



FENCES, WALLS, AND HEDGES

SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL ZONES

(Bellingham Municipal Code 20.30.110)

1. HOW HIGH CAN I HAVE A FENCE, RETAINING WALL, OR HEDGE?

Fences, walls, and hedges that are located within a required yard* shall not exceed the following height limits (see Figure 1.):

- Front yard on an interior lot: 54"(4'6")
- Front yard on a corner lot: 42"(3'6")
- Side yard on a flanking street: 42"(3'6")
- Interior side and rear yards: 72"(6')
- Vision Clearance Triangle: 36"(3')

Height is measured from the ground level adjacent to the outside edge of the wall or fence. When fences are constructed on top of walls, both are included in the calculation of height.

* The Land Use Development Ordinance (zoning code) sets height limits for fences, walls (including retaining walls), and hedges when they are located between a property line and a setback line. This area is called a required "yard". See the "Yards and Setbacks for Single Family Homes" handout if you need to determine the required yards for your lot.

2. WHAT IF I WANT A TALLER FENCE, RETAINING WALL, OR HEDGE THAN IS ALLOWED?

You may submit a request for an over-height fence/wall. An over-height fence request is subject to joint approval by the Planning & Community Development Department and the Public Works Department (request forms are available at the Planning & Community Development Department.) An illustration of the fence and a site plan showing the location of the fence and all structures within 50 feet of the fence must be attached to the application. You must also obtain written consent for the fence from all abutting property owners.

Tip: Over-height retaining walls are discouraged. Terraced retaining walls separated by at least a five-foot (5') wide planting area are preferred when higher slopes must be supported. The heights of retaining walls that are separated horizontally by at least five feet (5') are not added for the purpose of determining total allowed height under the zoning code (inquire at the Building Services Division to determine whether the terraced retaining wall will require a building permit.)

Tip: Sight obscuring over-height fences that extend across the full width of a lot on the street side are also discouraged. If a taller fence is desired for privacy, it should only enclose a portion of the front yard or the side yard on a flanking street.

If you are not able to obtain approval, you may consult with Planning Division staff to determine whether there are other options through variance or appeal.

3. HOW CLOSE TO THE PROPERTY LINE CAN A FENCE, RETAINING WALL, OR HEDGE BE PLACED?

There are no setback requirements for fences, walls, or hedges that meet height limits and do not require a building permit.

4. WHEN DO I NEED A BUILDING PERMIT FOR MY FENCE, RETAINING WALL, OR HEDGE?

- A building permit is required for fences over 72" (6') in height.
- Retaining walls require a building permit if they meet one of the following conditions:
 - a. Exceed 48" (4') in height (measured from the bottom of the footing); or,
 - b. Hold an additional load (road, parking lot, house, hill, etc.).
 (1997 UBC 106.2)

5. WHERE DO I GET A BUILDING PERMIT?

Building permits are available from the Building Services Division (360) 778-8300. and may be submitted concurrently with an Over-Height Fence Request, at the applicant's own risk.

Figure 1. Fence, Wall, and Hedge Heights in Required Yards

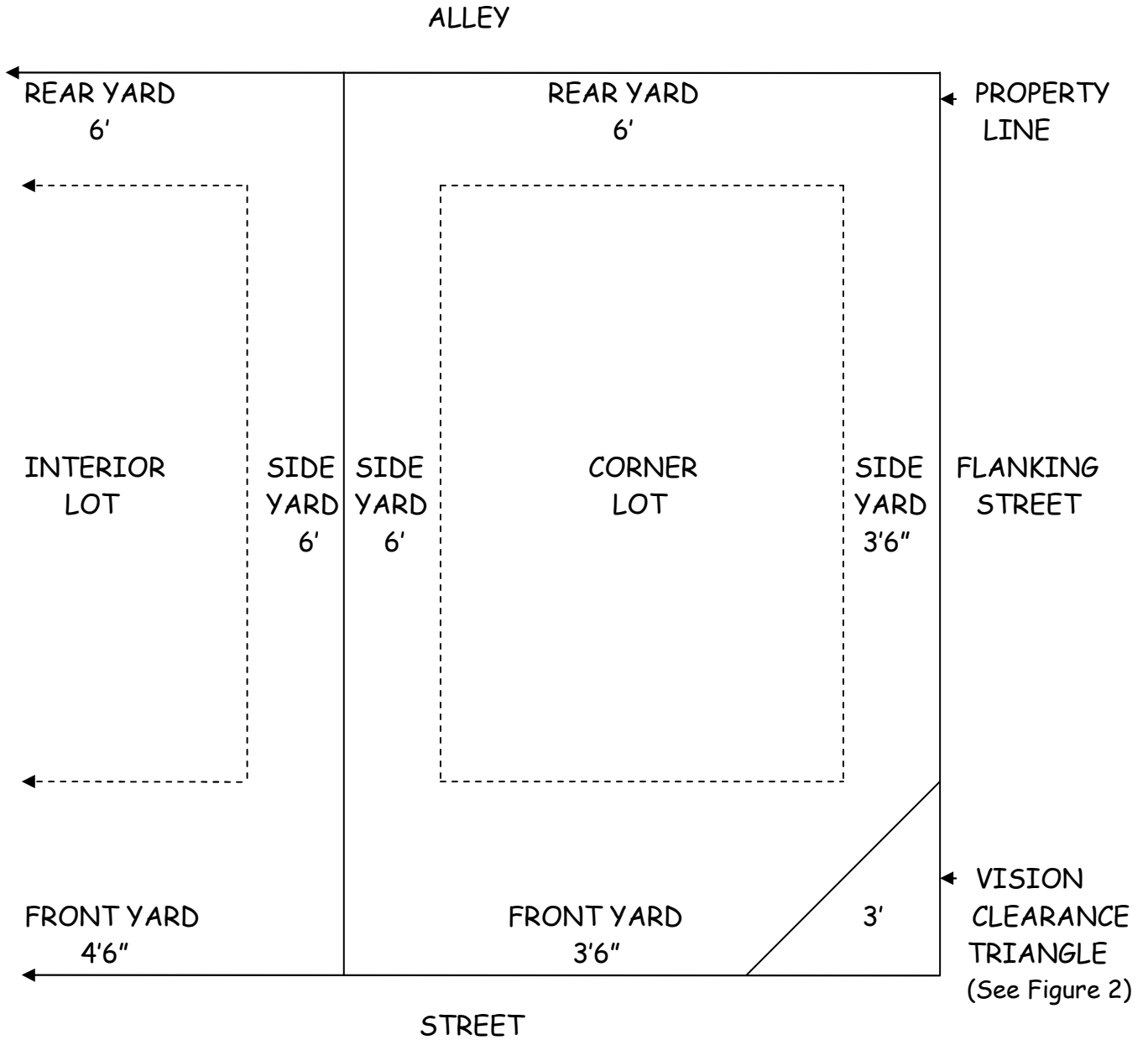


Figure 2. Vision Clearance Triangle

