

# Fence Ordinance Update



ORD25-0006

Board of Supervisors

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# Fence Ordinance Update

- **Goals of the Ordinance:**
  - Establish objective standards for fences and similar structures based on location, height, materials, and fence design
  - Streamline permitting requirements
  - Define and establish standards for agricultural fences to exempt them from design review, when applicable





# Outreach and Coordination

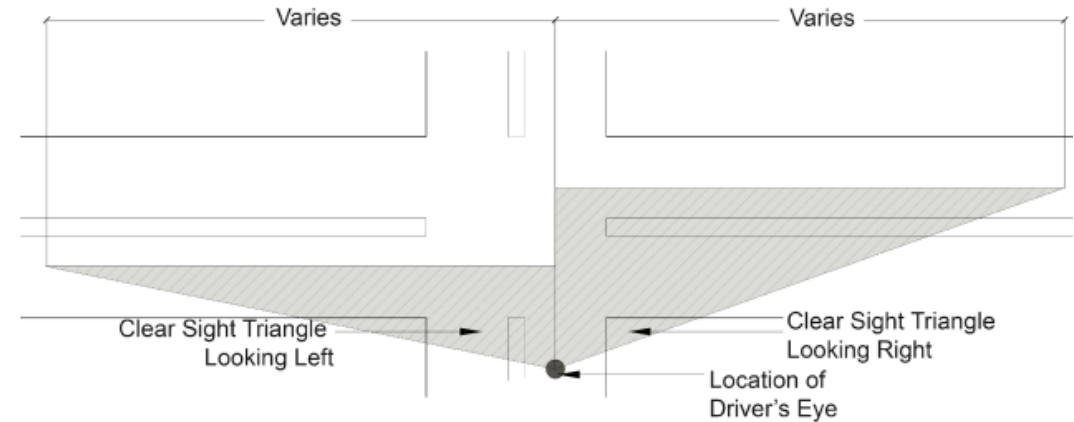
- **Sonoma Public Infrastructure (SPI)**
  - Safety
  - Sight distance
  - Review process
- **Permit Sonoma Code Enforcement Division**
  - Enforceable fence development standards, related to height measurement, location, materials, etc.
- **Sonoma County Farm Bureau and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers**
  - Agricultural fences related to agricultural production





# Sight Distance

- Sonoma Public Infrastructure bases county sight distance requirements on the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards.
  - **Sight distance:** length of roadway visible to a driver.
  - **Sight distance length** must allow for minimum stopping distance, corresponding to the speed traveled along the intersecting roadway.
  - **Sight triangle:** triangular area at intersections



**Open fence:** At least 90% of the vertical surface area allows for visibility through the structure, while the remaining 10% or less is opaque.

**Solid fence:** Less than 90% of the vertical surface area allows for visibility through the structure.



# Agricultural Fences

- **Existing Regulation:**

- Design review required for any fence within the Scenic Resources Combining District including fences that support agricultural production.

- **Proposed Regulation:**

- Defines an agricultural fence as a fence associated with an established or proposed agricultural production
- Exempt agricultural fences from design review, provided they are:
  - Located within agricultural and resource zoning districts (LEA, LIA, DA, and RRD), or the Agriculture and Residential (AR) zoning district;
  - Composed of:
    - Post and wire (e.g., barbed, smooth, high tensile, woven and mesh); or
    - Rail (e.g., metal, vinyl, wood)
  - No taller than eight feet in height.





# Existing Regulations

Applicable in Residential Zones (AR, RR, R1, R2, and R3) and Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial District (K)

## No Permit Required:

- Fences outside of required setbacks are not regulated
- Fence < 3 feet in height within front/street-side yard setbacks
- Fences < 6 feet in height within the side or rear yard setbacks

## Use Permit Required:

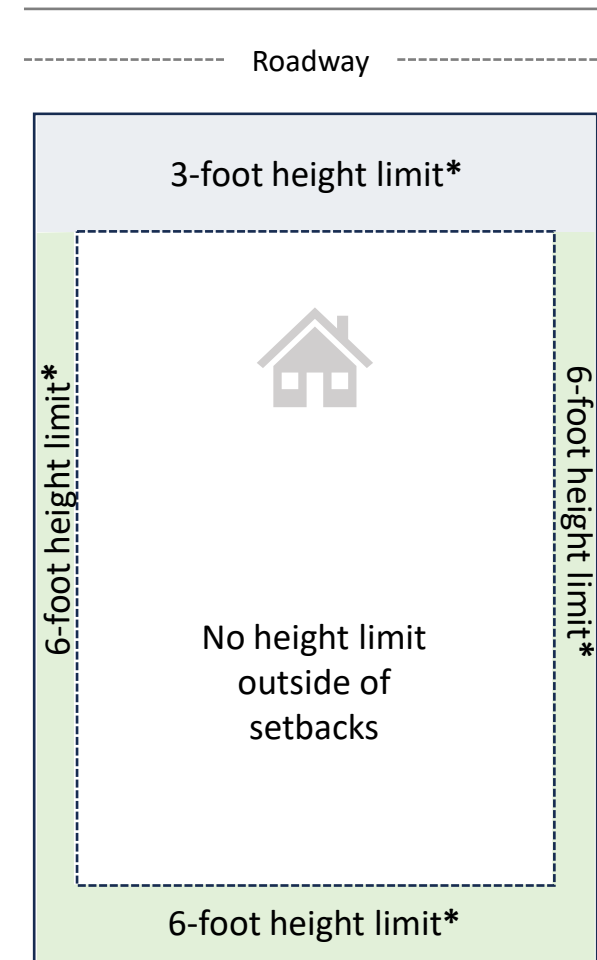
- To exceed height limits in setbacks
- Within 15 feet of street corner

## Design Review Required:

- Any fence in the Scenic Resources (SR) Combining District

## Fence Materials:

- There are no established design or material standards for fences.



**\*Exceptions only permitted with a Use Permit.**





# Proposed Regulations

- ✓ *Applicable in: Residential Zones (AR, RR, R1, R2, and R3) and Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial District (K)*
- ✓ *All fences must comply with allowed materials. Exceptions may be allowed with DRC approval.*

FENCE TYPES	NO PERMIT	ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN REVIEW (STAFF)	USE PERMIT (ZONING ADMINISTRATOR)	DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE (DRC)
<b>Within Front or Street Side Yard Setbacks</b>	Fences ≤ 3 feet in height <b>AND</b> Fences ≤ 6 feet in height provided the fence above 3 feet is open fence	Solid fences between 3 to 6 feet in height in the R1, R2, R3, and K zoning districts	Solid fences > 3 feet in height in the AR and RR zoning districts	
<b>Within Side or Rear Yard Setbacks</b>	Fences that is ≤ 6 feet in height, or a maximum height of 8 feet if the top 2 feet are wooden lattice or open fence			
<b>Agricultural Fences</b>	In the AR zoning district, agricultural fences that are: - ≤ 8 feet in height - Composed of wire and post, split rail, or pipe <b>AND</b> Agricultural fences in all other zoning districts	In the AR zoning district, agricultural fences that are: - > 8 feet in height - Composed of materials other than wire and post, split rail, or pipe rail		
<b>Other Fence Types</b>	Fences outside of required setbacks	Any fence in the Scenic Resources (SR) or Local Guidelines (LG) Combining Districts > 3 feet in height		Any fence not described under the <i>No Permit, Administrative Design Review, or Use Permit</i> allowances.







# Materials

- **Allowed Materials\***

- Wood
- Composite wood showing naturalistic grain and coloring
- Non-reflective metal finishes
- Stone and masonry
- Stucco or plaster
- Woven metal or wire fencing (e.g. chain link or hog wire)



*\*Exceptions may be made through the Design Review Committee.*

- **Prohibited Materials**

- Bunker blocks
- Reflective metal finishes
- Razor wire
- Barbed wire\*
- Glass
- Masonry walls consisting exclusively of uncovered concrete masonry units



*\*Except as required by State Law for certain agricultural fences.*





# Planning Commission Recommendation

- November 6, 2025, Planning Commission hearing
- Commission recommended modifications to staff's recommendation:
  - Solid fences > 3 feet in height in front or street-side yard setbacks should require a Minor Use Permit with Zoning Administrator review in the AR and RR zoning districts
  - Allow for flexibility in the type of agricultural fences eligible for exemption from Design Review
- Proposed ordinance incorporates the Planning Commission recommendations





# General Plan Consistency

- The **Open Space and Resource Conservation Element** provides design criteria for structures in any designated Scenic Resource and exempts certain agricultural structures from design review requirements.
  - The ordinance proposes to exempt certain agricultural fences that would not impact scenic resources and are associated with agricultural production from design review.
  - The ordinance still requires Administrative Design Review for residential fences within designated scenic resources.
  - The ordinance establishes fence standards and permitting tiers related to height, material, and design ensure that fences are compatible with and blend in with the surrounding rural landscape.
- The **Agricultural Resources Element** encourages easing restrictions and permitting for agricultural development.
  - The ordinance proposes exempting qualifying agricultural fences supporting agricultural operations from design review through streamlined permitting.





# California Environmental Quality Act

- The ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to:
  - CEQA Guidelines **Section 15061(b)(3)**, because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed ordinance may have a significant effect on the environment; and
  - CEQA Guidelines **Section 15303(e)**, which provides for the new construction of small accessory structures such as fences.





# Recommendation

## Adopt an ordinance:

- Finding the action categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3) (common sense exemption) and 15303 (new construction of small accessory structures); and
- Amending Sonoma County Code Chapter 26 (Zoning Regulations), Articles 04, 64, and 88, to establish streamlined permitting requirements and development standards for fences located within residential zoning districts (AR, RR, R1, R2, and R3) and the Recreation and Visitor-Serving (K) district, that meet standards for location, height, materials, and design, and exempt certain types of agricultural fences from existing design review requirements.



# Questions

