



# Historic Preservation Commission

## Staff Report

August 3, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Update on Public input on Fences in Historic Districts

**PROJECT PLANNER:** Geoffrey Starns, AICP, LEED AP BD+C, Historic Preservation Supervisor

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### BACKGROUND:

Several months ago, the Commission directed staff to get more public input regarding whether or not front yard fences should be allowed in historic districts. Staff took several actions to obtain the public's input. At staff's request, Pomona Heritage and the Historical Society of the Pomona Valley sent an email to their members asking for their input and directed them to contact the city via email. We received 22 comments. The City also created a post on the City's Facebook page asking for input. We reviewed 14 comments to our post. Finally, staff held a community meeting where three people showed up. They all stated that they should be allowed if designed properly. Staff also went through a post on the City's Facebook account and received emails on the subject. We have also included Ordinance 4118 (fence and wall regulations) as an attachment, for your information.

### PUBLIC INPUT RESULTS:

After going through all the comments and emails, and the comments of the people attending the community meeting, the results of the public input were as follows:

Response Type	Yes	Yes with Conditions	No	Total
E-mail	3	14	5	22
Facebook	9	2	3	14
Meeting	0	3	0	3

The email comments were much more constructive and helpful than the Facebook posts. For all the emails that stated they would allow fences with some conditions/restrictions/ etc., twelve (12) of the responses mentioned a period or architectural appropriate design, four (4) wanted a height restriction, and one (1) wanted setbacks. In addition, three (3) emails wanted the process to go through the Historic Preservation Commission or an Architectural Commission. Finally, one (1) of the emails represented the

board of Pomona Heritage. Their position was that they “were fine with front yard fencing that allowed the property to be viewed (preserve curb appeal) and was of a historically appropriate look/material”. They also thought that new fence requests should come to the Commission for review and approval.

The “Yes” responses cited safety most often as the reason a front yard fence should be allowed. One of the emails opposed to front yard fences summed up quite well concerns that had been expressed by the respondents, residents verbally to staff, as well as Commissioners and Council Members. They were:

- Unfriendly look – fences send an unpleasant message and infer that the neighborhood is less friendly
- Hostile presence – fences allow outdoor dogs to bark and menace walkers, joggers, bikers and school children passing by
- Restricts outdoor activities – fences limits residents from using their own yard for games such as “catch” and hide-and-go-seek
- Changes the front yard into a cage – fences will discourage trick or treating by forcing the children to enter into a confined space to participate in our neighborhood annual event
- Changes the character of the historic home – fences make the streetscape look like a collection of “mini-compounds” rather than a community
- Decreases the elegance of landscaping – fences would lead to diminishing front yard landscaping and the addition of “caged” animals would destroy what landscaping is left
- Changes streetscape – fences encourage homeowners to plant of hedges up to the back of sidewalk, thus shifting the character of the street view by blocking the historic home
- Increases possibility of crime – fences would allow burglars to lurk inside a front fence without being seen by the neighbors

## **OPTIONS:**

There are four options the Commission could take. They are:

1. Do nothing. This would leave the regulations as they are, which a case-by-case basis where staff determines if the majority of the block has front yard fences or not. If they do, staff approves an appropriately designed fence. If not, staff denies the applications
2. Prohibit front yard fences in historic districts. This will require staff to amend the zoning code and historic preservation ordinance to prohibit front yard fences in historic districts.
3. Allow front yard fences with no restrictions/limitations. This will require staff to amend the zoning code and historic preservation ordinance to allow front yard fences in historic districts.
4. Allow front yard fences with limitations/conditions. This may require staff to amend the zoning code and historic preservation ordinance, depending on the types of limitations, and to, potentially, create design guidelines for fences (if that is one of the limitations).

The previously discussed the public responses proposed the following limitations/conditions:

1. Appropriate design
2. Height limits

3. Setbacks
4. Approval by the Commission.

#### **STAFF RESEARCH:**

As discussed during staff's initial presentation on this item, there was no one factor that we could link to the areas that currently have front yard fences. In addition, based on staff's photographic research, homes of a Victorian era style, generally built prior to 1900, had a front yard fence. Those homes built in our historic districts, in styles other than those in the Victorian era, generally built after 1900, and did not have fences.

Staff reached out to the other certified local governments in the state to see how their jurisdictions treat front yard fences. The only response we have received at the time of publishing the agenda was from Santa Barbara. They responded that front yard fencing needs to be "simple and made of see-through wood picket fencing or wrought iron so that the building is the focal point, not the fence".

#### **CONCLUSION:**

There are legitimate reasons on both sides of this argument. Staff has been looking into this issue for months and has concerns with every option. The easiest option is to prohibit front yard fences in historic districts. However, we understand that front yard fences may be appropriate, or at least, not adversely affect the historic character, in some neighborhoods, while other neighborhoods would have severe adverse effects by allowing new front yard fences. We also understand that people in different neighborhoods feel differently regarding front yard fences. Staff has struggled to find a way to incorporate the various opinions into a cohesive recommendation. Staff is, therefore, looking for direction from the Commission.

#### **ATTACHMENT:**

1. Ordinance 4118