

Shaker Heights
Fences



SHAKER HEIGHTS FENCES

a guide to fence styles and regulations for residential architecture

Published

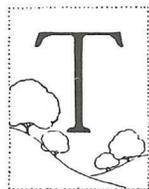
*for the guidance of those who
contemplate construction of a fence
for their residence in or near*

**THE CITY OF
SHAKER HEIGHTS**

September, 1995

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Introduction



This guide has been developed to help the property owner who may desire a fence select one appropriate to his home and community. Recommended fences are historically accurate and visually compatible for the period when the majority of Shaker Heights houses were constructed (1905-1939). These same styles, however, adapt very nicely to newer construction with similar themes.

To understand why fencing is an important issue in Shaker Heights, one must be familiar with the basis for the community's development. At the turn of the century, comprehensive city planning was beginning to take hold in America. A number of Ohio communities turned to the English designers whose collective work became known as the "Garden City Movement." The basic idea behind the movement was to capture the best of both city and country — abandoning the traditional rectangular grid of streets and developing a park-like setting for homes with plenty of open

green space. Mass transportation to commercial centers was important to the successful plan, as well as single control over planning and construction. Shaker Heights, by combining all these elements, became one of the nation's largest and most successful early twentieth century planned communities.

Since the community was planned to emphasize an open, inviting landscaped environment, fences became a contradiction. Creating spacious country freshness meant avoiding the rigidly defined look of the city. Not only were broad boulevards built and residential streets planned in curvilinear fashion, but yards were broad and left open to the street. Open front yards precluded the use of fences and other barriers that could be perceived easily by the passerby. This did not eliminate the use of fences, but demanded more consideration of their style and placement. A well-designed fence will not only create a complete harmonious look for the property, but also serve to enhance the entire neighborhood and larger community.

"Peaceful Shaker Village" combines the spaciousness and clear air of the country, the modern conveniences and transportation of the city, the beauty and interesting atmosphere of the old world, with a security and permanent protection that is unique."

Peaceful Shaker Village, 1927, Van Sweringen Co.

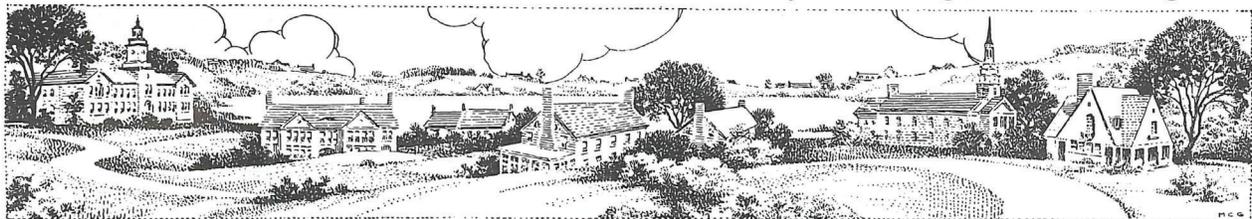


Illustration reprinted from the Van Sweringen Co. publication *The Heritage of the Shakers*, 1923.

Historical Perspective

The Van Sweringen Company, the developers of Shaker Heights, devised design standards that, coupled with deed restrictions, would ensure that the community overall would be harmonious and tasteful. Privacy, fences, and landscaping were addressed in both.

Shaker Village Standards discussed the problem of privacy and outdoor living in this manner:

“Shaker Village houses have two or more ‘fronts’ but no ‘backs.’ Automobile traffic lessens the usefulness of the street front yard and encourages a well designed garden behind the house for privacy and safety. The garden has the possibility of becoming a charming space for your family and friends that the passerby on the street is not privileged to see or enjoy.

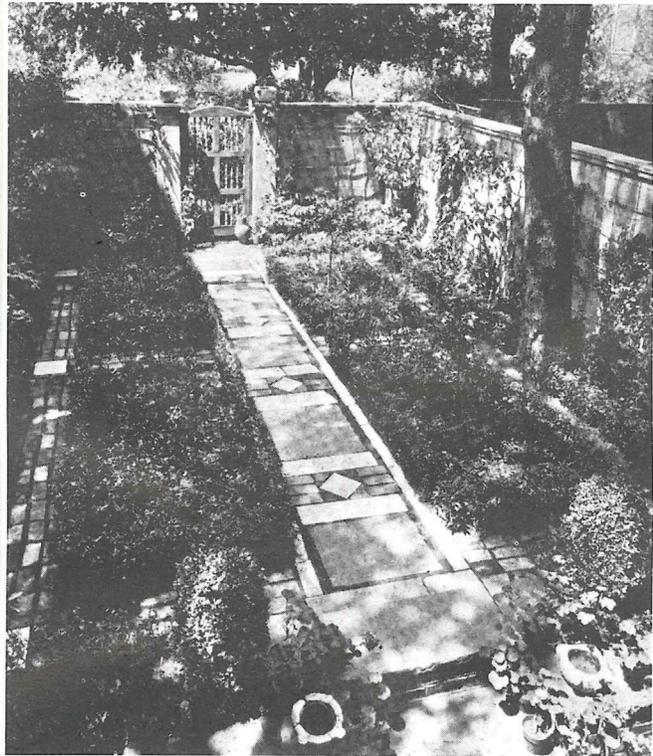
The opportunity exists on every Shaker Village lot for the development of an attractive garden plan. The photograph below shows an unusual garden arrangement for a small lot.”

The original deed restrictions cover front yard fencing with a separate item as follows:

“No fence or wall of any kind or for any purpose shall be erected, placed or suffered to remain upon said premises nearer to any highway now existing or any hereafter established than the front building line hereinbefore established.”

The basic form of this restriction is with us today through our zoning code. Except for decorative fences within the portion of the front yard closest to the house, no front yard fence can be erected without first obtaining a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals.

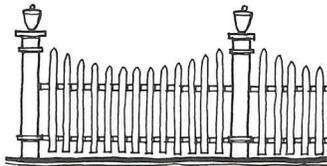
However, not all properties are typical ones that can be addressed by the Code. Because of the style of street planning, the community has a number of corner and odd-shaped lots that may not have clear front and rear yards; therefore, a variety of problems can result from the placement of fences. Suggested planning and design criteria along with explanations of the zoning code and ordinances applicable to fencing, will be explained in the sections that follow.



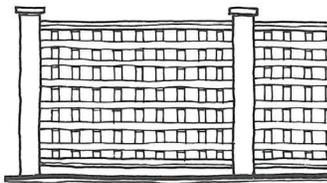
Design Considerations

- Fences must conform to the Shaker Heights Zoning Code and Ordinances. Refer to pages 13 and 14 for requirements and procedures.
- When selecting a fence design and its location, consider the overall context — including the lines of sight to your neighbors and passersby. Be sensitive to the architectural character of any construction, including fences. An inexpensive, simple fence can be enhanced by special treatment of a post or gate.
- Choose a fence design that meets your specific requirements. If sound absorption is needed, perhaps a wall is necessary, but if your aim is to keep a small family dog in the yard, a minimal wire fence screened with plantings may suffice.
- Materials as well as styles should be selected with the house in mind. Fence maintenance should be considered in conjunction with overall home maintenance and provided routinely, not neglected. Do not forget the practical aspects of fence installation, such as the required width for a snow plow or lawn mower.
- If your fence abuts a neighboring one, consider using the same type of fence if appropriate to the style of your home, or use a transitional element between two different types of fences, such as a post. Do not construct a second fence parallel to a neighbor's fence if the first meets your requirements. Possibly the neighbor's fence could be enhanced or screened with appropriate plantings.
- A fence is an integral part of your yard and should be considered a major design element in your landscaping plans. Have an overall plan for your yard even if you do not intend to accomplish it all at once.
- Consider use of a section of fence to meet your requirements instead of boxing in the entire yard along the lot line, if possible.
- Consider using a fence segment, gate, trellis or planting to screen rubbish containers from street view.
- A solid fence, such as a board-on-board or stockade fence, should be well-screened with plant materials to soften its appearance. For a more open type of fence, such as a picket or wrought iron fence, less screening is necessary.

Fence Types



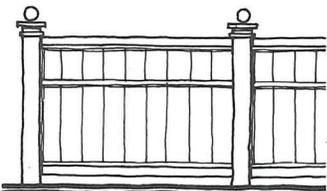
PICKET – This decorative fence features a series of vertical slats, posts, stakes, rods, etc., of wood or metal which are mounted to horizontal rails with space between the verticals (sometimes pointed at the upper end). Wood pickets, usually painted, are typical for Colonial and Craftsman styles. A metal picket can adapt well to English or French styles, especially for gates and in combination with masonry pillars.



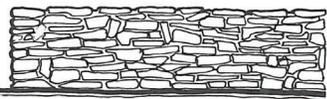
LATTICE – Usually of wood, a lattice fence is a variation of the picket fence with vertical, horizontal, or diagonal slats or lath strips that make up a grid pattern. Most appropriate for Colonials, French, Craftsman and Modern styles, lattice is usually painted to match house trim.



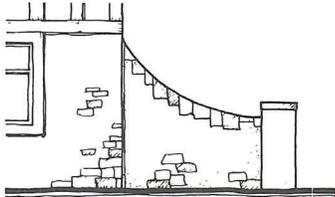
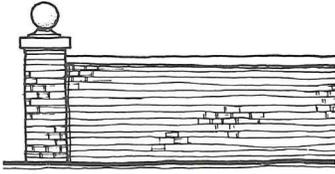
POST & RAIL – Post and Rail fences feature a few dominant horizontal rails supported by regular posts. These fences have a country farm character which makes them inappropriate for most Shaker Heights houses; however, when made of smooth, painted planks with attention to post cap detail, they blend well with many Colonials, especially those built more recently.



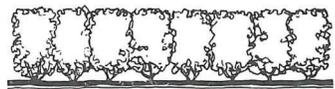
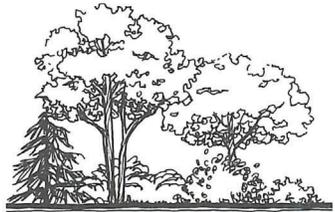
BOARD – Board fences are characterized by vertical wood planks supported by horizontal framing which may or may not leave space between each plank. Solid board fences are suitable for many styles including English, Colonial, Craftsman, Combination, and Modern, if painted or stained and detailed appropriately. Boards mounted on alternating sides of the frame constitute the currently popular board-on-board style with a characteristic heaviness suitable for less visible backyard use only.



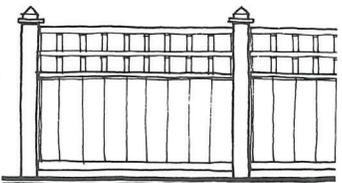
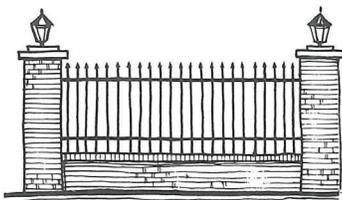
FIELDSTONE WALLS – A wall can serve as the ultimate fence, even acting as a sound barrier. Dry laid or constructed with mortar, or used as a veneer, fieldstone walls provide a rustic touch appropriate for Colonial houses, especially those incorporating fieldstone in their design.



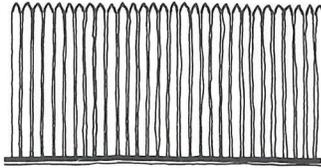
MASONRY WALLS — A typical brick wall has a stone cap and a running bond pattern with pillars at regular intervals to provide lateral stability. Pillars or gate posts are commonly topped with decorative finials or lanterns. Walls have considerable stylistic flexibility. The type of brick, stone, stucco, mortar, and method of construction should reflect the house style. Walls in Shaker Heights are usually built as an extension of the façade to screen one's line of sight to the backyard or to enclose an otherwise visible auto court.



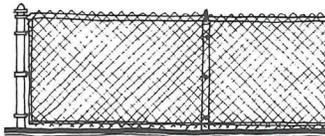
PLANTS — Perhaps the most typical fence in Shaker Heights, although not commonly acknowledged as such, is planting. Hedges, shrubs, and vines may create a real, yet visually graceful barrier. Type, color, rate of growth, ultimate size, and hardiness should be considered in selection. Natural woods-like planting arrangements to screen views are preferred over the severe structural character of a tall dense hedge. Evergreen hedges should be trimmed and maintained at a reasonable height to prevent an overgrown, ungainly appearance. Plants may be used with all styles of architecture although historic associations do make certain choices more predictably successful: for example, box-wood, or sheared evergreen hedges for English or Georgian Colonial styles, irregular flowering bushes with frame Colonials, and formally pruned or espaliered tree-walls for French (or vines on an open lattice fence).



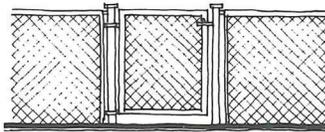
COMBINATION — Some of the most interesting barriers are combinations of two of the above: for example, wood or metal picket over a brick wall, wood lattice over a solid board fence, or alternating masonry and metal picket sections. Combination fences should be made to complement the residential structure.



STOCKADE — Similar to a picket fence, but without space between vertical elements, the stockade fence provides an opaque screen. Commercial stockade fencing is usually made of sapling halves mounted to horizontal rails. Older, more rustic stockades (available now as paling) had a lighter look due to the use of slender, full saplings bound together with rust-resistant wire. As it weathers to an inconspicuous gray-brown, stockade provides a naturalistic garden backdrop rather than evoking a particular architectural period; for this reason it is best used in the back yard where there is room for adequate planting to soften its rigidity and apparent height. When selecting a stockade fence, remember that the finished side must face out, to the street or neighbor.



CHAIN LINK — A heavy steel wire mesh (usually coated with zinc) structured with round metal posts serves as a basic security fence. This type of fence provides a trellis for vines and is recommended for tennis courts, dog pens, or where a restraining enclosure is important. Since this type of fence has no style it is best hidden by planting or painted very dark green or black to help make it disappear (rather than vinyl coated which cannot be renewed easily). There is a new, more attractive version of this type of fence available now which is cleaner looking, with thin, rectangular frames and posts.



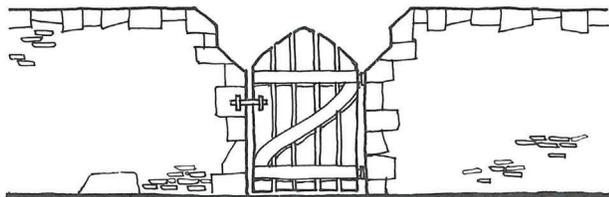
WIRE — An inconspicuous, inexpensive fence made of light welded wire can be found in different patterns. This type of fencing is available in lower heights and adapts to most styles if used to provide trellising for lighter vines or a barely visible barrier woven between plantings.

Fences Not Recommended

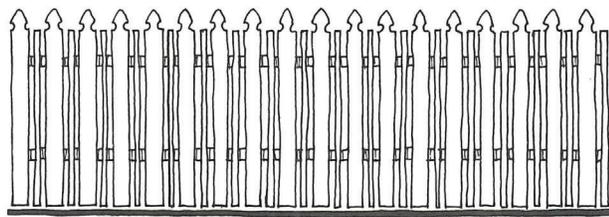
Natural wood basket weave fences, open decorative concrete block walls, aluminum weaves for chain link, and split rail fences are seldom adaptable to houses in Shaker Heights. Snow fencing is not permitted as a fence.

English

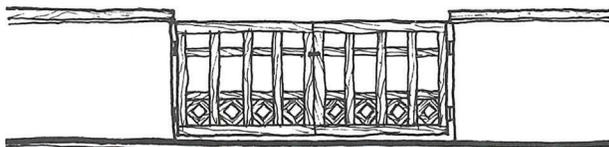
The variety of materials found in many English-style homes suggests fences of a similar nature. Brick, stucco and stone walls blend well as do board fences stained to match house trim, especially those with a decorative cut top and interesting patterns. Stained or weathered stockade fencing is acceptable in backyards where plantings can soften its severity.



Brick wall with stone and wood gate



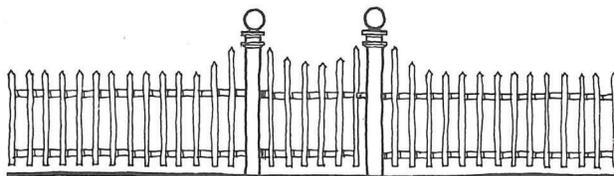
Spaced board fence with decorative top



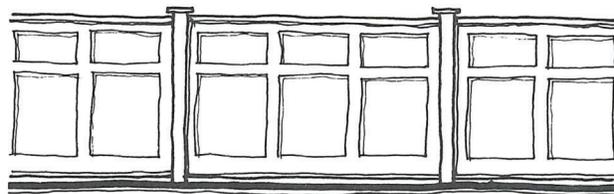
Stucco wall with wood cap and gate

Colonial

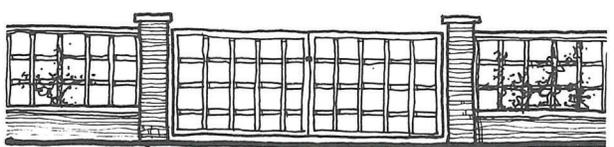
Most wood fences adapt well to the Colonial-style home, especially when painted to match trim color. A great variety of picket, board, post and rail, lattice, and combination fences are appropriate. The more open fences of lower heights can be used for front yard decorative fences. The heavier, taller, and more opaque fences should be restricted to use in the backyard and as fence segments.



Colonial wood picket



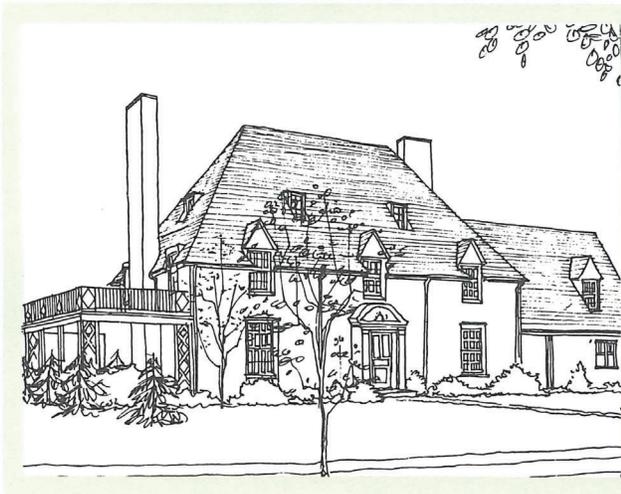
Solid paneled board fence



Wood lattice over low brick with pillars and gate

French

French homes may have ornamental metal work which can be repeated by a fence or gate. Latticework fencing as well as stucco or masonry walls are classic choices.

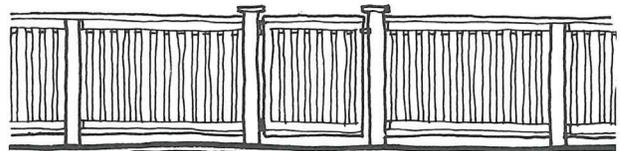


Craftsman

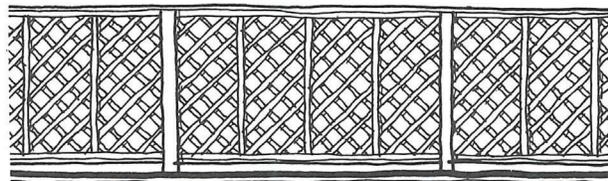
Craftsman or Vernacular type homes also adapt well to wood and combination fences similar to the simpler Colonials. A simple design with clean lines is a good approach for such homes. Corner posts and gates can pick up special design elements.



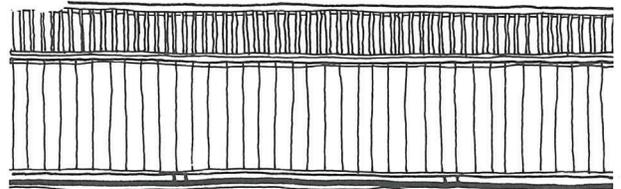
Metal picket with gate



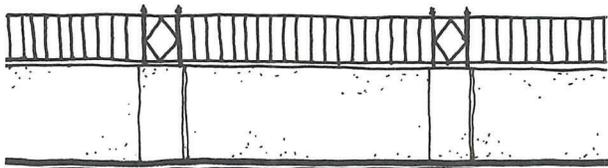
Wood picket fence with top and bottom rail



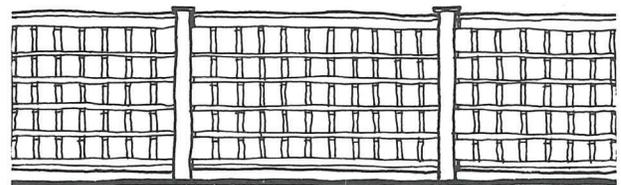
Diagonal wood lattice with vertical batten strips



Picket with cap over board fence



Stucco wall with pilasters and metal picket

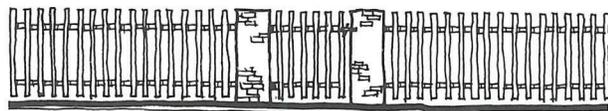


Wood rectangular lattice

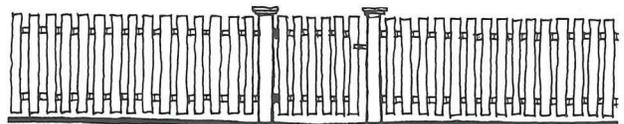
Combination & Modern

Since Combination, Modern, and more contemporary homes have a wide variety of looks, a fence should be selected primarily by the style, details, and materials of the home. For example, if a fence is placed near a modern garage with a typical grid pattern paneled door, then a lattice

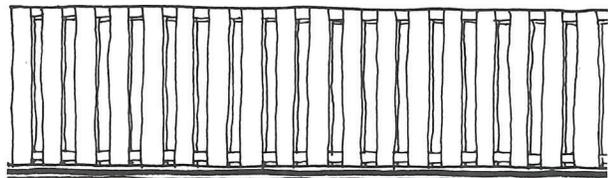
work fence might pick up the pattern. If a Combination home has a dominant style, you may favor a fence that highlights the preferred style. Similarly, if a house appears to have no particular style, the choice of a fence could establish one.



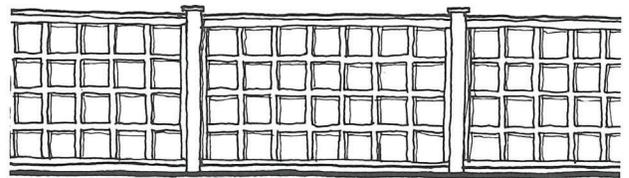
Square wood picket with brick pillars



Simple wood picket



"Board on Board" fence



Wooden board with battan strips in square grid (solid)



Stucco wall with brick piers

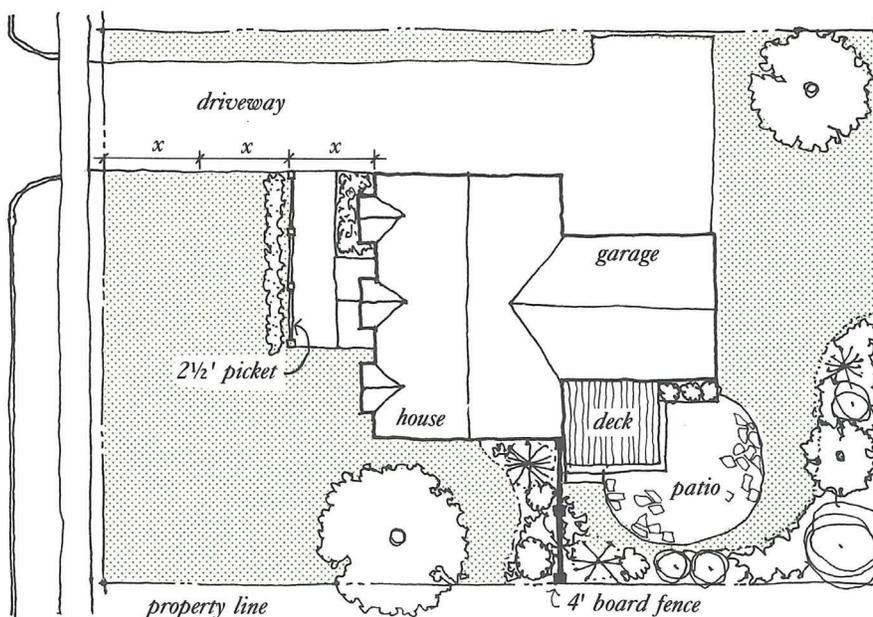


Hedge and brick wall and pillars

Planning

Front Yards

Decorative fences are permitted in the front of a house within the third of the front yard closest to the house. A maximum height of three feet and a style compatible with the house are required.

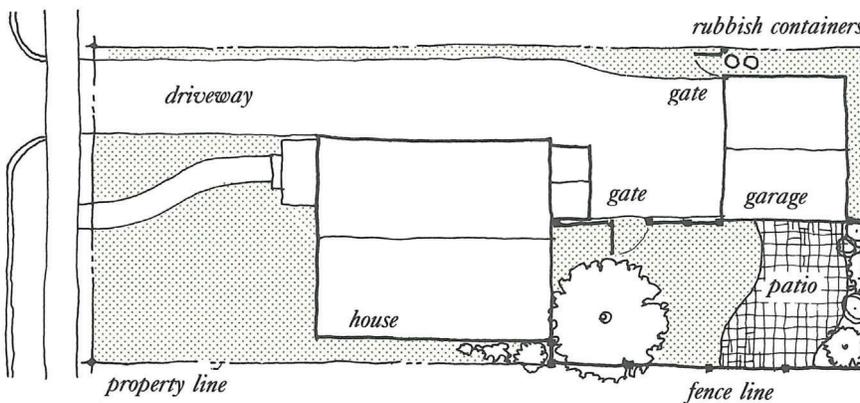


Privacy

The most efficient and economical use of fence is a section strategically placed for privacy. The layout illustrated above takes advantage of the wider lot, blocks the undesirable view and maximizes the use of the side yard, thus creating the illusion of a larger rear yard.

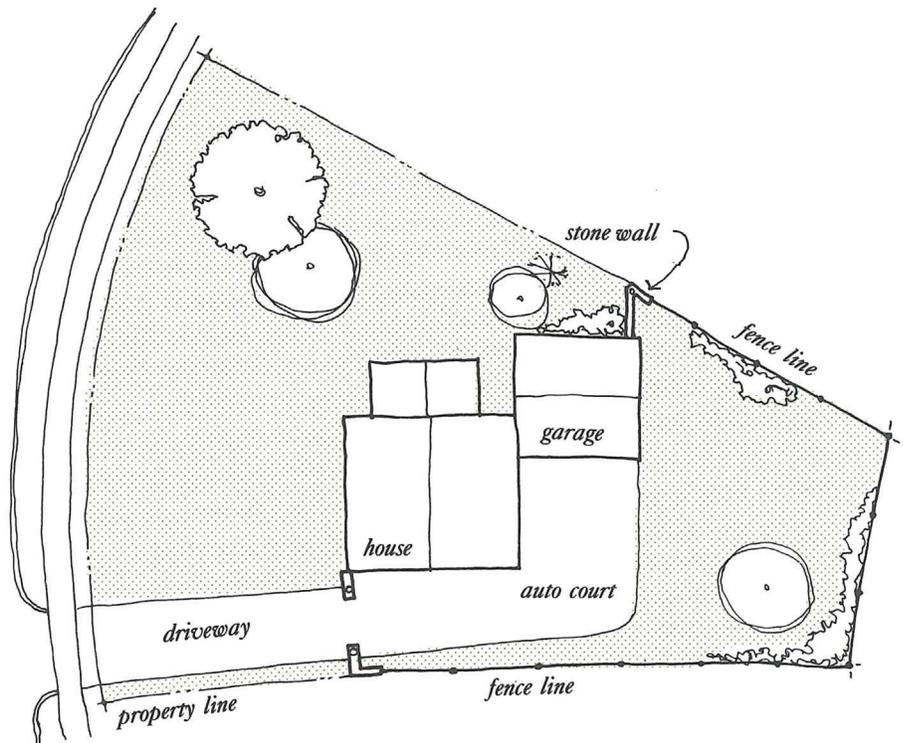
Narrow Lots

Fence arrangements on small narrow lots are relatively limited. The illustration shows the living area in the rear enclosed for privacy, children, or possibly pets. An attractive gate may be used at the drive. A smaller gate of the same style is shown to screen rubbish containers from the street area.



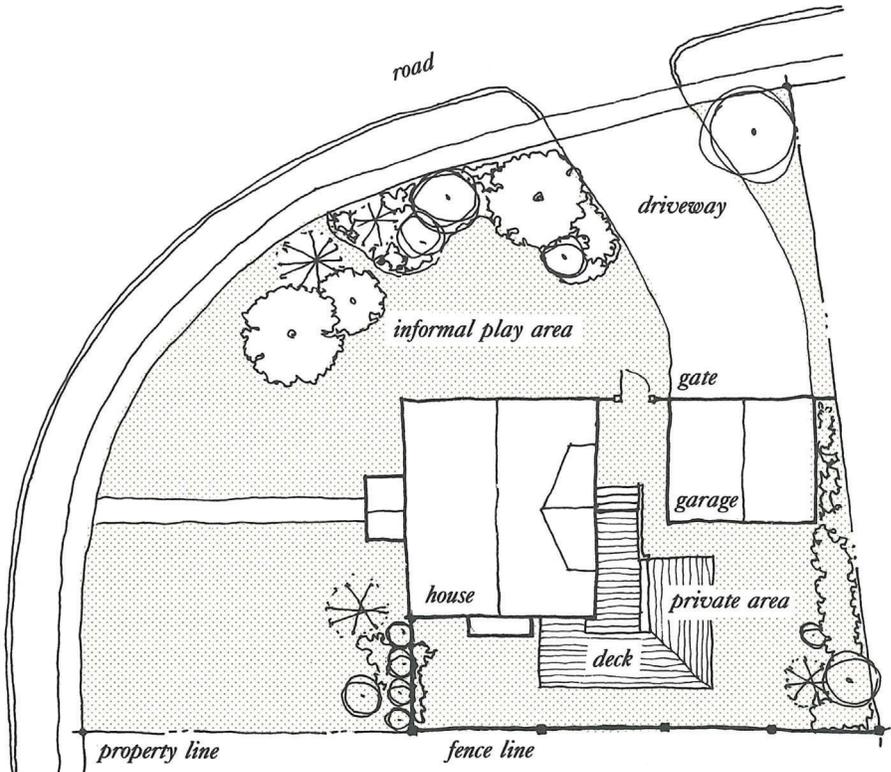
Enclosure

If complete enclosure is necessary, an open low profile fence is recommended and landscaping should be used to soften edges. The wall and gateway toward the front of this house help screen the long driveway and auto court from street view, as well as making an attractive formal entry.



Corner Lots

Most corner lots have a minimal rear yard and maximum frontage, creating little natural private space. This corner lot shows a very private area in the rear using a section of fence and landscaping along with a more informal play area near the street screened with plants.



Requirements

If the proposed fence is of a common type and no variances or board approvals are required, then the necessary information can be summarized on the Building Department's fence permit application form. However, if Architectural Board or Board of Zoning Appeals approval is required, then two sets of drawings and photographs should be filed with the Planning and Development Department along with the application.

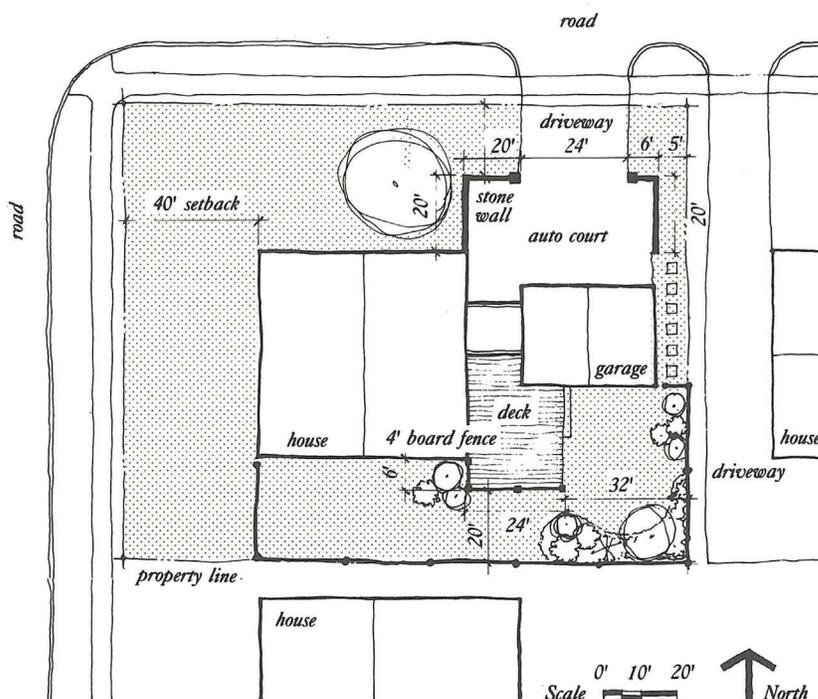
When submitting a proposal to obtain the necessary approvals, all graphic information necessary to convey the type of fence and its location relative to the existing structure is required, specifically:

- A site plan showing house, garage, driveway, walks, street, and neighboring buildings that would be impacted by the new fence. This

should be a plan view drawn to a reasonable scale, ie, $\frac{1}{8}'' = 1'0''$ or $1'' = 20'$ with all dimensions and structures labeled (see illustration below for an example).

- An elevation of the type of fence. For a standard fence type, a product brochure with height indicated is adequate. If it is a custom design, then a scaled drawing is necessary. All dimensions, materials, and proposed color should be indicated.
- For the Board of Zoning Appeals, you will also need a letter explaining the project, proof that you own or control the property, and a completed application form.
- For the Architectural Board, you will also need photographs showing the existing site conditions and architectural style of the house.

This typical site plan which is reduced in size shows the structures and fence locations to scale. All necessary dimensions are labeled.



Regulations

According to the Shaker Heights Zoning Code, a fence permit is required before constructing any fence, other than one of plant material. This is obtained at the Building Department at City Hall. A fee and an application form, which includes a site plan showing the location of the proposed fence, are required. Additional approvals from the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Architectural Board of Review may be required.

FRONT YARDS – Decorative fences up to three feet in height are permitted in the front yard, no closer to the right of way (sidewalk in most cases) than $\frac{1}{3}$ the distance from the house to the sidewalk. The fence must be compatible with the architectural style of the house.

Fences located in the front yard—or visible from the street—must be visually softened with landscaping. The more open a fence, the less screening required; the more solid a fence, the more landscaping required (refer to the zoning code for specific standards).

SIDE YARDS – Fences up to six feet high, as measured from the existing grade, are permitted in side yards at least 10 feet wide (when adjacent side yard is also at least 10 feet) between the front and rear building lines. If the owner's side yard is less than 10 feet, but the adjacent side yard is 10 feet or more, the fence may be erected if a variance is granted. If a side yard fence returns to the house or is plainly visible from the street, it shall be screened from the street with plantings. On corner lots, fences are permitted behind the front face of the house.

REAR YARDS – Fences may be up to six feet high in rear yards as measured from the existing grade. For residential properties abutting multi-family or commercial properties, fences up to eight feet high are permitted.

ALL FENCES – The side of a fence closest to the adjacent property line and facing outward from the yard being fenced, shall be the smooth finished side. All structural members shall be on the interior side of such fence.

Chainlink fences are permitted, but if they are visible from the street, they must be completely screened with evergreen vegetation and constructed of a dark, neutral colored material as approved by the Zoning Administrator. Masonry fences and freestanding walls require the approval of the Architectural Board of Review.

Barriers of plant materials may not interfere with vehicular traffic or impede pedestrian movement on public sidewalks.

VARIANCES – Variances from the above requirements may be permitted by the Board of Zoning Appeals. The Board will hold a public hearing to consider the variance. Written application for a variance must be filed with the Board of Zoning Appeals through the Planning and Development Department. (A fee is required).

LICENSES – Fence contractors or anyone installing, placing, or constructing a fence for hire is required to register with the City's Building Department in order to be kept apprised of applicable ordinances, policies, and procedures.

Procedures

- For a fence that complies with the Zoning Code, file a Fence Permit Application with the Building Department during the hours 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The height and location of the fence must be shown on the application.
- If a variance from the Zoning Code is desired, file a written application with the Board of Zoning Appeals through the Planning and Development Department. If a public hearing is required, it will be scheduled for a regular session of the Board of Zoning Appeals, which is held on the first Monday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in Council Chambers, City Hall.
- If the approval of the Architectural Board of Review is required, register for that meeting in the Planning and Development Department. The Board meets the first and third Monday of each month at 8:00 a.m. at City Hall. A complete filing must be registered seven days prior to the meeting.
- If the property is a local Shaker Heights Landmark or is located in the Shaker Square Historic Landmark District (the local designation), then approval must also be acquired from the Landmark Commission. The Building Department will forward the proposal to the Commission. Review will be scheduled for a regular meeting of the Commission. Meetings are held monthly at 7:30 p.m. in the second floor Conference Room, City Hall.

Further Information

Shaker Heights City Hall, 491-1400
3400 Lee Road
Shaker Heights, Ohio 44120

Planning and Development Department, 491-1430

Building Department, 491-1460

Office hours are 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.



The Planning Department is available for consultation and assistance in the selection or design of fencing.

Publications

Shaker Heights Fences is one of a series of booklets designed to help homeowners, contractors and architects with residential projects. They are intended to be used as guidelines for maintaining Shaker Heights as a pleasing, harmonious community of well-designed homes. In 1984, the "Shaker Village Historic District" was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This recognition, given for outstanding architecture and city planning, can, together with the City's maintenance program, enhance real estate values.

Available publications include:

Shaker Heights Fences - September, 1995

Shaker Village Colors - April, 1983

The Homeowner's Guide to Preservation and Maintenance - 1991

Home Improvement Brochure - 1983

Acknowledgments

The 1995 reprint of *Shaker Heights Fences* was made possible in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the Ohio Historic Preservation Office of the Ohio Historical Society. U.S. Department of the Interior regulations prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or disability. Anyone who believes he or she has been discriminated against in a program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of federal assistance should write: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127.

The Shaker Heights Landmark Commission wishes to express its appreciation to the many who have given criticism, advice, and substantial assistance in the preparation of the original 1984 edition of this guide, particularly Betty Hubbard of the City Planning Commission.

Shaker Heights Fences was a project of the 1984 Landmark Commission. It was written, compiled, and illustrated by Shaker Heights Heritage Director Patricia J. Forgac. The document was updated in 1995 by the Planning and Development Department.

1995 Shaker Heights City Government

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