



City of Arts & Innovation

Land Use Committee

Memorandum

TO: LAND USE COMMITTEE

DATE: FEBRUARY 9, 2026

FROM: VICE CHAIR FALCONE

WARD: ALL

SUBJECT: ORDINANCE PROHIBITING CHAIN LINK FENCING IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS, NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION AREAS, LANDMARKS AND STRUCTURES OF MERIT

ISSUE:

Consideration of an ordinance amendment to prohibit the installation or replacement of chain link fences within designated Historic Districts, Neighborhood Conservation Areas, Landmarks and Structures of Merit throughout the City of Riverside.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Land Use Committee recommend that the City Council consider an ordinance amending Title 19 (the Zoning Code) of the Riverside Municipal Code to prohibit the installation and replacement of chain link fences in or near all Historic Districts, Neighborhood Conservation Areas, Landmarks and Structures of Merit.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Riverside prides itself on its historic built environment. In order to protect and promote the high level of historical significance and accuracy to the era in which these historic structures were erected, special attention and explicit expectations must be codified to convey the way in which historic areas in Riverside should appear. Aligning with best practices for historic preservation as outlined by the United States Secretary of the Interior standards, chain link fences are inconsistent with the architectural character, material palette, and visual cohesion of these areas, often diminishing overall neighborhood quality and property values. Currently, the City's zoning and design codes do not explicitly prohibit chain link fencing in historic or conservation areas. In practice chain link fencing is strongly discouraged in historically significant areas while appropriate fencing materials such as wood, wrought iron, brick, concrete, or dense landscaping can achieve the same goals as chain link fencing while still being within the same price point and being historically appropriate.

To prevent uncertainties, frustrations, or feelings of mixed messaging that often arise from trying to enforce suggested guidelines as opposed to explicit directions a codified ordinance prohibiting such fencing materials in historic areas promote an equal and clear path for execution.

To address this gap, California municipalities known for their historic environment, like Riverside, had their fencing ordinances reviewed in preparation for this report.

Findings from Other Cities:

- **Monterey:** Chain link fences are not specifically prohibited citywide but are regulated primarily by height and location (City Code Sec. 38-23). Chain link is generally permitted in side and rear yards but restricted or discouraged in Historic Overlay or Coastal Zone areas where additional design/review standards apply.
- **Orange:** Ordinance 17.19.140 bans chain link fencing citywide between structures and public streets; furthermore, 2018 Historic Preservation Design Standards prohibit chain link and vinyl fencing entirely in historic residential areas.
- **Pasadena:** Chain link and similar materials are deemed inappropriate and unpermitted in historic districts under the *Design Guidelines for Historic Districts* (2002).
- **Redlands:** 2023 Historic Architectural Design Guidelines exclude chain link fencing from approved materials and require a Certificate of Appropriateness for new fence installation of any kind by the Office of Historic Preservation.
- **Sacramento:** Ordinance 17.620.110 prohibits chain link fencing in front and side setbacks; design standards prohibit fencing materials inconsistent with historic district character.
- **San Clemente:** Chain link fences are not specifically prohibited but are subject to the city's zoning and coastal design standards. Properties within the Coastal Zone or design review districts face material restrictions emphasizing decorative or masonry fencing for visual cohesion. Chain link is discouraged in visible or coastal areas but permitted in less visible side and rear yards (City Code Sec. 17.24 for fences, walls, and hedges)
- **San Juan Capistrano:** Although not outright prohibited, chain link materials are discouraged and require Planning Commission review for installation approval in zones containing historic properties.
- **Santa Ana:** Very restrictive toward chain link in residential, especially visible areas. Under its zoning code (Santa Ana Municipal Code 41-610), chain link is not allowed in front yards and only allowed in rear or side yards that are not visible from a public street
- **Santa Barbara:** Chain link fences are subject to Historic Landmarks Commission review and only permitted when screened by landscaping and located in places other than front yards.

These cities consistently restrict chain link fencing in historic areas to preserve visual integrity and align with adopted preservation principles.

DISCUSSION:

The proposed ordinance would align Riverside's preservation practices with peer cities across California. It would ensure visual consistency within the City's historic and conservation areas and support the goals of the City's Historic Preservation Element. Adoption of this ordinance would reinforce the value of preserving community character, improve visual quality, and support ongoing historic preservation initiatives citywide.

As for existing chain link fencing in the aforementioned proposed prohibited areas, an amortization period has been an approach by other cities. Proposed here is an amortization period which seeks to have total compliance within five (5) years of ordinance passage. Exempt Structures of merit and landmarks post 1955 historic districts. Citywide Residential Historic District Design Guidelines already discourages the use of chain link when not visible from the public right-of-way. There are select architectural styles in which chain link is an appropriate material. Those architectural styles date back to the mid-century era. There will be a strict process for an economic hardship waiver which will be approved by the historic preservation officer and cultural preservation board. As a good faith effort to reduce financial strain on residents who have existing chain link fences, an acceptable alternative to meet the amortization goals is to camouflage the chain link fencing with dense landscaping such as vines or hedges that do not exceed the height of the fence. This will cost significantly less than required removal and replacement, is historically appropriate, and meets the desired of approach to ensure aesthetically pleasing historic districts, neighborhood conservation areas, landmarks, and Structures of Merit. This amortization would be enforced by the Code Enforcement Division with assistance and direction from the Historic Preservation Officer

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact associated with adoption of the ordinance

Prepared by:



PHILIP FALCONE
Vice Chair, Land Use Committee

Attachment: Presentation