

**SANTA CRUZ COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT POLICY/ORDINANCE  
INTERPRETATION**

Interpretation No.: FENCE-02 (Design standards for fences over three feet abutting a street)  
Effective Date: 8/21/06  
Originally Issued: 8/18/06

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**Question:**

*What design standards are applicable to fences, over three feet in height, which are located abutting a street?*

**Applicable Ordinance Section(s)  
And/or General Plan/LUP Policy(ies)**  
13.10.525

**INTERPRETATION:**

Fences over three feet in height, which are abutting a street, are discouraged unless there are mitigating circumstances. Those that are approved must be set back a minimum of three feet from the property line, and must have landscaping installed along the length of the fence abutting the street, sufficient to mitigate visual impacts.

**Reason:**

Section 13.10.525(a) governs the construction of fences and retaining walls abutting a street. One of the stated purposes of this section is “*(t)o preserve a harmonious and compatible street front appearance.*” Because taller fences have negative visual impacts and may impair sight distance at driveways and intersections, fences over three feet in height abutting a street are discouraged. Mitigating circumstances that could justify a taller fence would include noise impacts from busy streets, security concerns in remote areas, required pool fencing, and similar situations. In situations where a fence over three feet could be approved, landscaping can help to mitigate the visual impacts and create a street front appearance more compatible with surrounding development. To allow sufficient area for the installation of landscaping, the fence must be set back a sufficient distance, such that the landscaping is not installed within the right-of-way. This setback will also help to assure that adequate sight distance is maintained to ensure visibility to and from vehicles entering the street from driveways.

County Code Section 9.70.520 prohibits encroachments that “*impede, obstruct or deny pedestrian or other lawful travel within the limits of the right-of-way of a county-maintained road, or impairs adequate site distance for safe pedestrian or vehicular traffic.*” This would prohibit most landscaping and would be required to mitigate the visual impacts of fences located on the property line, abutting a county-maintained road, when that landscaping would be installed within the right-of-way.

Exceptions can be considered in rural areas, where the fence abuts a privately-maintained road or in unusual circumstances, if the applicant can install the required landscape improvements within the right-of-way without obstructing vehicular or pedestrian travel (see Interpretation No. ROW-01 Rights-of-way, private; improvements within), and that landscaping does not impair sight distance.

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Tom Burns, Planning Director

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Date