

DATE: May 19, 2020

CASE: Staff Report for Text Amendments the Historic Handbook
"Chapter 5 – Section 9 "Fences and Walls"

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BACKGROUND

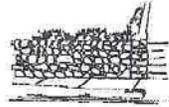
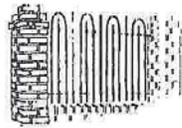
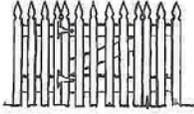
Over the past several years, the Historic Preservation Commission has received several requests to utilize "decorative concrete block" for projects such as retaining walls, landscape walls, and walls intended for outdoor seating. Currently the Historic Handbook, Chapter 5-Section 9 "Fences and Walls" states that: "*Concrete-masonry walls and walls constructed from railroad ties are prohibited.*" However, the Historic Preservation Commission and Staff believe that this language, at the time of adoption, was intended for what is typically known as "cinder blocks." Since that time, modern decorative concrete block and pavers have become popular materials for home projects.

In response to these requests and in an effort to differentiate between cinder blocks and "decorative concrete block," the Historic Preservation Commission has proposed the attached modifications to the Historic Handbook. Changes include:

1. Clarifying CMU's
2. Clarifying "decorative concrete block"
3. Allowing "decorative concrete block" in certain cases
4. Detailing appropriate/inappropriate aesthetics of "decorative concrete block"
5. Setting a maximum height for "decorative concrete block" walls in front yards
6. Providing exhibit images of appropriate and inappropriate materials/designs

The Historic Preservation Commission voted unanimously at their May 13th meeting to forward this text amendment to the Planning and Zoning Commission, requesting that the Planning and Zoning Commission forward the Historic Handbook amendment to City Council with a recommendation of approval.

Chapter 5 – Section 9: FENCES and WALLS



Appropriate Fences and Walls



Chain link, basket weave, plastic/vinyl, and split-rail fences are prohibited within the historic districts. However, where chain link fences already exist, they should be accompanied by landscaping materials, which will “climb” the fence and act as a screen. Fences should be compatible with most structures in the districts.

The style of fence or wall should respond to the historic nature of the property. All wooden fences should be “stick-built” on site. The styles shown to the left are encouraged as well as custom designs with appropriate architectural detailing. Wooden fences visible from the street and/or wooden fences in front yards and side yards of corner lots are required to be painted or stained white or a color matching the body or trim of the structure, including shutters, foundation color, etc. Painting or staining is recommended, but not required, for rear yard fences unless they are visible from the street. If a fence is designed as a single-sided fence, one with detailing on only one side, the finished detail should be on the outside face of the fence (facing neighboring property or the street). Additionally, wood picket fences should have

pickets spaced at a minimum of 1 inch or half the width of the picket. (See notes regarding “Privacy Fences” for allowable exceptions to this rule.) Additionally, it is not appropriate to introduce walls or fences in front yards and side yards at corner lots that are more than 65% solid. Cast-iron, powder coated aluminum, or wrought-iron fences should be designed to follow historic precedent.

Where fences are desired in front yards and side yards at corner lots, the design should be primarily decorative in nature. Front yard fences should not exceed four feet in height. Wooden fences should be painted or stained white or a color matching the body or trim of the structure, including shutters, foundation color, etc.

Rear yard fences are defined as fences, which do not extend forward on the applicant’s property beyond the side centerline of the house in plain view. Approval of the location may also be handled on a case-by-case basis to determine the best natural break in the rear and front yards for placement of fences. Rear yard fences may be higher than four feet. The portions of rear yard fences that face the street should be landscaped with shrubs and trees of a planting size that will fully hide the fence from the street within two years. Size, type, and growth habits of plant materials to screen rear yard fences that face the street should be submitted at time of application. If a front yard fence adjoins a rear yard fence, or an existing neighboring property fence, attention should be given to the transition between the two. Also, attention should be

given to the design of fences placed along a sloping grade. All proposed fences and walls should not negatively ~~effect~~[affect](#) existing trees and mature landscaping.

Privacy fences are defined as fences with no spacing between pickets or fences of the shadowbox design. Privacy fences may be allowed at the discretion of the Commission in the following circumstances:

1. Privacy fences are most appropriate in rear yards.
2. Privacy fences may be allowed where the applicant's rear yard is directly adjacent to property that is either not in a historic district, or is within a historic district but is non-contributing or intrusive in that district. The applicant shall show to the satisfaction of the Commission:
 - (a) that the adjacent property is unsightly in comparison to other properties surrounding the applicant's property,
 - (b) that the adjacent property or nearby property raises reasonable security concerns for the applicant, or
 - (c) that the adjacent property could reasonably be determined to negatively impact the property value of the applicant's property.

Privacy fences shall be allowed only on the applicant's property line directly adjoining the aforesaid adjacent property unless the Commission feels that such a partial privacy fence would not be visually appropriate or would not accomplish the purpose(s) of the privacy fence set forth above.

3. Privacy fences encompassing an area of no more than 250 square feet may be allowed at the discretion of the Commission when adjacent to the applicant's house, garage, or other outbuilding in order to screen from view trash cans, mechanical equipment, cars or other unsightly items, provided such fence does not unreasonably impact any neighbor by blocking windows or the like.

Privacy fences allowed by the Commission should be landscaped where practical with appropriate shrubbery to soften the appearance of the fence.

Where walls are concerned, natural stone or brick-masonry walls are encouraged and should not be coated or painted. The type and color of stone and masonry should respond to the historic nature of the property. The transparency or openings in the walls will be considered on an individual basis. Poured-in-place concrete walls are discouraged. ~~Concrete masonry walls and walls constructed from railroad ties are prohibited.~~ [Concrete-masonry walls constructed of plain concrete-masonry-units or CMUs \(often referred to as “concrete blocks” or “cinder blocks”\) and walls constructed from railroad ties are prohibited.](#)

[Concrete-masonry walls constructed of decorative concrete blocks \(such as split-face blocks that are textured, colored, etc.\) will be considered by the Commission on a case-by-case basis. Decorative concrete block shall not have a beveled face and shall not be stacked in a manner that allows the flat surface of the block to be visible on the wall’s front façade. Decorative concrete blocks shall have textured faces to mimic the shape irregularities of natural stone. Examples of](#)

inappropriate materials and materials that may be considered on a case-by-case basis are exhibited below. Front yard walls equal to and taller than 36 inches may not utilize decorative concrete blocks.

Chapter 5- Section 9 “Example A” (Inappropriate concrete-masonry-unit material examples):



Chapter 5- Section 9 “Example B” (Inappropriate beveled edge, concrete block designs):



Chapter 5- Section 9 “Example C” (Decorative concrete block considered on a cases-by-case basis):



DESIGN GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Do not use high walls or fences to screen front yards.
2. Use materials ~~like~~ such as natural stone, brick, wood, powder coated aluminum and iron.
3. ~~Avoid~~ Chain link or plastic materials are prohibited. ~~Also avoid~~ adding slats to existing chain link fences for screening purposes is prohibited.
4. Materials and style should coordinate with building and neighboring buildings as well as other walls and fences in the area.