

Guidelines for Fences, Gates and Shutters



Prepared for the
City of Victoria

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Background

A growing number of fences, gates and shutters have been installed throughout the downtown and neighbourhood commercial districts in Victoria. These barriers have been erected along driveway entrances, private laneways, open spaces, niches, building entrances and alcoves. Shutters and grilles have also been applied to building facades for security of shop windows. Some of these have presented aesthetic concerns. Others have presented safety concerns related to fire exiting and the operation of gates affecting public space.

In many cases, fences and gates are being installed on properties that lie within designated Development Permit and Heritage Conservation Areas and affect buildings that are Heritage Designated or listed on the City's Heritage Register. These require application for and approval of Development Permits and Heritage Alteration Permits respectively.

Fences and gates should be consistent with urban design objectives, ensure human safety, comply with other standards that are required and not contribute to a "fortress" appearance.

The following guidelines provide a framework for considering proposals for the installation of fences, gates and shutters in the City of Victoria. A few examples of installed fences, gates and shutters are provided to illustrate some of the principles identified in these guidelines.

The goal of these guidelines is to ensure that where fences, gates and shutters are required, they are well designed and complement their surroundings.



Development Permit and Heritage Conservation Areas

Where your site is located affects the review and approval process for your application.

Properties that lie within designated Development Permit and Heritage Conservation Areas and affecting buildings that are Heritage Designated or listed on the City's Heritage Register need to apply for the appropriate Development Permit or Heritage Alteration Permit. These require Council approval.

A map indicating the location of designated Development Permit Areas and Heritage Conservation Areas can be found at www.victoria.ca/common/pdfs/ocp-1995-schedule-b-intro-map.pdf

A map indicating the heritage status of properties can be found at www.victoria.ca/common/maps/zoning.pdf. A list of addresses of heritage properties can be found at www.victoria.ca/cityhall/departments_plncmm_hrtinv.shtml.

Depending on the extent of renovations proposed some fence, gate or shutter installations might also require a Building Permit.

Define the Problem

The first step is to define the nature of the security problem. Is the problem break and enter into the premises or nuisance trespassing?

If the problem is break and enter into the premises, exterior gates and fences will have very limited application. The solution to this problem may be best addressed by other means, including:

- installing more secure doors, windows and locks to the building
- installing more effective alarm systems
- increasing private security company presence and monitoring of their performance
- implementing Downtown Victoria Business Association (DVBA) initiatives such as signage, cleaning and graffiti control
- increasing visibility to the problem area

- installing lighting to improve viewing opportunities into the problem area and beautify and enhance the overall character of the surrounding area.

If the problem is nuisance trespassing a fence or gate may be an appropriate solution. In this case, basic urban design principles apply, including principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).

A clear understanding of the nature of the security problem and a thorough assessment of alternative solutions should be undertaken prior to proposing the installation of fences, gates and shutters.

Develop Your Design

The following describes a process to assist you in developing your design.

1. Take photographs that illustrate your building and the character of the area around your site.
2. Document examples of design solutions that you like.
3. Retain a professional designer to prepare a preliminary design on your behalf or prepare a sketch design yourself.
4. Make an appointment with City staff to review your proposed design early in your design process.

The next section, Design Principles, describes criteria that your proposed design must meet.

Understand the Character of Your Street

The design solution for your fence, gate or shutter should respond to the character of your particular surroundings. Understand how your design could affect the overall character of your street, including variation of treatments and sensitivity and compatibility to architectural conditions. Consider whether your proposed design will have a positive or negative impact on the character of your street. Your proposed design should make your street look more attractive. It is important that your proposed design does not contribute to a "fortress" like appearance of your street. The cumulative impact of many fences and gates can damage the public's perception of whether a street or area is safe and alter the character of the street when gates are closed after hours.

Understand the Character of Your Building

What is the character of the building you are dealing with? Is it an older building with heritage detailing? Or is it a modern one, or something in between? What are its best features? What colour are the architectural finishes? How can your gate, fence or shutter be compatible with its design? These elements could contrast in an interesting way to bring out the qualities of the structure or be completely within the same design vocabulary. Your design should complement your building's architectural character, façade and colour of architectural finishes. Fences, gates or shutters must not be the dominant feature of the building façade. Think of these elements as something that, when well done, can add value to your property.

Safety Considerations

Fire safety is an important consideration and fences, gates and shutters must meet all fire egress requirements. Gates that are designated as fire exits should open outward in the direction of escape. Side folding, sliding or gates opening inward may be permitted if approved by the City's Permits and Inspections Division and Fire Department. The width of the gate will depend on the number of persons that would have to use it in an emergency. These matters should be discussed with City staff.

Due to concerns with injury to passers-by, gates may not open onto public walkways. Gates should therefore be set back to allow opening within private property or a sliding or folding gate of an acceptable aesthetic standard should be used. If your gate is opened and closed only once a day, it may be acceptable that it open onto public space, but must be locked in the open position. You will be required to demonstrate liability insurance covering any personal injury or property damage caused by the operation of the gate.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

The principles of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) apply to the design of fences, gates and shutters. Key CPTED principles that apply to these elements include:

Beautify the Urban Environment – The design for all fences, gates and shutters must contribute to the beautification of the urban environment. Poorly designed fences, gates and shutters, particularly when they become dominant elements on the street, have a negative impact on the quality of the urban environment and become targets themselves for vandalism. This has been referred to as the "Jane Jacobs Test".¹

Build to Last - Use high quality and durable materials. Materials and construction methods that are easily damaged will quickly deteriorate and become the target of further abuse.

Maintain Good Visibility - The fence or gate must maintain transparency. This allows the passing public, police and security services opportunities to view into the space. Fences and gates must not result in opaque, blank surfaces.

Consider Lighting Carefully – Lighting to supplement fence or gate installation must improve viewing opportunities into the problem area. The quality of the light must beautify and enhance the overall character of the surrounding area.

¹ For a more complete discussion of the Jane Jacobs Test and other CPTED principles, refer to the Design Centre for CPTED website at www.designcentreforcpted.org

To achieve the design principles, the following design guidelines will be used to evaluate proposals for fences, gates and shutters.

Fence, gate and shutter proposals must:

- complement the character of the street and not result in a fortress-like appearance
- integrate with building design, architectural finishes and materials for a cohesive effect
- not be the dominant feature of the building façade
- maintain transparency of windows and doors, and not result in opaque or blank surfaces
- be constructed of high quality, durable materials that weather gracefully
- acknowledge colours within the building or immediate context. Contrasting colours may be considered if it contributes to pedestrian interest along adjacent public sidewalks
- respond to important safety considerations by meeting BC Building Code and fire egress requirements.

Fence, gate and shutter proposals are encouraged to:

- not encroach onto adjacent public walkways. If gate encroachments are proposed, applicants must demonstrate to the City that the gate can be secured in the open position and does not negatively impact the public realm.

Fence, gate and shutter proposals may include lighting schemes for consistency with CPTED principles. If proposed, lighting is encouraged to:

- illuminate property or building entrances that are proposed to be gated
- avoid lighting overspill to neighbouring properties
- be compatible with adjacent street lighting.

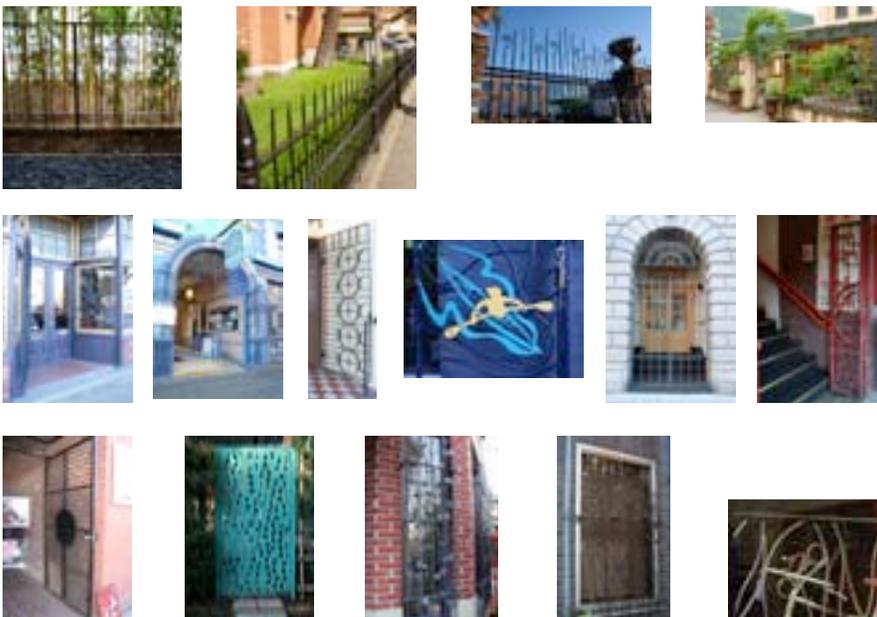
Fence proposals may incorporate plantings or other landscaping features. If proposed, plantings must:

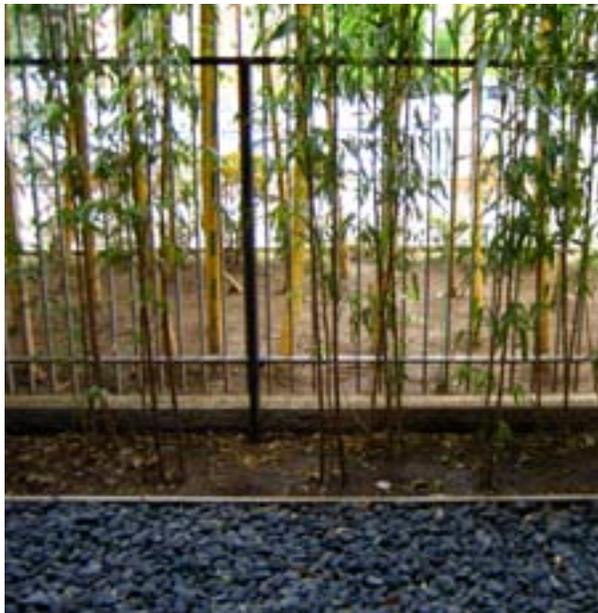
- be accessory to the fence structure as an accent feature
- not create entrapment spots
- be selected carefully and maintained well to ensure that plantings do not encroach onto public walkways or obstruct views.

The design of fences, gates and shutters requires careful consideration to successfully integrate them into the overall composition of a building and street. Too often, they appear as an unfortunate afterthought. This is a significant design challenge, requiring creative skills, particularly where these elements have not been conceived as part of the original building design.

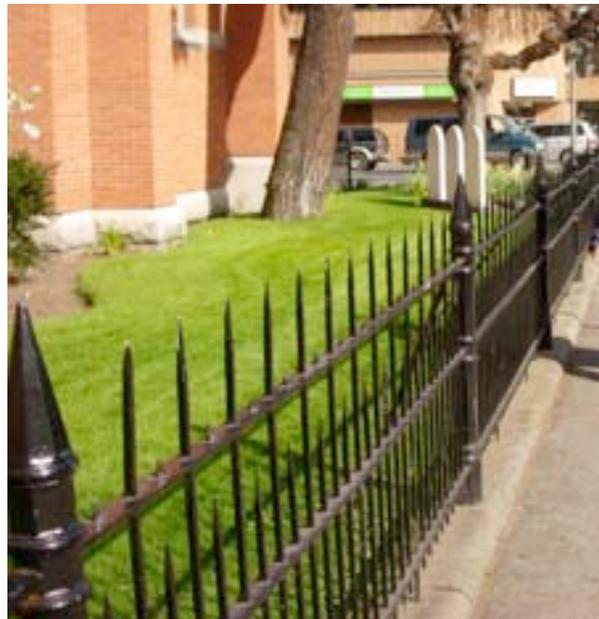
How fences, gates and shutters are added to a business or residence communicates a powerful message to your customer or guest. The entrance to your building is of particular importance and there is no place more important than this to invest in a creative and beautiful design solution. They can be a positive addition to your environment, if they are well considered.

Following are photographs of fences, gates and shutters that illustrate some of the design principles identified in previous sections. Comments describe some of the positive attributes of these examples. Applicants are encouraged to apply these principles to achieve a design proposal that responds to the unique circumstances of their location.





Planting compliments this fence while maintaining transparency, and providing security



Even a short fence can be an effective deterrent
This fence is made of high quality materials



Combination of materials brings delight to the passerby
while providing security



Custom detailing adds character to this fence, complimentary planting softens the appearance



Security bars are discreet and match storefront colour

Gates compliment the architecture and are securely folded back to be out of the way of pedestrians



The wavy water-like pattern and kayak in this custom steel fence help communicate the kind of business that lies beyond



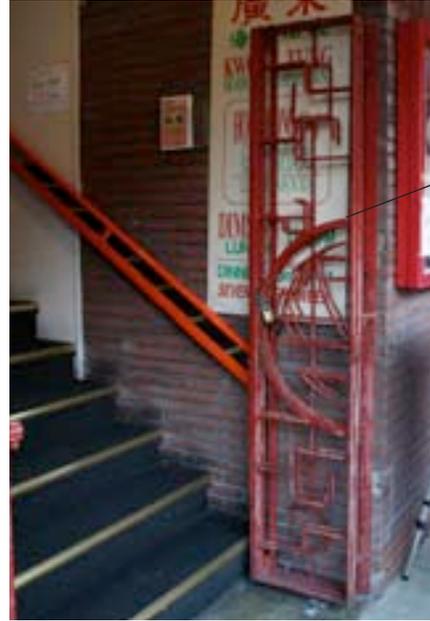
A latch secures this gate while it is open

Artistic use of high quality materials



Compliments architectural setting

Quiet colour works well with building materials



Artistic reflection of cultural identity

Folds out of way for pedestrian safety



Playful combination of simple forms



Combination of planting provides extra screening

Imaginative use of transparent pattern



Special elements enliven these security screens



Custom detail reflects the character of this business

This grille doesn't need to go all the way to the top of the window to be effective