located?

Anywhere on private property as long as the fence complies with the height limit. Fences cannot be located outside your property lines.

How tall can trees and landscaping be?

For vehicular and pedestrian safety purposes, there must be a visual clearance from 3 feet through 7 feet height when located in the visibility triangle[1] and within any street or alley right-of-way, per SMMC 27.84.050.

Are tree branch extensions over sidewalks or streets allowed?

Branches, trees, or shrubs may spread over a fence and onto the sidewalk if they provide at least an 8-foot vertical clearance. If they extend onto the street, a minimum 14 feet vertical clearance is necessary. The sidewalks must also maintain a clearance of 4 feet wide, per SMMC 27.84.040.

Are the requirements different for commercial or manufacturing districts?

A solid wall or solid fence of at least 6 feet tall is required for commercial or manufacturing districts located adjacent to or within 10 feet of an abutting residential district. For more details, see SMMC 27.84.030.

Are site surveys required?

In some cases, both the front and street side property lines may not be located directly behind the sidewalk. The City property may extend several feet behind the existing sidewalk. A site survey can locate exact property lines and is required when applying for a fence exception. The site survey must be stamped and signed by a Land Surveyor licensed by the State of California.

For more information, please see San Mateo Municipal Code 27.84 – Fences, Trees, and Hedges.