

Most owners assume the estimate process starts the morning the contractor walks the yard with a clipboard. It actually starts a week earlier, at the kitchen table, with a survey, a tape measure, and a phone call to the neighbor. The fence you end up with is decided less by the bids you collect than by the preparation you do before anyone quotes. Getting and comparing **Have a peek here** written estimates only works when the estimates are built on the same foundation, and that foundation is laid before the first contractor ever sees the property.

Find the Property Line Before You Call Anyone

A Vaughan homeowner once discovered that the fence she had maintained for fifteen years sat a foot inside the true property line, which meant her neighbor owned a strip of her yard and the fence itself. Nobody noticed for a decade and a half, because nobody checked. Before you request quotes, know where your line actually runs. If you have a survey from when you bought the house, dig it out. If you do not, consider having the boundary located before you spend money on a fence that might be built in the wrong place.



Fence crews are not surveyors. A good crew will flag the obvious markers and ask about the line, but they will not resolve a boundary dispute for you, and they should not have to. If the property corners are unclear or the neighbors disagree about where the line sits, sort that out first. Municipal property records and a licensed surveyor are the tools for this job, and the cost of getting it wrong is a fence you may be forced to move.

Also confirm the local rules for your address. Height limits, placement relative to the street, and rules about fences on corners differ across GTA municipalities, so check with your local building or bylaw office before you commit to a design. What passes in Richmond Hill may not pass in Aurora, and the estimate you collect should describe a fence you are actually allowed to build.

Corner lots deserve extra attention. The street-facing side of a corner property often carries stricter rules than the rear line, and the difference matters if your fence runs along both. Ask the bylaw office about both faces of the property before you settle on a height, because the estimate should be built on the design you can actually install, not the one you sketched.

Pick the Material Family Before You Ask

The single biggest driver of price differences between estimates is the material, so decide the family before you collect numbers. If you ask three contractors for "a fence" without saying more, you will get three bids for three different products, and the comparison will be meaningless. Choose a direction first: wood, vinyl, composite, aluminum, or chain link. You can change your mind later, but start with a family in mind so every bidder prices the same thing.

See the materials in person before you commit. Photographs flatten texture, color, and weight. Drive through a neighborhood with mature fences and look at what years of weather have done to each kind. A cedar fence that has never been stained tells a story. A vinyl fence that has yellowed tells another. Knowing what the product looks like after a decade in a Toronto winter will do more for your decision than any brochure.

Decide the finish too. If you want cedar but hate the idea of staining every few years, say so up front and ask what the installed difference is between a treated-and-sealed product and one you will maintain yourself. The finish decision changes the number, and it changes the annual chore list for the life of the fence.

Keep a record of the decision with your quotes. Write down the material, grade, and finish you asked for, and attach that note to the request you send each bidder. When the estimates arrive, you will know they are all answering the same question, and the comparison will compare fences instead of misunderstandings.

Think about the street, not just the yard. In neighborhoods with a consistent fence style, an odd choice stands out to every passerby and, sometimes, to the next buyer of your house. Matching the neighborhood is not about conformity. It is about making sure the material you choose does not fight the houses around it, and it is a conversation worth having before the quotes land.

Decide Where the Gates and Access Go

Gates are where fence plans quietly go wrong. Walk the property and decide exactly where you need to pass through the line: the side yard to the backyard, a path to the driveway, a gate wide enough for a snow blower or a lawn tractor, a double gate if you ever want a vehicle in the yard. Every gate is a line item on the estimate, and a gate added after the fact is a change order. Decide now, while it is free.

Think about access for the crew as well. How will materials reach the fence line? A house with a narrow side yard means panels may have to be carried in one at a time or hoisted over the fence, which changes the labor picture. If you have a locked gate, a dog, or a garden that cannot take foot traffic, say so when you book the visit. The contractor who plans for your actual site is the one whose estimate you can trust.

Also look at what the fence will enclose. Utility meters, gas lines, and service entries need to stay reachable, and a fence that seals them off will have to be cut open later at your expense. Note where the access points are and tell each bidder about them.

If the fence will surround a pool, the rules for that enclosure are separate from the neighborly ones. Confirm the pool enclosure requirements that apply in your municipality before you settle on height, gate hardware, and latch placement, and make sure every estimate is built on those requirements.

Talk to the Neighbor Before the Contractor Arrives

If the fence will sit on or near a shared boundary, the neighbor is part of the project whether they like it or not. Most GTA owners split the cost of a shared fence, and the split is much easier to negotiate before a contractor is involved. Walk the line with the neighbor, show them the material you are leaning toward, and agree on the height and style. A fence dispute is not really about the fence. It is about being told what to do, so give your neighbor a seat at the table early.

Get the agreement in writing, even a short one. A one-page note signed by both owners beats a he-said-she-said conversation three years later, and it should cover the points that cause most arguments:

- The cost split and who pays for gates, corners, and any extras.
- The material, height, and style, named specifically enough that both owners agree on what was approved.
- Who maintains which side, and what happens if one owner wants changes later.
- What happens if one of you sells the property.

If the boundary itself is in dispute, do not build until it is resolved, and get any resolution confirmed against the property records.

Sort Out the Site Conditions Ahead of Time

Clay, Grade, and Utilities

Walk the fence line and write down what you see. Low spots where water pools, slopes, tree roots, and rocks all matter, because each one affects the post installation and the drainage. On the clay soil common across this region, posts need to be installed with the freeze-thaw cycle in mind, and the crew you hire should be able to explain their method. If the line runs along a ravine lot with a drop, expect the estimate to include steps in the run and longer posts at the change in grade.

Utilities deserve their own check. Call the local utility locator service before any digging, and walk the line with the markers in mind. Hydro easement corridors, buried gas lines, and cable runs all have rules about what can be placed over them, and a post driven through a line is an expensive mistake that no estimate covers. If your property sits inside a hydro corridor, check the requirements with the utility before you fall in love with a design.

Drainage is easy to overlook and hard to fix later. Water that pools along the base of a fence rots posts and shifts the ground under them faster than anything except frost. If the yard tilts toward the fence line, plan for the grading as part of the project and make sure the estimate accounts for it, instead of discovering the puddle in the first spring after installation.

Know Your Timeline and the Season

Fence work in this region is seasonal. The ground thaws in spring, the crews fill up through the summer, and the season ends with the first hard freeze. If you want the fence up before a specific date, ask about lead times when you request the quote, and be honest about your deadline. An owner who says "no rush" in April may be booking for July, and an owner who needs it done before the pool opens should say so in the first phone call.

Your own calendar matters too. If the yard is being landscaped, the fence should usually come first so crews are not working around each other. If you are planning to sell, the fence can be a selling point or a negotiating chip depending on its condition, and the timing of the project should reflect that. Decide what you need and when, then let every bidder price the same window.

Deposits deserve a question too. Most fence projects require something up front to hold the date and order materials, and the terms vary from one company to the next. Ask what the deposit covers, what happens if you cancel, and what happens if the contractor cancels. The answers belong in writing, and a contractor who is vague about their own money terms will be vague about yours.

Ask each bidder how long their number stays valid before you collect the others. Estimates written weeks apart are priced against different material and labor conditions, and a price that expires before you decide is a price you cannot use for comparison.

What Getting and Comparing Written Estimates Really Requires

Getting and comparing written estimates is a fair test of contractors, but it is also a test of your own homework. The owner who knows the property line, has chosen a material family, has agreed with the neighbor, and has flagged the site conditions will collect three estimates that actually describe the same project. That owner can compare numbers honestly and hire with confidence. The owner who skips the preparation will collect three estimates for three different fences and never know which one to trust. Do the work before the quotes arrive, and the quotes will do their work for you.