

# Fences

## Fences Allowed without a Permit

Fences can be built up to **seven feet in height** without a permit, provided the fence is structurally sound, is located entirely upon private property, and does not block the view from vehicular traffic entering into or turning onto the street (See **Clear Sight Triangle** tipsheet).

## Fence Planning and Design

For an aerial photo of the site with approximate property lines shown, visit our Tacoma Permits Maps page: <http://tacomapermits.org/projects/maps>. Aerial views from our online maps can serve as a general guide to determine the location of property lines. The only way to be certain of a property line location, however, is to have a licensed surveyor conduct a survey. It is always beneficial to consult with adjacent property owners and come to an understanding of where and what you will build, prior to purchasing materials. Where there is some dispute about a property line location, or where the fence being installed is of a significant cost, a survey may be beneficial and/or necessary.

Front property lines generally do not extend all the way to the sidewalk. When building a fence on City-owned property, a Right-of-Way Occupancy permit may be required. Additionally, fences are generally not allowed to be located closer than two feet from the edge of the sidewalk, even with a Right-of-Way Occupancy permit.

It is valuable to consider the aspect of crime prevention as well as the desire to enhance privacy when designing the fence. While a solid, high fence may seem like a good way to enhance privacy, it can also create a problem from the standpoint of theft because once inside, it provides a place to hide. A more open design may be preferable. For more information on Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), a coordinator can be reached at 253-591-5634.

Clear sight triangles are areas next to intersections and driveways where a driver needs to be able to see when turning to avoid pedestrian and auto accidents. Areas within clear sight triangles must be kept free from obstructions. Fences and structures over 3 feet high are not permitted within this area. The dimensions of clear sight triangles are generally determined by the speed of the traffic on the abutting roadway and whether or not traffic is required to stop at the intersection.

## General Tips for Typical Fence Construction

1. The first step in fence building is to dig cylindrical holes in the ground at intervals with an auger or post hole digger. Typically, holes are dug at 5-foot intervals and posts are buried 30 inches into the ground. The reason posts are set in deep holes is so they will not fall over or be pushed over in a windstorm.
2. Fence posts suitable for burial (.60 pressure treated lumber if using wood), are then inserted into the holes and plumbed and braced to vertical.
3. Concrete is poured into the hole and allowed to set.
4. A chalk line is stretched between the posts so the tops can be cut to the same height.
5. Horizontal members (rails) are fastened to the posts, top and bottom as a support upon which to nail individual fence boards. The top and bottom rails are usually installed 6 inches above the ground and 6 inches below the top of the posts.
6. Fence boards are then fastened to the horizontal rails.

## Fences Requiring a Permit

Any fence over seven feet in height, or any masonry wall over four feet in height requires a building permit, because they can be quite dangerous if built incorrectly.

Submittal checklist for a building permit:

- Simple site plan
- Sectional drawing with the following details
  - type, size and spacing of posts
  - depth below grade and concrete diameter
  - size and spacing of rails
  - type and spacing of fence boards
  - height of fence
  - method of attachment



*Note: This Tip Sheet does not substitute for codes and regulations.*

*The applicant is responsible for compliance with all codes and regulations, whether or not described in this document.*

**More information: City of Tacoma, Planning and Development Services | [www.tacomapermits.org](http://www.tacomapermits.org) (253) 591-5030**

To request this information in an alternative format or a reasonable accommodation, please call 253-591-5030 (voice).

TTY or STS users please dial 711 to connect to Washington Relay Services.