

Three contractors stood at the back of a yard on a Saturday morning, and each one gave a different answer to the same question. The question was simple: how high can a fence go along this property line? The first said the maximum was no problem and started quoting numbers. The second said it depended on the neighbor and the street. The third asked to see the survey, asked whether the lot was a corner lot or an interior lot, and asked about the pool that was already framed in the backyard. Only the third contractor was doing the job correctly, because only the third one treated the fence as a municipal matter before treating it as a construction matter.

That scene plays out across Toronto and the GTA every spring, and it explains why local bylaw and permit knowledge belongs at the front of your contractor search instead of somewhere in the middle of it. You are not hiring someone to install boards. You are hiring someone to install boards in a specific place, at a specific height, under a specific set of rules that your municipality enforces, and the difference between a smooth project and a costly redo is usually not the carpentry. It is the compliance.

Start With Your Own Homework, Not Their Sales Pitch

A fence contractor can know a great deal about building and still be guessing about your street. The rules come from your municipality, and they differ between Toronto and Mississauga, between Vaughan and Markham, between Burlington and Oshawa. Within a single city, a corner lot faces different restrictions than an interior lot, and a lot that backs onto a ravine, a hydro corridor, or a busy arterial road faces different ones again. A crew that has spent years building in one part of the region can be excellent there and useless on your block, not because the carpentry is different, but because the paperwork is.

Before you invite a single bidder onto your property, spend an evening with your municipality's website. Find your property's zoning, look up the fence provisions that apply to it, and write down the maximum height for the front, side, and rear yards, the setback and sight-line rules if you are on a corner, and anything that touches pools, heritage districts, or easements. Building departments publish most of this material directly, and a short phone call settles whatever is unclear. Rules change over time, so confirm the current requirements with your municipality rather than relying on what your neighbor was told five years ago or what a forum thread claims today.

Your homework also protects you from bad assumptions, and the GTA is full of them. The height of your neighbor's fence is not proof of what is legal; it may be an old fence that predates the current rules, or a fence the municipality has never inspected. A permit that was granted for a deck does not cover a fence. The location of the old fence is not the property line, however much it looks like it. Every one of these assumptions has cost a homeowner a fence they had to move or remove, so check the survey and the zoning before you let anyone dig.

The differences between municipalities are not cosmetic, and they matter even within a short drive. A height that is routine in one town can be over the limit in the next, which is worth knowing if your property sits near a municipal boundary or if you are considering a contractor who mostly works elsewhere in the region. The rules that matter are the ones for your address, and your address alone.

The Questions That Separate Local Pros From Roadside Crews

Once you know your own rules, use them to test every contractor who responds to your search. The point is not to trap anyone. The point is to find out how much local bylaw and permit knowledge each candidate actually carries, because that knowledge shows up in the questions they ask you and in the way they answer yours.

- Which municipalities do you work in regularly, and where were your most recent fence permits issued?
- Who applies for the permit, who pays for it, and who attends the inspection?

- What is the maximum height for my lot type, and does anything about my street change that number?
- Do you set the line from the survey and the pins, or do you follow the existing fence?
- What happens if the municipality flags the work after the posts are set?
- Do you arrange the property line confirmation, or is that on me?

A contractor with genuine local experience answers these without flinching and often turns the conversation back on you with sharper questions of their own. A contractor who has never worked in your municipality will wave the questions away or promise that everything is handled. That reaction, more than any brochure or logo, tells you where you stand, and it is worth more than a decade of online reviews.

Pay special attention to who asks about your survey. A crew that insists on working from the existing fence line is a crew that will happily rebuild your fence three feet onto your neighbor's land, because that is where the old one sat. A crew that asks to see the survey, or asks whether you have property pins, is a crew that has watched a boundary dispute unfold and does not want to be part of the next one. Between those two attitudes, the choice is not hard.



Verify Permit Claims With a Paper Trail, Not a Handshake

Talk is cheap in the fence business, and permit talk is the cheapest of all. When a contractor tells you they will handle the permit, that is a promise, not proof. Ask for the application number once it is filed, ask for a copy of the approved drawing, and ask to see the inspection record when the work is complete. Then verify the application yourself with the building department. It takes one phone call, and it tells you whether the promise was actually kept.

Be wary of the contractor who dismisses the whole topic. The phrase "you do not need a permit for a fence" is sometimes true and sometimes a shortcut that leaves you holding the liability. Be equally wary of anyone who offers a cash discount for skipping the paperwork. The amount you save today can become a stop-work order, a removal order, or a neighbor dispute tomorrow, and none of those are the contractor's problem once the crew has driven away.

One homeowner in the region found out about a skipped permit the hard way. The contractor said everything was filed, the fence went up, and the first the owner heard otherwise was a letter **ornamental metal fence services** about a complaint from the neighbor behind him. The fence had been built to the wrong height for the wrong yard, and the correction cost more than the original installation. A ten-minute call to the building department during the job would have caught it. Verify early, verify often, and ask for status updates at each milestone of the project.

How Local Bylaw and Permit Knowledge Should Shape Your Shortlist

When the bids come back, do not compare totals. Compare scopes. One bidder may have included the permit, the survey check, the removal of the old fence, and the disposal of the materials, while another bidder's number assumes you will handle all of those yourself. A lower number built on exclusions is not a better number. It is an incomplete one, and it will grow the moment the work starts.

Treat compliance as a scoring criterion in your shortlist. Between two contractors with similar workmanship, the one who knows the local rules, files the paperwork, and schedules the inspection is worth more, because they are

buying you protection against a redo. Ask how each bidder handles change requests, what coverage they carry, and what happens if the municipality flags the work mid-project. Then verify the insurance and any required credentials with the provider or the issuing authority directly, because a verbal assurance has no value at a claims desk.

Scope details change bids more than people expect. The number of gates, the width of the access path for equipment, whether the old fence comes down and goes away, the slope of the terrain, and the depth the posts need to be set in your soil all move the final figure. Ask each bidder to quote the same scope, in writing, so the comparison is honest. The bidder who asks the most questions about your yard is usually the bidder whose number you can trust.

From Signed Contract to Finished Fence

A well-run fence project follows a recognizable sequence. The permit is applied for early, often before materials are ordered. The property line is confirmed from the survey or the pins, and the neighbor is told what is happening before the first hole is dug. The posts go in to the right depth for the soil, which matters in the GTA, where clay, freeze-thaw cycles, and frost heave punish shallow posts. The inspection happens at the right stage, the boards go up, and the site is cleaned before the crew leaves.

Timing is part of compliance too. Spring thaw leaves the ground soft and the crews booked solid, and summer brings its own backlog and heat. If your project can wait, an off-peak start often means better attention and a calmer schedule. Whatever season you choose, build the permit timeline into your plan instead of treating it as an afterthought. The fence cannot legally go up until the paperwork says it can, and no contractor can hurry a process your municipality controls.

Before you sign, nail down the details that usually cause friction: the start date, who applies for the permit, who repairs the lawn, what happens if an inspection fails, and who is responsible for the site once the crew leaves. A contract that answers those questions protects both sides, and a contractor who refuses to put them in writing is telling you something about how the rest of the project will go. If a bidder hesitates on the permit clause, that is the clause to keep.

The Search Ends With the Person Who Knows Your Street

When you search for a fence contractor near me, you will get plenty of names, but the search only ends well when you hire someone whose local bylaw and permit knowledge matches your address. The right contractor walks your lot, reads your survey, knows your municipality's rules, and files the paperwork without being asked. Confirm the current requirements with your municipality before you commit, and confirm the contractor's claims with the building department as the project moves. The fence will still be standing in twenty years. The arguments, the stop-work orders, and the redo costs are the only things that disappear.