



Administrative Report

N.1., File # 26-0848

Meeting Date: 7/21/2026

To: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

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COLE WEBB, LEGAL INTERN

TITLE

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING MODIFICATION TO THE REDONDO BEACH MUNICIPAL CODE PERTAINING TO HEDGE-RELATED ORDINANCES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 9, 2026, City Council referred a discussion to city staff regarding the city's hedge ordinance. Councilmember Obagi requested that the City Attorney prepare recommendations on how to revise the hedge ordinance, including defining what constitutes a hedge and who has standing to make a complaint.

The City Attorney's Office researched and reviewed several hedge-related ordinances from various cities across Southern California. A summary of these ordinances is outlined below and were used drafting these recommendations. Councilmembers Behrendt and Obagi submitted proposed ordinance revisions. These revisions were submitted to City staff. At the time of this administrative report, department feedback from Community Development, Engineering, Police/Code Enforcement, and Fire have been submitted for Council's consideration. Councilmembers Behrendt and Obagi also submitted proposed recommendations for consideration.

It is recommended that City Council review the feedback and recommendations and provide policy direction before a draft ordinance is presented for a first reading.

BACKGROUND

Redondo Beach Code Enforcement has received an influx of complaints regarding over-height hedges throughout the City since approximately December 2025. Code Enforcement has responded to these complaints by issuing the property owners who are allegedly in violation with a correction notice. This increased enforcement has led to increased questions from property owners and residents about the current state of the law and how alleged violations are enforced.

The Redondo Beach Municipal Code (RBMC) currently reads that hedges may not be higher than 42 inches in front setbacks and 6 feet in rear/side setbacks, with a 42-inch limit in specific reverse corner lot areas. In nonresidential zones, heights are restricted to 42 inches in front/exterior side setbacks and 6 feet in rear/interior side setbacks, with height measured from existing grade or finished grade if lower. Redondo Beach zoning regulations require a clear 15-foot by 15-foot triangular sight visibility

area at all corner lot, street, and alley intersections to ensure safety. Within these areas, no trees, fences, shrubs, or other obstructions may exceed 36 inches above the established sidewalk or curb grade. RBMC § 10-2.1524

The RBMC also declares hedges as nuisances if they block traffic sight, constitute flammable materials near dwellings or block streets and sidewalks. RMBC § 4-10.02 (c)

Most cities limit the height of hedges for health and safety concerns. These Redondo Beach Departments reviewed the issues surrounding maximum hedge heights and provided input for Council's consideration:

Community Development

The Community Development Department supports maintaining the 42-inch height limit as a general rule. Maintaining low fences and hedges in front yards is a fundamental urban design principle that improves character, safety, and livability of neighborhoods. Low front-yard landscaping creates an open, welcoming appearance and allows the homes to contribute visually to the street. Furthermore, it strengthens neighborhood interaction, as neighbors are more likely to greet and interact when front yards are open and visually connected to the street. While staff supports maintaining the 42-inch height limit as a city-wide standard, there may be individual instances that warrant an exception. The City Council may consider establishing an Administrative Design Review process in the ordinance that would allow exceptions to this height limit cases-by-case basis, subject to certain criteria.

Engineering

Traffic Engineering concerns center on traffic safety for all modes and driver sightline visibility. With the rise of more quiet vehicles, such as electric vehicles (EV) and e-bikes, the concern is that users approach cross traffic more quietly, providing less audible indication of their presence leading to potential conflicts. As such, sightline visibility has become even more important. Therefore, Traffic Engineering supports the City's ordinance that requires no obstructions higher than 36" above ground 15-foot triangle on corner lots and front hedges/fences - no higher than 42". The areas of specific safety and visibility concern are within 15 feet of a street intersection or within five (5) feet of either side of a driveway. Should hedge and fence line heights be reconsidered, the preference is for no obstructions higher than 24 inches within 15 feet of a street intersection or within 5 feet of a driveway to street intersection to improve visibility and safety. That said, 36-inch maximum height is standard and comparable with industry norms.

As for encroachment into the public right-of-way, Engineering concerns center on obstruction of the American with Disability Act (ADA) path of travel, pedestrian safety, access to utility and city facilities, visibility for first responders, and preservation of trees. The following items are not allowed in the public right-of-way:

- No hedges encroaching into the ADA path of travel
- No vegetation higher than 24" in parkways
- No toxic or sharp, spiky, nuisance vegetation
- No gardening of edibles for human consumption

Police Department/Code Enforcement

The Redondo Beach Police Department and Code Enforcement support the City's 42-inch front setback height limit for fences, walls, and hedges for these reasons:

1. Traffic safety

- *Improves sight distance at driveways:* Drivers backing out or entering a roadway can better see approaching vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.
- *Enhances visibility at intersections:* Low landscaping allows drivers to see cross traffic sooner, reducing the likelihood of angle collisions.
- *Protects pedestrians:* Children and adults walking on sidewalks are more visible to motorists exiting driveways or approaching intersections.
- *Increases cyclist safety:* Cyclists traveling along the roadway or sidewalk are less likely to be hidden behind tall hedges or dense vegetation.
- *Allows drivers to see traffic control devices:* Overgrown hedges can block stop signs, speed limit signs, street name signs, and traffic signals.
- *Improves nighttime safety:* Low landscaping allows headlights and street lighting to illuminate intersections, sidewalks, and driveways more effectively.
- *Reduces conflicts during turning movements:* Drivers making left or right turns have clearer views of oncoming traffic and pedestrians when vegetation does not obstruct sightlines.

2. Crime prevention:

- *Natural surveillance:* Low hedges allow homeowners, neighbors, and passing motorists or pedestrians to see the front door, windows, and yard. Criminals are less likely to target a home where they can easily be observed.
- *Eliminates hiding places:* Tall hedges provide cover for burglars to conceal themselves while attempting to force entry, look through windows, or wait for residents to leave.
- *Increases the perception of risk:* Offenders generally prefer locations where they cannot be seen. An open, visible front yard increases the likelihood they will be noticed, interrupted, or identified.
- *Supports neighborhood watch:* Good visibility allows neighbors to recognize suspicious behavior and report it more quickly.
- *Improves police visibility:* Officers conducting patrols can better observe activity around homes when landscaping does not obstruct their view.
- *Enhances lighting effectiveness:* Low landscaping allows porch lights, streetlights, and motion-activated lighting to illuminate entrances more effectively rather than being blocked by dense vegetation.

3. Emergency Access:

- *Improves visibility of the residence:* Responders can more easily locate the front door, house numbers, and access points when landscaping does not obscure them.
- *Provides quicker access:* Low hedges reduce physical barriers that can slow responders carrying equipment or rescue tools.
- *Enhances situational awareness:* Police officers can better observe conditions around the home, identify hazards, locate occupants, and assess threats before entering.

- *Reduces concealment during law enforcement incidents:* Open visibility helps officers identify potential threats, locate suspects, and maintain officer safety during responses.
- *Facilitates communication:* Responders can more easily see and communicate with occupants who may be signaling for help from windows, doors, or the front yard.

Fire

The Redondo Beach Fire Department supports the City's ordinance that retains the 42-inch maximum height requirement for fences, walls, and hedges within the required front setback. This standard promotes fire safety by maintaining clear sightlines for emergency responders while improving visibility of addresses, fire hydrants, and access points during emergencies. Large hedges can conceal gates and block pathways, preventing access to occupants in need of rescue. In addition, maintaining lower vegetation near structures and power lines can reduce the spread of fire and support defensible space principles.

The Fire Department recommends that any requests for exceptions be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and only approved when it can be demonstrated that emergency access and public visibility will not be adversely affected.

After review and input, staff is recommending the following:

1. Add definitions for fence/wall, hedge, and vegetation to RBMC §§10-5.402(a) and 10-2.1524
2. Re-classify violations of RBMC §10-2.1524 as either an infraction or misdemeanor in §1-2.01(b)
3. Add new language to § 10-2.1524 on who can file complaints for alleged violations

DEFINITIONS

Currently, there are no definitions of "hedge," "fence or wall," or "vegetation" in the RBMC. Staff is proposing an ordinance amendment that would create a definition for hedge, fence or wall, vegetation in the RBMC.

The Laguna Beach Municipal Code ("LBMC") in Section 12.14 defines fence, hedge, vegetation and view, as follows:

"Fence" means a barrier of any material or combination of materials placed in a manner so as to enclose or screen areas of land. "Fence" includes hedges, chain link and wire mesh.

"Hedge" means generally dense vegetation so aligned as to form a physical barrier or fence.

"Vegetation" means all types of plants, bushes, hedges and shrubs, including trees.

The City of Beverly Hills defines hedge as "growth of vegetation taller than twelve inches, consisting of two or more individual plants, including, without limitation, trees, that are cultivated or maintained in such a manner so that the horizontal distance between the nearest points of two plants is less than eight feet." Beverly Hills Municipal Code ("BHMC") §10-3-2616.

The code also defines “hedge” as a growth of vegetation, cultivated in such a manner as to produce a barrier to inhibit passage or to obscure view, which is more than twelve inches in height. Where there are interruptions of growth by vertical space having a horizontal distance of more than twenty-four inches in every four feet, such growth shall not be considered a hedge. This definition is not intended to include individual shrubs, plants, or trees.” BHMC §10-3-100.

The Santa Barbara Municipal Code (“SBMC”) defines fence and hedge as follows:

“Fence” is defined as an upright structure serving as an enclosure, barrier, or boundary or that visually divides or conceals a parcel, usually made of posts, boards, wire, or rails. SBMC §28.87.170.

“Hedge” is defined as a row of closely planted shrubs, bushes, or any other kind of plant material that forms a boundary or substantially continuous visual barrier. SBMC §28.87.170.

In Santa Monica, “hedge” is defined as a boundary or barrier of plant material formed by a row or series of shrubs, bushes, trees, or other similar vegetation that enclose, divide, or protect an area or that prevent a person from passing between any combination of individual shrubs, bushes, trees, or other similar vegetation. Santa Monica Municipal Code (“SMMC”) §9.520202.

Staff recommends the following definitions be added to the RMBC as follows:

"Fence or wall " means any artificially constructed barrier of wood, masonry, stone, wire, metal, or other manufactured material or combination of materials erected to enclose, screen, or separate areas of land "Fence" includes hedges, chain link and wire mesh.

"Hedge" means any row, series, or grouping of shrubs, bushes, trees, or other vegetation planted, cultivated, or maintained in close proximity so as to form a substantially continuous barrier, boundary, screen, or obstruction to passage or view, and having a height greater than twelve (12) inches. Isolated or intermittently spaced plants that do not create a substantially continuous visual or physical barrier shall not constitute a hedge.

"Height" shall mean the vertical distance measured from existing grade to the top of the fence, hedge, or wall, except in a required front or exterior side setback where the finished grade is lower than the existing grade, in which case height shall be measured from the finished grade.

"Vegetation" means all types of plants, bushes, hedges and shrubs, including trees.

RECLASSIFICATION OF VIOLATIONS §10-2.1524

RBMC Section §10-2.1524 “Fences, hedges, walls and obstructions in all zones,” states, in part as follows:

- a) Purpose. This section is intended to provide for the regulation of the height and location of fences, walls, and similar obstructions, for the purpose of providing for light, air, and privacy and safeguarding the public welfare by preventing visual obstructions at street and highway

intersections. The provisions of this section shall not be deemed to set aside or reduce the requirements established for security fencing, either by local, State, or federal laws, or by the safety requirements of the Board of Education.

b) Height. For the purposes of this section, "height" shall mean the vertical distance from existing grade to the top of the fence, hedge, or wall, except in a required front or exterior side setback where the finished grade is lower than the existing grade, height shall be measured from the finished grade. The following standards shall apply:

1. All residential zones.
 - a. Front setbacks. No fence, hedge, or wall over 42 inches in height shall be permitted within any required front setback.
 - b. Rear and side setbacks. Except as permitted in subsections (c) and (e) of this section, no fence, hedge, or wall greater than six feet in height shall be permitted within any required rear setback or side setback.
 - c. Reverse corner lots in residential zones. Notwithstanding subsection (b)(1)(b) of this section, no fence, wall, or hedge over 42 inches in height shall be permitted within a triangular area at the corner of the lot abutting the front setback of the key lot, which triangle shall be formed by the rear and exterior side lot lines and a diagonal line drawn between two points located 15 feet along the rear and exterior side lot lines from their point of intersection...

If violations of section (b) are not corrected, property owners are subject to criminal prosecution and could potentially face misdemeanor charges. RBMC §1-2.01(a).

Nuisance-related hedge violations are wobblettes, which means they may be deemed as either an infraction or a misdemeanor, and/or remediated through abatement orders, if the hedge constitutes a traffic obstruction, flammability concern, or impedes a street or sidewalk. RBMC §§ 1-2.01(b), 4-10.02(c)(1), (2) and (8), and 4-10.05-4-10.09.

Staff is proposing that violations of RBMC §10-2.1524(b) also be deemed wobblettes to align with nuisance-related hedge violations. In addition, violations of §10-2.1524 (hedge-height violations) would need to be added to the chart in §1-2.01(b) and subject to penalties consistent with §1-2.02.

BONAFIDE COMPLAINANT AND CITY STAFF ENFORCEMENT

Currently, the RBMC does not specify who can file a complaint for alleged height or nuisance-related hedge violations. Staff recommends adding language to §10-2.1524 as follows:

1. General. Enforcement of the height and location standards of this section shall be primarily complaint-driven. This subsection governs the standing required to initiate a complaint and does not restrict any person's right to petition the city or submit information to city staff.
2. Bona Fide Complainant Defined. For purposes of this section, a "bona fide complainant" means an owner or occupant of record of a parcel that:
 - a. Shares a property line with the property alleged to be in violation; or
 - b. Is located directly across the street, alley, or right-of-way from the property alleged to be in violation and is within 150 feet of the alleged violation; or

- c. Is otherwise demonstrably and materially affected by the alleged violation, including but not limited to violations that constitute a public nuisance as defined in section 4-10.02(c) (1), (2), (8) and as determined by the Director of Community Development or City Engineer or their designee.
3. Complaint Requirement. The City shall not initiate a formal enforcement action under this section absent a written complaint submitted by a bona fide complainant as defined in subsection (h)(2). Anonymous complaints and complaints from persons who do not qualify as bona fide complainants may be logged for informational purposes but shall not, standing alone, constitute the basis for a formal enforcement action.
4. Good Faith Requirement. Complaints submitted under this section shall be made in good faith based on a genuine belief that a violation exists and that the complainant is materially affected thereby. The city reserves the right to decline to pursue enforcement where it determines that a complaint has been submitted for an improper purpose, including but not limited to harassment of a property owner or an attempt to manipulate city enforcement resources for purposes unrelated to the welfare of the complaining party.
5. Notice before enforcement. Prior to initiating formal enforcement proceedings under this section, the city shall provide the property owner written notice of the alleged violation and a minimum of 60 days to achieve voluntary compliance. This notice requirement shall not apply where the Director of Community Development or City Engineer determines that a public safety hazard requires more immediate action.

ADMINISTRATIVE DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

At this time, staff recommends that hedge heights remain consistent with the current ordinance. In a meeting with Engineering, there were discussions about *lowering* the front setback height limit near driveways to 24-inches consistent with the City of Santa Monica.

However, the City Council could consider creating a process, through Administrative Design Review (RBM §10-2.2500), to permit hedge heights in excess of 42 inches. Under this process, the authorization of hedge heights exceeding 42 inches could be approved by the Community Development Director, subject to certain criteria such as:

- The hedge does not create a public safety issue due to obstructed sight lines;
- Front yards of neighboring properties are generally visible from the public way and the hedge would not contribute a "walled off" appearance of the neighborhood;
- The hedge would not significantly impact adjacent properties; and
- The property owner shall be responsible for maintain the hedge at the approved height in perpetuity.

Councilmembers Behrendt and Obagi make the following recommendations:

1. Include clear and updated definitions of what actually constitutes a "hedge" (and "fences" and "walls").
2. Revise the ordinance to provide the City Attorney's Office with discretion to prosecute violations as "wobblettes," *i.e.*, either a misdemeanor or an infraction, depending on the circumstances and severity of the violation (currently, the ordinance requires misdemeanor prosecutions).

3. Include a "bona fide" and/or "good faith" complaint requirement (e.g., the owner or occupant of an adjoining or nearby home) to reduce the likelihood of unnecessary filing of complaints, the unnecessary expenditure of time and resources, and enforcement actions, concerning only minor, trivial, or inconsequential violations.
4. Ensure the City retains the independent discretion to seek enforcement of the ordinance for violations concerning police, fire, and public safety matters; public health; statutory nuisances; encroachment onto City sidewalks or right of ways; large or multiple adjacent lots with hedges that create a "walled off" appearance of the neighborhood; and other objective and clear criteria, based on the input and recommendations provided by Police, Fire, Public Works, Community Development, the City Attorney's Office, and other City Departments ("Critical and/or Urgent Violations").
5. Include an Administrative Design Review process (RBMC 10-2.2500), to permit hedge heights in excess of 42 inches, to be reviewed for potential approval by the Community Development Director, or designee, or a process through another City Department, subject to certain criteria such as:
 - a. The hedge does not create a public safety issue due to obstructed sight lines, including demonstrating that emergency access and public visibility will not be adversely affected;
 - b. Front yards of neighboring properties are generally visible from the public way and the hedge would not contribute a "walled off" appearance of the neighborhood;
 - c. The hedge would not significantly impact adjacent properties
 - d. The property owner shall be responsible for maintain the hedge at the approved height in perpetuity
6. Include a neat and orderly requirement for all hedges in the City, no matter what type of property, for example:

All fences, walls, and hedges shall be maintained in a safe, neat and orderly condition at all times. Property owners must maintain the hedge so that it does not encroach onto the parcel of an adjoining parcel and the public right-of-way. If any portion of a hedge, including its roots, encroaches onto the parcel of an adjoining parcel, the owner of the adjoining parcel shall, after giving 30 days' notice and opportunity to cure, have the right to remove those portions of the hedge that encroach on their parcel back to the parcel line so long as they act reasonably and the removal does not cause unnecessary injury. The adjoining parcel owner shall have the right to file a civil action to recover all costs reasonably incurred in removing the encroaching portions of the hedge.
7. Revise the statement of Purpose in the ordinance to capture and explain the intentions and reasoning for the revised ordinance.
8. Other items:
 - a. Maintain the current height limits.
 - b. Add a new height limit for a "High Visual Obstruction" (HVO), emulating Santa Monica's new ordinance, which caps height at 24" in a 5' x 5' triangle.
 - c. Ensure a reasonable notice and opportunity to cure, and/or seek administrative review, procedure for violations, with the exception of "Critical and/or Urgent Violations."
 - d. Create standards / guidance for Code Enforcement, including to determine which complaints (i) are "bona fide" and/or "good faith" complaints; and (ii) address a legitimate public health or safety concern (e.g., Critical and/or Urgent Violations) vs.

minor, trivial, or inconsequential violations, among other things.

COORDINATION

The City Attorney's Office coordinated with the Community Development, Engineering, Fire and Police/Code Enforcement, as well as Councilmembers Obagi and Behrendt in connection with the preparation of this report.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

Submitted by:

Joy A. Ford, City Attorney

ATTACHMENTS

- RBMC §§ 4-10.02, 10-2.1524
- Related hedge ordinances from other Southern California jurisdictions