OTTAWA FENCES

Wood & Cedar Fences

Pressure-treated and cedar board, picket and privacy fences in Ottawa: rules, the finished side and upkeep

5 Expert Answers from Fencing IQ

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Q1

Board fence with a cap rail in Barrhaven, any rules?

A board fence with a cap rail is a straightforward build under the City of Ottawa Fence By-law, No. 2003-462. In a side or rear yard the fence itself must not exceed 213 cm (about 7 feet) measured from grade at the base, and the cap rail counts as part of that height. In a front yard the limit drops to 1 m.

The by-law measures height from the finished ground next to the fence, and where the ground is higher on one side, from the higher side. A berm or raised bed does not raise the limit. If your fence sits on top of a retaining wall or a raised pad, we found no rule in the by-law for that situation; confirm the measurement point with the City before you build.

The finished side of the fence, meaning the side where the boards face outward cleanly, must face the public street and any neighbouring properties under section 15 of the by-law. A cap rail running along the top is part of the fence structure, so ask the installer how the cap is fastened and finished on both sides.

On materials: if the boards are cedar, redwood or treated wood, the by-law does not require a protective coating. Any other wood species must be protected by paint, preservatives or another weather-resistant material. The cap rail follows the same rule as the rest of the fence, whatever material it is made from.

A few other rules that apply in Barrhaven:

- If your lot is on a corner, the Fence By-law limits any fence to 75 cm within a triangle measured 3 m along each lot line from the corner. The zoning by-law (2008-250, section 57) adds a second triangle: solid obstructions over 0.75 m are not permitted within 6 m along each street lot line from the corner. A see-through fence is not counted as an obstruction under zoning, but a solid board fence is. Confirm the layout with the City if your lot is on a corner.
- On any lot, no fence over 75 cm within the triangle formed by measuring 2 m along the lot line and 2 m along the driveway edge where the driveway meets the street.
- In a side or rear yard, decorative caps on structural posts may exceed the 213 cm limit by up to 15 cm. A continuous cap rail is not the same as a post cap; ask the installer which parts of the design fall under that allowance.
- No building permit is needed for a residential fence that does not enclose a pool.

Before any post holes are dug, the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act requires a locate request. Ontario Dig Authority asks for it at least 5 business days before digging starts. Ask the installer whether they submit the request or whether you do, and ask about any private lines on your property; we found no statement either way on whether those are marked.

When you have two written quotes in front of you, set them side by side and compare the height and board material specified, the total length of the run, how the posts are set and how deep, each gate priced as its own line item, and whether old-fence removal and disposal are included or extra.

Q2

Rough-sawn cedar or smooth boards for a Gloucester fence?

Both rough-sawn and smooth cedar are permitted under the City of Ottawa Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, provided the fence meets the by-law's height limits, has its finished side facing the street and neighbouring properties, and is kept in good repair. Cedar is one of the materials the by-law specifically excepts from the requirement to apply paint, preservatives or another weather-resistant coating, so either surface texture qualifies on that point.

The choice between the two comes down to what you want the fence to look like and what you ask the installer to specify in writing.

Rough-sawn cedar has a textured face left from the mill cut; smooth boards are planed to a consistent face. Ask the installer to tell you the actual board dimensions being quoted (nominal sizing and actual thickness both), the grade of cedar, and whether the boards are kiln-dried or green. Those are things to confirm in the quote, not assumptions to make.

A few things that affect what shows up in a cedar fence quote: the height and total length of the run, the number and size of gates (priced separately, with pedestrian gates running about $500 to $1,500 and driveway gates about $800 to $2,200 based on published 2025-26 Ontario installer pricing), whether an old fence needs to come out (roughly $5 to $15 per linear foot, more where posts are set in concrete), and the post method. The installed price for cedar fence runs about $45 to $85 per linear foot based on published 2025-26 Ontario installer pricing; rough-sawn and smooth boards can fall anywhere in that spread depending on grade and style, so ask for both options to be quoted as separate line items so you can compare directly.

The single most useful question to put to an installer before you sign: ask them to write the cedar grade, board thickness, and whether the lumber is kiln-dried or green directly into the quote, so you know exactly what you are getting for the price.

Q3

Split rail fence across a Manotick front yard, allowed?

A split rail fence across a Manotick front yard is allowed under the City of Ottawa Fence By-law, as published on ottawa.ca, as long as it stays at or below 1 m in height. Height is measured from the grade at the base of the fence, or from the higher grade where the ground differs on each side of the fence. A berm does not raise that limit.

Split rail is an open style, and two triangle rules matter on the lot. At the point where your driveway meets the street, the Fence By-law requires that nothing over 75 cm sit within a triangle formed by measuring 2 m along the lot line and 2 m along the driveway edge. On a corner lot, the same 75 cm limit applies within a triangle measured 3 m along each lot line from the corner. If your lot is on a corner, the City of Ottawa's Zoning By-laws (2008-250 and 2026-50) add a second sight-triangle rule: solid obstructions over 0.75 m are not permitted within a triangle measured 6 m along each street lot line from the corner. The zoning rule says a chain link fence or a similar feature that can be seen through is not an obstruction; whether a split rail fence counts as see-through there is a question to confirm with the City before you build.

The Fence By-law also requires that the finished side of the fence face the street and neighbouring properties. Split rail is the same on both sides, so that is straightforward. If your split rail is cedar or treated wood, it falls under the by-law's exception to the coating rule: cedar, redwood and treated wood do not need to be painted or sealed, though the fence must still be kept stable, vertical and in good repair under sections 11 and 12.

No building permit is needed for a residential fence that does not enclose a pool. The fence must still comply with the Fence By-law and zoning.

Q4

Warped boards on a new wood fence in Gloucester, normal?

Wood boards can move after installation, and whether that is within normal range or a defect worth pursuing depends on a few things worth checking before you contact the installer.

Why particular boards warped is something the installer has to look at and explain. What you can check yourself is whether the fence still meets the standard the by-law sets, and what your written contract says about the material.

The City of Ottawa Fence By-law No. 2003-462 (section 11 and 12) requires that a fence be stable, vertical, of good-quality materials suitable for the purpose, kept in good repair, safe, and free from accident hazards. It also requires that the fence be protected by paint, preservatives or another weather-resistant material, with an exception for cedar, redwood and treated wood. If boards have warped to the point where the fence is no longer stable or vertical, that is a condition the by-law addresses, regardless of how new the fence is.

A few things to look at when you assess the boards:

- Are the boards still fastened securely, or are they pulling away from the rails?
- Is the fence still plumb and stable, or is it leaning?
- Are gaps between boards wider than what was quoted or agreed to?
- Did the installer specify the wood species and moisture content in the written contract?

On the contract side, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 says that if your agreement included an estimate, the installer cannot charge more than 10 per cent above it, and that a written direct agreement gives you 10 days to cancel after receiving it. If the fence was delivered in a condition that does not match what was described in writing, that is a matter to raise directly with the installer first, in writing, with photos and dates.
If the installer does not respond or disputes the issue, By-law Services can inspect whether the fence meets sections 11 and 12 of the Fence By-law. They enforce the by-law; they do not resolve contract disputes.

The installer is the right first call, because they know what material they used, how it was stored before installation, and what their warranty covers in writing. If you get no satisfactory answer there, By-law Services can tell you whether what you have in front of you meets the by-law's standard.

Q5

Lattice top on a cedar fence in Orleans, allowed?

A lattice top on a cedar fence is allowed in Orleans under the City of Ottawa Fence By-law, No. 2003-462, as long as the total height of the fence, including the lattice, stays within the limits. In a side or rear yard, the full structure, solid boards plus lattice, must not exceed 213 cm (about 7 feet) measured from the grade at the base of the fence. In a front yard, the total cannot exceed 1 m.

How height is measured matters here. The by-law measures from the finished ground at the base of the fence, and where the ground is higher on one side, from the higher grade. A berm or artificial embankment does not raise the limit. Boards and lattice count together: if the combined height passes 213 cm in a side or rear yard, the fence does not meet the by-law, however much of it is lattice.

A few other points from the by-law apply to this fence. Cedar is one of the materials excepted from the coating rule, so the cedar boards do not need to be painted or sealed to meet the by-law, though the lattice material should be confirmed with your installer if it is not cedar. The finished side of the fence, the side that looks complete, must face the public street and neighbouring properties under section 15. Decorative caps on structural posts may extend up to 15 cm above the 213 cm limit in a side or rear yard, but that allowance is for post caps only, not for the lattice panel itself.

Ask your installer to specify the lattice height and the board height as separate line items in the quote, so you can confirm the total before the fence goes up. Things that show up in a cedar fence quote include the material and style, the total height, the length of the run, the number and size of gates, removal and disposal of any old fence, and how the posts are set.

Keep the written contract, the itemized quote and photos of the finished fence.

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.