

You can build a beautiful fence and still lose. Lose the money, lose the neighbor, lose the use of the yard, and sometimes lose the fence itself. Every one of those losses traces back to the same root: decisions made in a hurry, without local bylaw and permit knowledge. The mistakes below repeat year after year across Toronto and the GTA, in backyards and behind strip malls, and each one has a fix that costs far less than the mistake.



Mistake One: Trusting the Old Fence as the Property Line

The old fence is not a survey. It is a fence that someone built, possibly decades ago, possibly in the wrong place, possibly by a contractor who followed the previous fence, which was also in the wrong place. When the new fence goes up on the same line, the mistake is inherited and quietly made permanent, until the neighbor gets a survey done for their own project and the boundary conversation turns expensive.

The fix is boring and cheap by comparison. Check the survey and the pins before anyone digs. If the pins are missing, arrange for a line confirmation. If the fence is a shared boundary fence, have the conversation with the neighbor while it is still a conversation and not a dispute. A commercial property with a fence on the wrong line can end up paying to move it twice, once for the neighbor and once for the municipality, so the line work pays for itself on any scale.

Boundary mistakes rarely announce themselves. They surface at resale, when the survey comes back and the fence is not where the deed says the line is, or when the neighbor puts up their own fence and the two meet in a way that makes everyone reach for a lawyer. The cost of the fix is always larger than the cost of the confirmation, because by then the concrete is set and the story is public.

Mistake Two: Assuming the Neighbor's Fence Is Legal

A tall fence on the neighbor's side looks like proof that tall fences are fine. It is not proof of anything except that the neighbor has a tall fence. Theirs may predate the current rules, may have been built under a different zoning, or may simply never have been inspected. It may also be completely legal. None of that changes what applies to your property.

Build to the current requirements for your own lot, verified with your municipality, and let the neighbor's fence be their business. Owners who copy a neighbor's height and get ordered down usually discover that the neighbor's fence sits inside the neighbor's line, was built under different rules, or carries a permit their own lot could never have gotten. The copy is the liability, not the original.

There is a flip side worth knowing. If the neighbor's fence is illegal, your best move is usually to build yours to the rules and stay out of their dispute. Calling the municipality about someone else's fence invites an inspection of the whole street, including yours, and owners who fire that weapon rarely enjoy the return fire.

Mistake Three: Skipping the Permit Question Entirely

The most expensive sentence in fence contracting is "we will handle all that." Sometimes it is true. Sometimes it means the contractor intends to skip the paperwork and hope nobody notices. The owner discovers which version they got when a complaint lands, an inspection happens, or a question surfaces at sale time, and by then the fence is built and the options are all expensive.

Ask the permit question directly, in writing, before you sign: who applies, who pays, who attends the inspection, and what happens if the work is flagged. Then verify with the building department that the application exists. The verification takes minutes. The alternative is owning a fence the municipality considers unbuilt.

The permit question also matters at sale time. Buyers and their lawyers ask about work done without approvals, and a fence that cannot show its paperwork can become a negotiation point or a condition on the deal. What looked like a shortcut becomes a discount you give the next owner.

Mistake Four: Ignoring Corner Lot Rules

Corner lots fail on sight lines more than any other rule. The corner exists for drivers and pedestrians to see each other, and the rules keep the sight triangle open, which usually means lower heights or open designs near the intersection. Owners price a tall privacy fence for the whole lot, install it, and get ordered to cut it down or take it out. The same logic applies to commercial corners, where a fence that hides a driveway or a crosswalk is a hazard, not just a violation.

Check the corner lot provisions before you choose the design, and expect the design to step down or open up near the corner. A stepped fence that follows the rules can still look intentional. A uniform fence that ignores them looks expensive twice.

Sight-line rules exist because someone was hurt or nearly hurt before the rule was written. Treating them as red tape misunderstands the point. A corner fence that blocks a driver's view of a child on a bike is not a paperwork problem; it is a safety problem that happens to have paperwork attached.

Mistake Five: Building First and Asking Later

Building first and asking later is the master mistake, the one that contains all the others. The posts are set, the boards are up, and then someone checks the rules, talks to the neighbor, or reads the survey. By then every fix costs double, because the labor is already spent and the materials are already cut.

The sequence that works is the reverse: research, verify, design, quote, permit, then build. It is not glamorous and it does not feel like progress, but it is the difference between a fence that passes inspection and a fence that gets dismantled. Experienced crews are happy to work in this order. The ones who push to start digging this week are usually the ones with something to outrun.

The ask-later habit usually comes from a deadline. The pool is being filled, the tenant is moving in, the season is ending, and the pressure to dig feels real. Every one of those deadlines survives a few extra days of paperwork, and none of them survives a removal order.

Mistake Six: Assuming the Rules Follow You

Owners who have built fences before, or who grew up in a town with familiar rules, carry expectations across municipal borders as if the rules were provincial. They are not. A height allowance in one GTA city can differ in the next, a setback that works in a rural township can fail on a Toronto lot, and pool enclosure requirements change as soon as the property sits in a different municipality. The neighbor's fence across the street may be perfectly legal, or it may have been built under rules that no longer exist, and neither one is a permit for your lot.

The fix is to treat every property as a fresh research project. Verify the current rules with the municipality where the lot sits, not the one where you last built, and put the confirmation in the file. It takes an afternoon, and it converts the most common compliance failure in the GTA into a non-event.

Where Commercial Projects Go Wrong

Commercial fences fail differently from residential ones, and the mistakes cost more. A strip mall fence is a security asset, a liability surface, and a municipal matter all at once, and it sits on land zoned for business, under rules a residential contractor may not know. Parking lot fences have to respect sight lines for drivers and pedestrians, loading zones need gates that clear delivery trucks, and industrial yards often sit on hydro corridors or easements where the utility's rights beat the fence.

Access is a commercial issue that residential owners rarely think about. Fencing a parking lot or an industrial yard changes how vehicles, deliveries, and emergency services move, and a gate that blocks a fire route or a utility access point is a problem no contractor's warranty covers. Liability is the other difference: a commercial fence that fails, or that blocks a sight line, is a claim surface, and the maintenance plan matters as much ***licensed fence company*** as the build.

The fix for commercial projects is the same discipline with higher stakes. Verify the zoning and any corridor or easement rules with the municipality and the utility. Confirm sight-line and access requirements. Put the line **pool enclosure contractor** confirmation and the permit in the contract. Schedule inspections the way you schedule safety equipment checks. A facility manager who treats the fence as infrastructure instead of decoration gets a fence that works.

The Fix Routine: Verify, Write, Confirm

Every mistake above has one cure, and it fits on an index card. Verify the current requirements with your municipality for your exact property. Write the decisions down, including the line, the height, the gates, and the permit plan. Confirm each step with the people who matter: the building department, the neighbor, the utility, the contractor. Then build. That is the whole system, and it is the entire difference between the projects that go smoothly and the ones that become stories.

Compliance Is a Feature, Not a Tax

Local bylaw and permit knowledge reads like paperwork and behaves like insurance. It is what separates a fence that stands for decades from a fence that stands until the complaint arrives, and it protects residential owners and commercial operators exactly the same way: by making the rules visible before the concrete sets. Verify the current requirements with your municipality, apply the fix routine, and let the fence be the only permanent thing about the project.