

City of East Lansing One Pager Plus

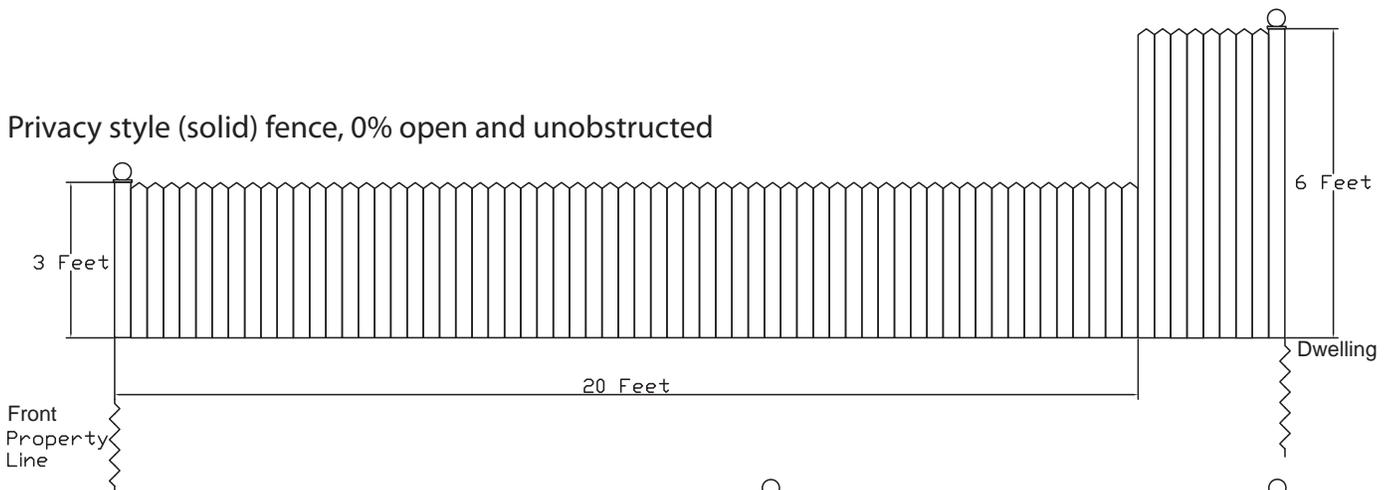
Building a Fence

One of the most visible property improvements an owner can make is the addition of a fence for their yard. From wrought iron to chain link, there are a variety of options for fence materials and appearance. But before building a fence, there are a number of regulations that property owners should be aware of. Fences can have a dramatic visible change to the character of a neighborhood and the regulations for fences in East Lansing are intended to minimize these impacts while allowing property owners to erect a fence.

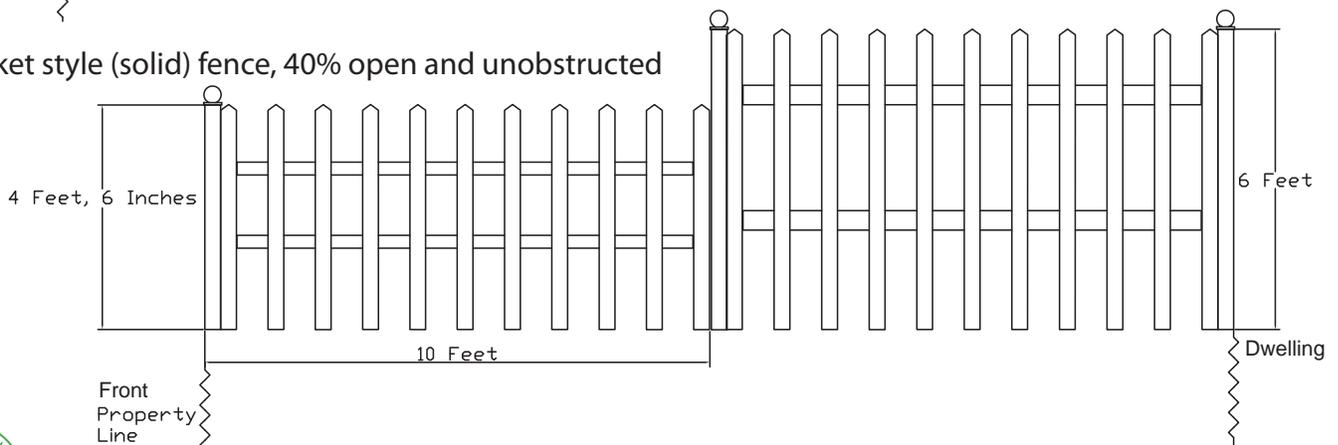
How tall can a fence be?

The height of a fence depends on where the fence is located, how far away from the property line it is located, and whether it is a solid fence or a picket style fence. In the rear or side yards (yards not adjacent to a street), fences can be up to six feet tall and can be solid or picket style. In the front yard, a solid fence can only be three feet tall, unless it is setback from the property line 20 feet. A picket style fence that is 40% open can be up to 4'-6" tall at the property line, or six feet tall if it is setback ten feet. The following diagrams show more clearly how tall fences in the front yard can be built.

Privacy style (solid) fence, 0% open and unobstructed



Picket style (solid) fence, 40% open and unobstructed



Building a Fence

Is a permit required to construct a fence?

There is no permit required to construct a fence in East Lansing. Staff strongly encourages property owners to obtain a survey of their lot, prior to installing the fence, so they know exactly where their property lines are.

How far does a fence have to be setback from my property line?

Except in the front yard discussed on the first page, there is no setback required for fences. It is important to note, all setbacks in the front yard are taken from the property line, not from the edge of the street or the edge of the sidewalk. If you are unclear as to where your property line is, a survey will be able to clarify that for you.

Are there any restrictions on the materials that can be used to build a fence?

A fence can be constructed out of any typical fence building material (iron, wood, plastic, etc). The City doesn't regulate the look or the materials, except those fences that are located in a Historic District. Fences in a Historic District undergo an additional level of review by the Historic Preservation Officer.

I want to install a decorative lattice at the top of my privacy fence. Is this permitted?

The only exception to the maximum height of six feet is for decorative features on top of a fence. An additional two feet of height is permitted only in the rear and side yards and only when the space above six feet is at least 75% open and unobstructed. This limits the additional height to decorative fence post toppers or open lattice work, not intended to provide additional screening.

Are walls treated differently than fences?

No, walls are required to meet all the same setback, height, and opacity requirements of fences. The exception to this are retaining walls, which are structurally supportive. These are addressed through the Building Code, which is enforced by the Department of Code Enforcement and Neighborhood Conservation.

What if my question wasn't answered here?

Contact the Planning and Community Development Department at (517) 319-6930 or stop by our office on the second floor of City Hall.

