
ZONING CODE TEXT AMENDMENT

Initiator: Council Member Vetaw and Council Member Palmisano
Introduction Date: February 19, 2026
Prepared By: Sara Roman, Senior Planner, (612) 673-2855
Ward: All
Neighborhood: All
Intent: To amend fence regulations

APPLICABLE SECTION(S) OF THE ZONING CODE

- Chapter 550, Development Standards

BACKGROUND

Council Members Vetaw and Palmisano introduced an ordinance to amend fence regulations on February 19, 2026, modified on April 23, 2026. The intent of the amendment is to:

- allow additional flexibility for fences constructed in corner side yards and front yards
- to introduce a provision related to distances between fences and entry doors in interior side yards for safety

Fence regulations, in general, advance public health and safety goals and establish reasonable standards for newly constructed fences. The requirements for fences are intended to balance several objectives, which may sometimes conflict with one another. These include the desire for privacy for residential and commercial properties, maintenance of public right of way and infrastructure, and pedestrian and traffic safety standards. Fence regulations apply citywide to maintain consistent aesthetic and land use standards.

Fences are one of the most common touch points for Minneapolis homeowners to engage with zoning staff and the zoning code. Homeowners can find information about fence regulations on the city's webpage, or by calling or e-mailing 311. However, no permits or site plan review are currently required for fences under 7 feet tall. This can result in situations where homeowners may become aware that their fence is not in compliance with code after it has been built, either as constructed by themselves or fence contractors.

Enforcement is currently almost completely complaint based. If a fence is found to be out of compliance with the zoning code, the property owner must bring the fence into compliance or seek a variance to install a fence that does not comply with code.

Seeking a variance increases project costs and time, and outcomes are unpredictable. Many homeowners are looking for taller fences to remedy issues that are not considered a circumstance "unique" to the property for the purposes of a variance, such as a perceived safety measure against crime, or to prevent escape of pets. Some

conditions, such as proximity to high traffic roadways and lack of a rear yard have historically been supported by staff and the Board of Adjustment for required variance findings.

Current Fence Regulations

The requirements for a fence are dependent on the location of the fence on a property. In zoning districts with required yards, including residential zoning districts, the following standards apply:

Design and/or Location	Front Yard Max	Corner Side Yard Max	Interior Side Yard Max	Rear Yard Max
Entire fence within the applicable yard is open, decorative, ornamental and at most 60% solid	4 ft.	4 ft., except as allowed below	6 ft.	6 ft.
Entire fence is 60% or more solid	N/A	4 ft., or may be 6 ft. on corner lots, where the additional height is only authorized as far forward as necessary to enclose an entrance facing the corner yard.	4 ft., or 6 ft. between the rear wall of the neighbor's house on the adjoining property and the rear lot line, or 6 ft. when the fence is 5 ft. or more from the neighbor's house.	6 ft., but may be 4 ft. if rear lot line abuts an interior side lot line
Beginning at the rear wall of the house to the rear lot line	N/A	6 ft.	Please see above.	N/A

Fences not located in required yards but located within 5 feet of a public street or sidewalk, shall not exceed 6 feet in height. No fence shall exceed 8 feet in height.

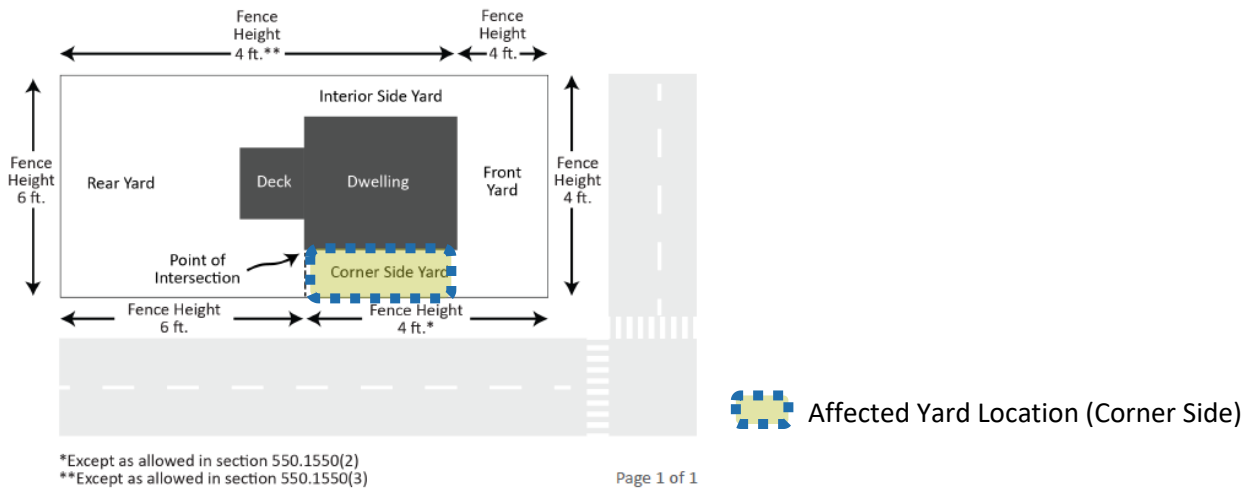
Proposed Changes to Fence Regulations

Language is proposed to be amended in sections 550.1530 and 550.1550 of the zoning code, to modify regulations for:

- fences located in corner side yards
- Fences located in front yards
- Fences located along interior side yards where adjacent to a building wall containing an entry door.

The proposed changes are discussed in detail in the following text.

Corner Side Yards



The proposed amendment to the fence ordinance would allow a six-foot-tall fence to be constructed up to the front wall of a house if constructed of open, decorative, ornamental fencing materials that are less than sixty (60) percent opaque. Open decks and porches would not be considered part of the principal structure when determining the front wall of the house.

This allows for more flexibility for fence height while maintaining access to light, air, and encouraging "eyes on the street," a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principle that enhances safety by designing spaces so that residents and passersby can naturally observe public areas, deterring crime through increased visibility.

Figure 1.



Figure 1. Example of a fence currently allowed under the existing fence ordinance, with a reduced maximum height in the side yard, adjacent to the house.

Figure 2.



Figure 2. Example of privacy fence extended to enclose a side entrance in a corner side yard, currently allowed under the existing fence ordinance.

Figure 3.

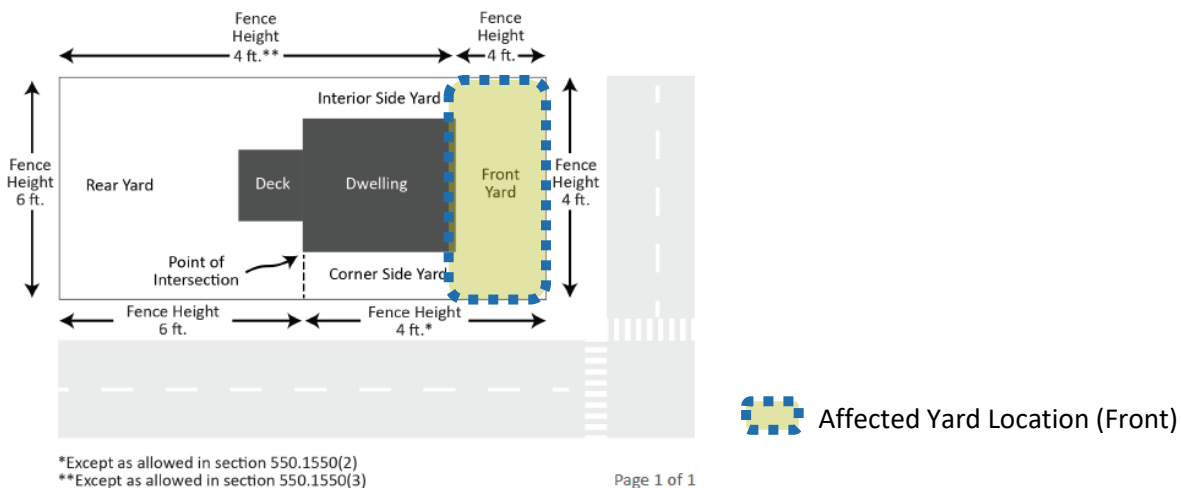


Figure 4.



Figure 3. and 4. Examples of six-foot tall fences that would be permitted in a corner side yard up to the front wall of a home, if code is amended as proposed. Figure 3. shows a fence that is constructed of open, decorative fencing. Figure 4. shows an allowed mix of opaque privacy fencing and open, decorative fencing.

Front Yards



Prior to the Land Use Rezoning Study, adopted in 2023, two kinds of fences were allowed in the front yards of residential properties:

- Opaque fences, a maximum of three feet tall
- Open and decorative fences, a maximum of four feet tall

The land use rezoning study removed the allowance for opaque fences; the proposed zoning code amendment would re-instate the allowance, providing more flexibility.

Figure 5.



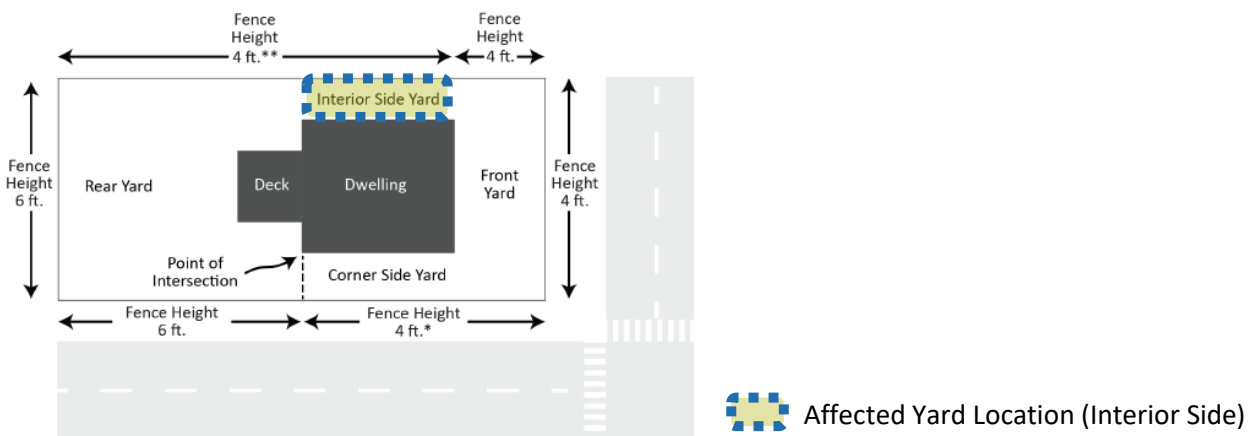
Figure 6.



Figure 5. Example of an opaque fence in a front yard, not currently allowed under the existing fence ordinance, that would be allowed if the amendment is adopted.

Figure 6. Example of four-foot-tall open and decorative fence, currently allowed under the existing fence ordinance.

Entrance Door Clearance



*Except as allowed in section 550.1550(2)

**Except as allowed in section 550.1550(3)

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The fence ordinance contains a small number of prohibited fence locations, included to prevent fences from being built in locations that may endanger public safety. Staff are proposing to include a provision for a minimum entrance door clearance along interior side yards. This provision would prevent a fence from being constructed that inhibits the opening of an existing door to a dwelling unit on an adjacent property.

In general, minimum setback requirements prevent this occurrence, but there are limited instances where existing structures are built near the property line, and construction of a fence on the property line could prevent use of an existing entrance/exit door. Staff expect that this provision will be applicable in very rare instances.

Figure 7.

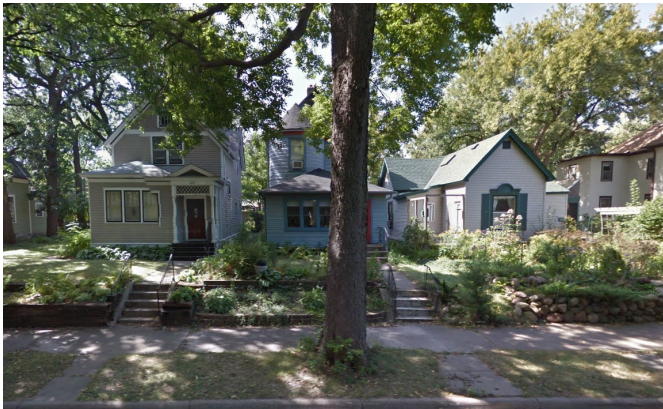


Figure 7. Example of existing 25 ft. wide properties where homes are built within 3 ft. of an interior side property line. If entry doors were located on walls facing the interior side property line, a fence would not be allowed within 3 ft. of the interior side door.

Amendment Feedback

City Planning Commission, Committee of the Whole – May 21, 2026

An overview of the amendment was presented to the City Planning Commission at its Committee of the Whole meeting on May 21, 2026. Staff received feedback regarding the amendment, including the following:

- As a common touchpoint for the public, fence regulations should be as uncomplicated as possible and easy to understand.
- Fences in front yards and corner side yards should allow views between private property and public property and sidewalks.
- The experience of the pedestrian on the sidewalk is important and should be balanced with needs for privacy in yards, particularly in front yards.
- Public handouts and educational materials on fences could be more user-friendly.

Zoning Board of Adjustment – July 23, 2026

Following staff presentation of the draft zoning code text amendment to the Zoning Board of Adjustment on July 23, 2026, staff received positive feedback. Board members noted the following:

- Any changes made to the ordinance should be shared broadly with the public and fence contractors to reduce noncompliance due to lack of accurate information
- A required permit or site plan review prior to fence construction should be considered, if staff capacity allows
- Ordinance language and public handouts should be as easy to understand as possible, and could include example imagery where applicable
- Additional flexibility is welcome to reduce variance requests related to fences

ANALYSIS

What is the reason for the amendment and what public purpose will be served?

The intent of the proposed zoning code text amendment is to modify fence regulations to allow flexibility for fences constructed in corner side yards and front yards and to introduce a provision related to distances between fences and entry doors in interior side yards.

The purpose of fence regulations, generally, is to advance public health and safety, and establish reasonable standards for newly constructed fences. Fence regulations affect the following:

- Visibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles, providing clear sight lines
- Differentiation between public and private property
- Protection of public infrastructure
- Privacy for residential and commercial properties
- Support for crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles, including natural surveillance

How is the amendment consistent with the purpose of the zoning district(s) or ordinance chapter(s) being amended?

The proposed zoning text amendment is intended to provide additional options for residents to construct fences that are consistent with the purpose of the fence ordinance, to promote public health, safety, and welfare, encourage an aesthetic environment and allow for privacy while maintaining access to light and air.

The proposed changes are consistent with purpose of Chapter 550. Development Standards, as stated in the code of ordinances, to provide regulations of general applicability for property throughout the city to promote the orderly development and use of land, to protect and conserve the natural environment, to minimize conflicts among land uses, and to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.

The proposed provision related to distances between fences and entry doors in interior side yards serves a public safety purpose.

Are there consequences in denying this amendment?

Denial of this amendment would perpetuate more limited fence options for homeowners and prevent city staff from introducing an amendment aimed at improving public safety where existing homes are located within 3 feet of an interior side property line.

What adverse effects may result with the adoption of this amendment?

The adoption of this amendment is not expected to result in significant adverse effects.

How does the amendment relate to other City ordinances?

The amendment does not affect or significantly impact other City ordinances. The following requirements will not change under this proposed amendment:

- Fences above 7 feet tall must obtain a building permit.
- No portion of any fence shall encroach upon or project into any public right-of-way or other public property without the fence owner first obtaining an encroachment permit.

What factors are influencing the timing of the proposed amendment? Why?

The proposed zoning code text amendment was brought forward by members of City Council because of continued requests for flexibility from constituents. Additionally, the request related to side door access came forward because of an event that caused a life-safety issue in the community.

How does the amendment compare to practices in other cities?

Fence regulations vary among cities and the districts within them, as individual cities tailor their codes to meet aesthetic and functional objectives and complement the existing built environment.

Fence regulations in suburban and rural communities vary widely.

How will this amendment implement the comprehensive plan?

The amendment will implement the following applicable goals of *Minneapolis 2040* (2020):

- Goal 6. High-quality physical environment: In 2040, Minneapolis will enjoy a high-quality and distinctive physical environment in all parts of the city.

The following policies and action steps from *Minneapolis 2040* (2020) apply to this proposal:

Policy 8. Public Safety Through Environmental Design: Use design principles that ensure a safe and welcoming environment when designing all projects that impact the public realm, including open spaces and parks, on publicly-owned and private land.

- c. Design the site, lighting, landscaping, and buildings to promote natural observation and maximize the opportunities for people to observe adjacent spaces and public sidewalks.
- e. Locate landscaping, sidewalks, lighting, fencing and building features to clearly guide pedestrian movement on or through the site and to provide clear delineation between public and private spaces.
- g. Locate entrances, exits, signs, fencing, landscaping, and lighting to distinguish between public and private areas, control access, and to guide people coming to and going from the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department of Community Planning and Economic Development recommends that the City Planning Commission and City Council adopt staff findings to amend Title 20 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, as follows:

A. Text amendment to Title 20, Zoning Code, to amend fence regulations.

Recommended motion: The City Planning Commission recommends that the City Council **approve** the text amendment to amend fence regulations.

Chapter 550 related to the Zoning Code: *Development Standards*

ATTACHMENTS

1. Ordinance amending Chapter 550 related to the Zoning Code: *Development Standards*
2. Racial Equity Impact Analysis

ORDINANCE
By Vetaw and Palmisano

Amending Title 20, Chapter 550 of the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances relating to Zoning Code: Development Standards.

The City Council of the City of Minneapolis do ordain as follows:

Section 1. That Section 550.1530 of the above-entitled ordinance be amended to read as follows:

550.1530. Prohibited fence locations. No person shall place, construct, maintain, or cause to be placed any fence that may endanger the public safety, including but not limited to the following:

(1) *Fire hydrant access.* No fence shall obstruct free access to any fire hydrant.

(2) *Sight triangle.* No fence shall be constructed or maintained within a distance of fifteen (15) feet from any street or alley intersection.

(3) *Entrance door clearance.* Within a required interior side yard, no fence shall be constructed or maintained within a distance of three (3) feet of a side-facing entrance to a dwelling unit on an existing building wall on an adjoining property.

Section 2. That Section 550.1550 of the above-entitled ordinance be amended to read as follows:

550.1550. Fence height. Fence height shall be limited by its location as specified below. In no case shall a fence exceed eight (8) feet in height, regardless of location.

(1) *Front yard.* Fences located in the required front yard shall not exceed ~~four (4)~~ three (3) feet in height. ~~Fences located in a required front yard shall be~~ The maximum fence height may be increased to four (4) feet if constructed of open, decorative, ornamental fencing materials that are less than sixty (60) percent opaque.

(2) *Corner side yard.* Fences located in the required corner side yard shall not exceed four (4) feet in height, ~~except as follows:~~

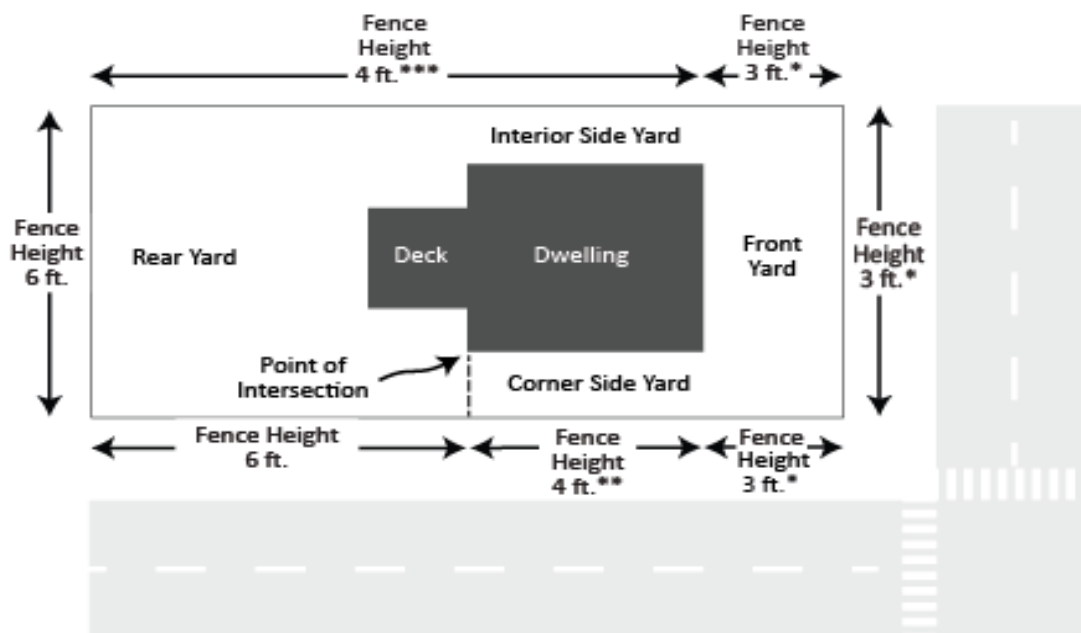
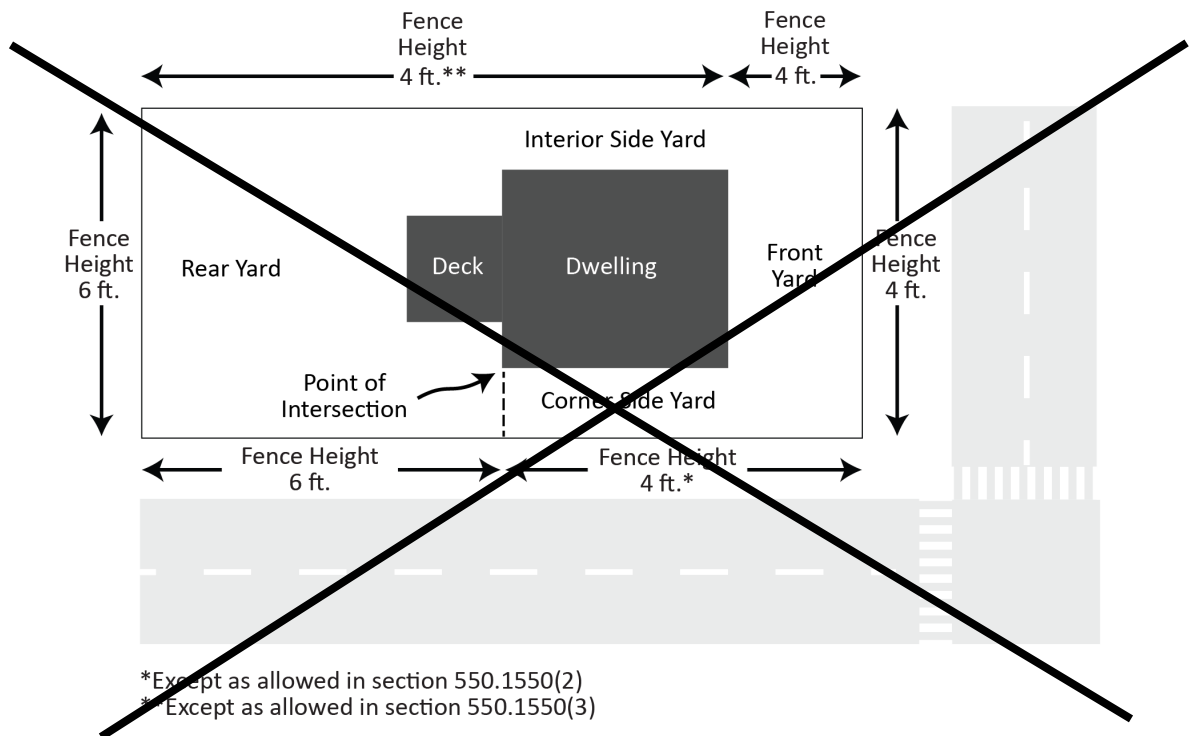
a. In addition, the ~~The~~ maximum height may be increased to six (6) feet beginning at the point of intersection of the corner side wall and the rear wall of the principal structure to the rear lot line.

b. The maximum height may be increased to six (6) feet beginning at the point of intersection of the corner side wall and the rear wall of the principal structure to the front wall of the principal structure if, at minimum, the portion above four (4) feet is constructed of open, decorative, ornamental fencing materials that are less than sixty (60) percent opaque. For the purpose of this section, open decks and porches shall not be considered part of the principal structure.

c. Where the structure includes an entrance facing the corner side yard, the zoning administrator may further authorize a fence up to six (6) feet in height between the ~~and~~ greater than sixty percent opaque

between the rear wall of the principal structure and the corner side property line, extending as far toward the front of the lot as reasonably necessary to incorporate the entrance within the fenced area.

Figure 550-2 Maximum Fence Height



*Except as allowed in section 550.1550(1)
**Except as allowed in section 550.1550(2)
***Except as allowed in section 550.1550(3)

(3) *Interior side yard.* Fences located in the required interior side yard shall not exceed four (4) feet in height, except as follows:

a. The maximum height may be increased to six (6) feet if the fence is located not less than five (5) feet from the structure on the adjoining property or if the entire fence is constructed of open, decorative, ornamental fencing materials that are less than sixty (60) percent opaque.

~~b. In addition, the~~ The maximum height may be increased to six (6) feet between the rear wall of the principal structure on the adjoining property and the rear lot line.

(4) *Rear yard.* Fences located in the required rear or side yard and extending along the rear lot line shall not exceed six (6) feet in height, except that a rear yard abutting a required side yard shall be considered an interior side yard and shall be subject to the regulations for interior side yards.

(5) *Along public streets.* Fences not located in required yards, but located within five (5) feet of a public street or public sidewalk, shall not exceed six (6) feet in height.

Racial Equity Impact Analysis (REIA)

SUBJECT:

Fence regulations ordinance amendment

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

DOES THIS IMPACT ONE OF THE CITY'S GOAL AREAS?

Policy Goals

- Public Safety
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Public Services
- Environmental Justice
- ✓ Built Environment & Transportation
- Public Health
- Arts & Culture

Operational Goals

- Workforce
- Spending
- ✓ Data
- Community Engagement

DESCRIBE THE IMPACT ON SELECTED GOAL AREAS

The proposed zoning code text amendment, introduced by Council Members Vetaw and Palmisano, would amend the regulations for fences. The amendment is intended to increase flexibility for fences constructed in corner side yards and front yards and to introduce a provision related to distances between fences and entry doors in interior side yards for safety.

Fence regulations play a role in the built environment as fences can impact the quality of streetscapes in both positive and negative ways. Fence regulations allow for privacy while minimizing conflicts among land uses. However, tall fences can also prevent "eyes on the street," a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principle that enhances safety by designing spaces so that residents and passersby can naturally observe public areas, deterring crime through increased visibility. Tall fences adjacent to sidewalks can also detract from the pedestrian experience and opaque fences can make snow storage adjacent to sidewalks challenging.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN COMPLETING THIS ANALYSIS?

CPED Code Development staff

SECTION 2: DATA

LIST THE SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIES THAT WILL BE IMPACTED AND THE RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF CONSTITUENTS IN THOSE AREAS:

The text amendment includes regulations that apply city-wide and will impact all communities within the city. According to the US Census (2020), the City of Minneapolis population is 429,954 and includes:

- Black and African American (18.5%).
- American Indian and Alaskan Native (1.2%);
- Asian (5.2%);
- Hispanic or Latino (9.9%); and
- two or more races (7.8%).

WHAT DOES AVAILABLE DATA TELL YOU ABOUT HOW CONSTITUENTS FROM BIPOC COMMUNITIES CURRENTLY RELATE TO THE DESIRED OUTCOME COMPARED TO WHITE CONSTITUENTS?

Available data does not identify differences in how residents from BIPOC communities relate to current fence ordinances compared to white residents. Available fence data includes number of zoning citations issued for noncompliance with fence regulations and variance requests made to the Board of Adjustment. However, zoning compliance inspections are primarily complaint driven and therefore do not necessarily reflect the prevalence of noncompliance. Staff note that complaint-based enforcement data is affected by multiple factors, including reporting behavior, neighborhood expectations, or patterns of interaction with city government.

- 22 fence height variances were requested between 2023 and today
- Over 100 fence violations were issued for fence height during the same period

WHAT DATA IS UNAVAILABLE OR MISSING? HOW CAN YOU OBTAIN ADDITIONAL DATA?

The city does not currently collect demographic information related to land use processes at the City of Minneapolis, including land use applications such as variance requests, or fence-related variance approvals.

Similarly, code enforcement matters including citation issuance does not include demographic information.

Data related to the types of fences installed in different parts of the city is not readily available but could be collected.

SECTION 3: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

USING THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (IAP2) PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM, WHICH PARTICIPATION STRATEGY(S) WAS USED WHEN ENGAGING THOSE WOULD BE MOST IMPACTED?

- ✓ Inform
- ☐ Consult
- ☐ Involve
- ☐ Collaborate
- ☐ Empower

DESCRIBE THE ENGAGEMENT AND WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Minneapolis residents, business/property owners, and the development community influence proposed regulations through the public hearing process. CPED staff has issued a notice regarding this zoning code text amendment to all neighborhood groups and published a notification in Finance and Commerce for the public hearing scheduled for the August 10, 2026, City Planning Commission meeting.

CPED staff also provided communications to stakeholders via the City's website and LIMS. The amendment was presented to the City Planning Commission – Committee of the Whole on May 21, 2026 and to the Zoning Board of Adjustment on July 23, 2026.

SECTION 4: ANALYSIS

HOW DOES THE OUTCOME FOR THIS ORDINANCE, AMENDMENT, OR POLICY HELP THE CITY ACHIEVE RACIAL EQUITY?

While there may not be explicit evidence that fence regulations create or increase racial disparity, providing additional flexibility within the code and reducing the need for costly and time-intensive land use applications benefits all residents. Additional flexibility also supports the City's goal of eliminating disparities between different communities within the city, as more flexible regulations encourage consistent and equitable outcomes across the city, rather than a reliance on less formal and more subjective processes, such as land use applications.

Historically, wealthier, more organized, and whiter communities have had a stronger political infrastructure and more time to dedicate to local development oversight and have historically been more successful at pushing for higher-quality development. Codifying standards creates more consistent and equitable outcomes rather than results based on the expectations of the most active residents.

SECTION 5: EVALUATION

HOW WILL IMPACTS BE MEASURED? WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS INDICATORS AND PROCESS BENCHMARKS?

CPED staff can measure impact of the amendment by tracking the following:

- Number of citations issued by Zoning Inspectors related to noncompliance with fence regulations.
- Number of fence variances requested at the Board of Adjustment or City Planning Commission

Other success indicators of the amendment could include:

- Feedback from stakeholders, such as neighborhood groups or 311 callers, indicating that fence regulations feel more navigable and flexible

HOW WILL THOSE WHO ARE IMPACTED BE INFORMED OF PROGRESS OVER TIME?

Adopted zoning code text amendments are published in the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances. City staff will communicate applicable fence regulations to members of the public through the 311 Service Center over the phone and through e-mail, in-person services at the Minneapolis Service Center and through other applicable methods, including meetings with staff.

Public fence handouts will be updated to reflect adopted changes and to be more user-friendly. The handouts are available on the city's website. Planning staff will work with Communication and Marketing staff to develop a plan to share information with the public.