

# How to Apply for a Permit to Build a Fence

## What kinds of permits do I need to build a fence?



Fences of any type exceeding 6 feet in height or masonry fences of any height will require a building permit. If the fence is less than 6 feet in height and is nonmasonry, you are not required to have a building permit, but you are still required to follow the county's planning regulations concerning fences. If the fence is in the public right of way, you will also need an encroachment permit from the Department of Public Works.

## How do I apply for a permit?



Submit an application to BuildingInspection at the Development Review Center. The application must identify the property, list the name of any architect or engineer who will work on the project, and describe the proposed work in detail. Along with that application, submit the following:

- ✓ A plot plan showing any driveway, walkway, parking area, wells, retaining walls, utilities, easements, trees, and other structures, as well as the location of the proposed fence
- ✓ Construction details showing all structural elements.

A separate handout entitled Plan Requirements describes requirements in greater detail and gives you examples of how they should be drawn. This handout is not specific to fences.

## Is there any limit on the height of fences?

In the front yard area of most properties, you may have a fence, wall, or hedge as high as 4 feet. In the side and back yard areas that are not on corner lots, you may have a fence, wall, or hedge as high as 6 feet, as long as it doesn't extend into the front yard.

On large parcels, located in districts where 20,000 sq. ft. building site is required, with 100 ft. of street frontage, a 6 foot fence is allowed in the front yard.

On parcels which have an elevation shift at the property line, the owner of the lower property may construct a retaining wall/fence combination of up to 12 feet. The upper property owner may do the same only with the consent of the lower property owner.

On parcels located outside the Coastal Zone, the Planning Administrator may approve an exception to allow fences or hedges to exceed the height limits set forth in Section 6412 by up to two (2), feet. Additional information regarding Fence Height Exceptions may be obtained at the Planning Counter.

## At what point should I call for an inspection of my project?



During the project, you should request an inspection of the foundation or post holes. After you have completed the project, you should request a final inspection.

## What fees must I pay?



You must pay Building, Planning, and filing fees, and possibly a plan check fee.

## What's the next step in this process?



Read the pamphlet *General Procedures When You Apply for a Planning or Building Permit*. This pamphlet explains the general procedures for applying for a permit, paying fees, calling for inspections, and other related matters. Then you should also review the following documents, which contain other information that you may need:

[How to Apply for Design Review](#)

[Section 6412, San Mateo County Zoning Regulations: Fences](#)

[Section 6412.2, San Mateo County Zoning Regulations: Fence Height Exceptions](#)

[How to Apply for an Encroachment Permit](#)

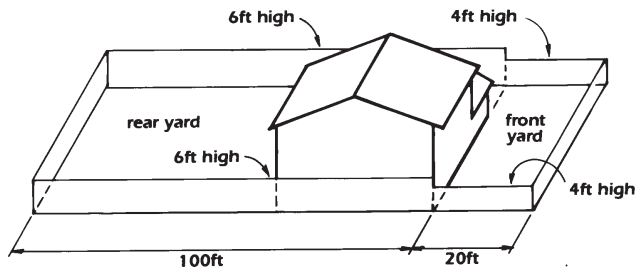
After you have become familiar with these documents, we recommend that you prepare some very preliminary plans and bring them to the DRC counter so that we can review them. An informal meeting at this stage may save you considerable time and money later on.

If you are new to San Mateo County, you may also wish to make an appointment to meet with staff as part of the County's Early Assistance Meeting Program. Early assistance meetings are designed to acquaint owner/builders, contractors, architects, and other professionals who are new to the area or are unfamiliar with our permit system, with the different agencies involved, and the various costs and requirements. There is no charge for the meeting, which you can schedule by calling (650) 363-1825.

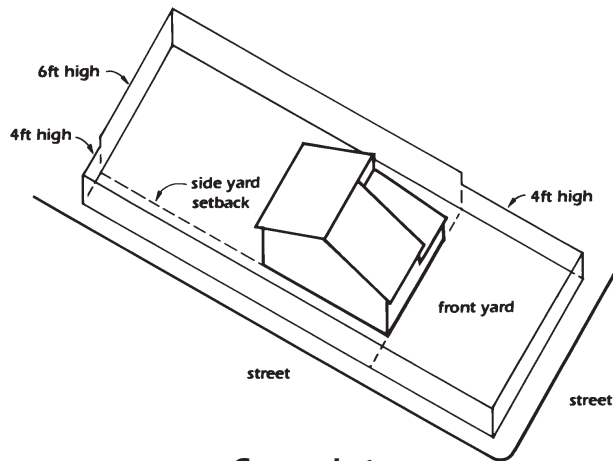
## Special Neighbor Considerations

Even though fences are a somewhat minor form of development, they are often the subject of great contention between neighbors. The Division recommends that you consult with your neighbors before you add new fences or modify existing structures.

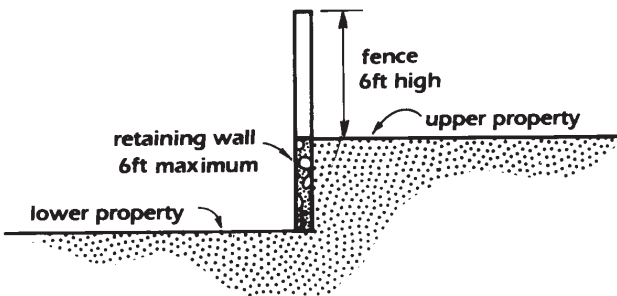
**Fence Height Schematics**



**Standard Lot**



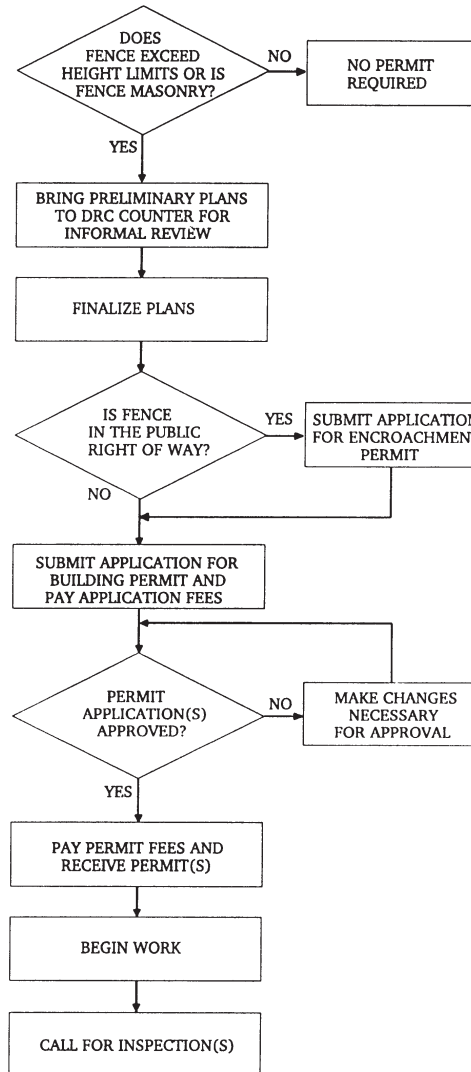
**Corner Lot**



**Fence Height with Change in Elevation at Property Line**

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**Permit Process to Build a Fence**



*PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE*



**San Mateo County  
Planning and Building Division**

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a Permit  
to Build a  
Fence**

Planning and Building Division

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