OTTAWA FENCES

Fence Heights & the By-law

Ottawa's Fence By-law: 1 m front yards, 213 cm side and rear yards, gate, archway and post-cap allowances, and how height is measured

5 Expert Answers from Fencing IQ

ottawafences.ca/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. A 4-foot front yard fence in Kanata: too tall?
2. Who enforces fence height rules in Ottawa?
3. Does Ottawa have a fence by-law for townhouses in Riverside South?
4. Does my backyard fence height count from my side or theirs in Ottawa?
5. Taller fence in Orleans if my neighbour agrees?

Q1

A 4-foot front yard fence in Kanata: too tall?

A 4-foot fence exceeds the front-yard limit. The Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, sets the front-yard limit at 1 m, and a 4-foot fence is taller than that.

The front yard, under the Fence By-law No. 2003-462, runs from your front lot line to the nearest point of your house, across the full width of the lot. Height is measured from the grade at the base of the fence, meaning the finished ground next to it, not counting any artificial berm or embankment. A fence that sits on a berm does not get a higher allowance; the berm does not raise the limit.

A few things are worth checking before you settle on a design. If your lot is on a corner, the Fence By-law also requires that no fence exceed 75 cm within a triangle formed by measuring 3 m along each lot line from the corner. Separately, Ottawa's Zoning By-law 2008-250 (section 57) and Zoning By-law 2026-50 (section 216) say that on a residential corner lot, solid obstructions over 0.75 m are not permitted within a triangle measured 6 m along each street lot line from the corner. A see-through fence is not considered an obstruction under the zoning rule, though it must still meet the Fence By-law's 75 cm limit within the 3 m triangle. On a corner lot, confirm the exact layout with the City. On any lot, the Fence By-law also restricts height to 75 cm within a triangle formed by measuring 2 m along the lot line and the driveway edge where the driveway meets the street.

The 30 cm gate allowance and the 250 cm archway allowance in the Fence By-law apply in side and rear yards only. They do not extend the 1 m front-yard limit.

If you want a fence taller than 1 m in a front yard, the Fence By-law does include an exemption process: the Director of By-law Services may permit a residential fence up to 3 m where it is necessary for the health or safety of the public. The by-law does not describe an application form or fee for this, and it is not a route to a taller privacy fence. Municipal Law Enforcement Officers enforce the by-law, and fines fall under the Provincial Offences Act. If you have a specific situation, ask By-law Services directly.

A fence that does not enclose a pool does not need a building permit in Ottawa.

When you have two written quotes in front of you, set them side by side and compare: the height and material specified, the total length of the run, how posts are set and to what depth, each gate priced as its own line item, and whether removal and disposal of any existing fence is included and at what cost.

Q2

Who enforces fence height rules in Ottawa?

Municipal Law Enforcement Officers enforce the City of Ottawa Fence By-law, No. 2003-462, and fines are under the Provincial Offences Act; we found no set fine amount on the by-law page. The by-law (s.25) says no one may erect, own or maintain a fence on private property that does not comply with it.

The rules they apply are straightforward. In a front yard, no fence may exceed 1 m. In a side or rear yard, the limit is 213 cm (about 7 feet). In those side and rear yards only, a gate may exceed the limit by up to 30 cm, an archway forming part of an entrance may reach 250 cm, and decorative caps on structural posts may exceed the limit by up to 15 cm.

Height is measured from the grade at the base of the fence. Where the ground is higher on one side, measurement starts from the higher grade. The by-law defines grade as the finished ground next to the fence, not counting artificial embankments or berms, so placing a berm at the base does not raise the permitted height. For a fence on top of a retaining wall or a deck, we found no rule in the by-law; confirm with the City.

We found no City page describing how fence complaints are handled, so for a specific fence, ask By-law Services. A fence lawfully built under an old municipality's by-law before January 1, 2004 may continue in use and be maintained, but because the by-law defines "erect" to include altering or rebuilding, ask By-law Services before making changes to an older fence that exceeds today's limits.

A residential fence that does not enclose a pool does not need a building permit. The Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, is the main document to check, and By-law Services is the office to contact with questions about a specific fence.

Before signing a quote, ask the installer to confirm in writing the height they are building to in each yard.

Q3

Does Ottawa have a fence by-law for townhouses in Riverside South?

Yes, the City of Ottawa Fence By-law No. 2003-462 applies to townhouses in Riverside South, the same as any other residential property in Ottawa. The height limits are 1 m in the front yard and 213 cm (about 7 feet) in side and rear yards.

A few specifics worth knowing for a townhouse setting:

- Front yard: the front yard runs from the front lot line to the nearest point of the house, across the full width of the lot. No fence there may exceed 1 m.

- Side and rear yards: the 213 cm limit applies. In those yards only, a gate may be up to 30 cm taller than the fence, an archway forming part of an entrance may reach 250 cm, and decorative caps on structural posts may exceed the limit by up to 15 cm.
- Finished side: the finished or "good" side of the fence must face the street and neighbouring properties.
- No building permit is needed for a residential fence that does not enclose a pool. If the fence will enclose a pool, that falls under the Pool Enclosure By-law and a permit is required; ottawapoolinstallation.ca covers that.

If your lot shares a boundary with a common element or a condominium corporation's land rather than a neighbouring private lot, ask the City of Ottawa whether the Fence By-law applies to that shared line the same way it does to a standard property boundary, and check your condominium declaration or rules for any additional restrictions.

Before the fence goes in, pull up your property on geoOttawa to see the approximate lot lines and check your title documents for any easements along the fence line. If there are trees near the planned fence line, check with the City's Forestry Services before digging within the critical root zone.

Q4

Does my backyard fence height count from my side or theirs in Ottawa?

The City of Ottawa Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, answers this directly: height is measured from the grade at the base of the fence, and where the ground is higher on one side, from the higher side. So if your neighbour's yard sits higher than yours, the fence height is measured from their grade, not yours.

"Grade" in the by-law means the finished ground right next to the fence. The by-law specifically excludes artificial embankments or berms from that measurement, so if someone has built up a berm against the fence, that raised soil does not move the measuring point higher or give you extra height to work with.

The limit for a backyard fence on residential property is 213 cm (about 7 feet). A few additions are permitted in side and rear yards only: decorative caps on structural posts may go up to 15 cm above that limit, a gate may exceed it by up to 30 cm, and an archway forming part of an entrance may reach 250 cm. None of those allowances apply in a front yard.

One situation the by-law does not address is a fence sitting on top of a retaining wall or a raised deck. If your fence is mounted above grade on a structure like that, the by-law text does not say where measurement starts, so confirm that specific setup with the City of Ottawa before building.

If you are ready to get quotes, the request form on this site sends your project details to local Ottawa fence installers listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q5

Taller fence in Orleans if my neighbour agrees?

Your neighbour's agreement does not raise the height limit. The City of Ottawa Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, sets the maximum at 213 cm (about 7 feet) in a side or rear yard, and that limit applies regardless of what you and your neighbour have agreed between yourselves.

The only route to a taller residential fence under the Fence By-law is an exemption the Director of By-law Services can grant, up to 3 m, where a taller fence is necessary for the health or safety of the public. The by-law does not describe this as a privacy or convenience option, and we found no application form or fee for it.

A few other rules apply in Orleans the same as anywhere in Ottawa:

- In your front yard, the limit is 1 m, neighbour agreement or not.

- In a side or rear yard, a gate may be up to 30 cm taller than the fence limit, an archway forming part of an entrance may reach 250 cm, and decorative caps on structural posts may exceed the limit by up to 15 cm. These allowances do not apply in the front yard.
- A residential fence that does not enclose a pool does not need a building permit. It must still meet the Fence By-law and zoning.

If your fence is near a property line, check geoOttawa for approximate lines and consider an Ontario Land Surveyor for exact ones before you build. A fence contractor cannot certify where the boundary is.
Your neighbour's agreement is still worth having in writing, because a shared fence involves shared expectations about cost, maintenance and appearance, and the Line Fences Act provides an arbitration process through the City if a dispute arises later. Talk to your neighbour first, and if you reach an agreement, put it in writing before any work starts.

If you and your neighbour agree on a fence within the limits, a short written note of who pays for what saves an argument later.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Fences. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any fence project. Fences in Ottawa must meet the City's Fence By-law, and a free locate is required before digging any post hole. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawafences.ca** for the latest answers.