

**Commission of Architectural Review  
Guidelines for Administrative Approval of  
Walls, Fences, and Gates**

**Introduction:** Fences and gates are among the most frequent subjects of requests for approval in Old and Historic Districts. In many cases these elements have only a minor impact on the historic character of the property. The purpose of this document is to define which of those elements can be approved by staff without approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Commission of Architectural Review.

**A. Items delegated for staff review**

The Walls, Fences, and Gates guidelines below, through adoption by the Commission, shall constitute items delegated by the Commission of Architectural Review for administrative review to Commission staff in accordance with Sec. 30-930.6(h) of the Code of the City of Richmond. Unless the Commission Secretary deems it desirable, for particular reasons, to present the items listed below to the Commission for review, Commission staff may approve them administratively. All such approvals shall be reported monthly to the Commission accordance with Sec. 30-930.6(h). These guidelines shall serve as a supplement to and be deemed consistent with the *Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*. Administrative approvals may be granted for Walls, Fences, and Gates as follows:

**1. Board Privacy Fences and Gates**

Board privacy fences and gates (allowed by zoning in rear and side yards) may be approved administratively if the following criteria are met:

- The privacy fence does not exceed 6.5 feet in height. Zoning and these guidelines shall allow an additional 1½ feet of height for posts, columns, and gates to the 6.5 feet.
- The privacy fence is constructed in the rear of the property.
- The fence possesses solid vertical elements (palings).
- The fence palings are butted together or have a separation not to exceed 2 inches.
- The tops of the palings are straight, curved, spear-shaped or dog-eared.
- A fence and/or gate located along a main thoroughfare is painted or opaquely stained a color or colors complementary to the main structure.

Examples that comply with these criteria are shown below:





## 2. Metal fences and gates

Metal fences and gates fences may be approved administratively if the following criteria are met:

- The rear or side yard metal fence does not exceed the limitations of the Zoning Code: 6.5 feet in height with an additional 1 ½ feet of height for posts, columns and gates.
- The metal fence or gate for the front yard of a property does not exceed the four feet allowed by the zoning code.
- The property on which the fence is to be placed is adjacent to a historic property of comparable style and age with a metal fence of similar material, form, and extent.
- The fence is painted black, black green, dark green, or a color that complements that of the main structure.
- The fence is a simple contemporary design with fence sections supported by plain metal posts; or,
- The design of the fence is substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence that is specific to that particular historic property.
- The fence and/or gate materials relate to materials commonly found in the neighborhood.
- A metal gate has a simple curved or straight horizontal top.





### **3. Wooden Picket Fences and Gates**

Wooden fences and gates fences may be approved administratively if the following criteria are met:

- The rear or side yard wood picket fence does not exceed the limitations of the Zoning Code: 6.5 feet in height with an additional 1½ feet of height for posts, columns and gates.
- The wood picket fence or gate for the front yard of a property does not exceed the four feet allowed by the zoning code.
- The property on which the fence is to be placed is adjacent to a historic property of comparable style and age with a wood picket fence of similar material, form, and extent.
- The fence is a simple design with fence sections supported by plain wooden posts; or,
- The design of the fence is substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- If the fence and/or gate located along a main thoroughfare it is painted or opaquely stained a color or colors complementary to the main structure.
- The gate has a simple curved or straight horizontal top.

Examples of these kinds of fences include:



#### **4. Masonry Walls**

Because of the permanent architectural nature of masonry walls administrative approval of masonry walls shall be restricted to modifications to existing walls as follows:

- The installation or modification of new openings in a masonry wall not to exceed 4 feet in width.
- The modification of any existing opening in a masonry wall not to exceed 20% of the size of the existing opening.
- The expansion of an existing wall by less than 10% of the total length of that wall for screening of HVAC equipment or other functional elements.

#### **5. Removal of non-contributing elements**

In relation to the installation of any fencing referenced in 1 through 4 above, the Commission Staff may approve the removal of the following kinds of fencing as non-contributing elements:

- Any type of chain link fencing.
- Metal lattice fencing.
- Lattice, board, or picket fences of recent construction.
- Vinyl or plastic fencing.

#### **B. Items not delegated for Commission Review**

The following items shall **under no circumstances be approved administratively** and will require a certificate of appropriateness from the Commission of Architectural Review. It will be necessary for the Commission to determine if they are in compliance with the *Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*.

1. The construction of a privacy fence in the front yard of a property.
2. The construction, installation, or modification in detail and/or extent of any fence, wall or addition thereto that exceeds 6.5 feet in height for side and rear yards (excepting the allowable additional 1½ feet height for posts, columns and gates), and 4 feet in height for any front yard.
3. Other than minor modifications discussed in A.4 above, the construction or modification in detail and/or extent of masonry walls.
4. The installation or modification in detail and/or extent of vinyl, plastic, wire, metal lattice, or chain link fence.
5. Construction or modification in detail and/or extent of ornamental metal work for fencing or gates.
6. The installation of salvaged fences, gates or other gate components.
7. The reinstallation of a lost historic fence that is not based on evidence particular to a specific property.

### **C. Adoption and Effect**

These administrative approval guidelines were adopted by the Commission of Architectural Review on **October 14, 2008**. The adoption and implementation of these guidelines shall be consistent with Sec. 30-930.6(h) of the Code of the City of Richmond. These guidelines are deemed to be consistent with and a supplement to the *Old and Historic District Handbook and Design Review Guidelines*. These guidelines shall be in full effect and force until amended or rescinded by the Commission.