

CHAPTER 90

FENCES

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|--------|---|-------|---|
| 90.01 | Fence viewers. | 90.09 | Partition when land bounded by water. |
| 90.02 | Legal fences; space between ground and bottom. | 90.10 | Compulsory repair of fence. |
| 90.03 | Partition fences; when required. | 90.11 | Cost of repairs. |
| 90.035 | Public fences. | 90.12 | Apportionment of cost of fence. |
| 90.04 | Effect of fences on action for trespass by animals. | 90.13 | Partition fence on newly-enclosed land. |
| 90.05 | How partition made. | 90.14 | Fence on town line. |
| 90.06 | Removal of fence. | 90.15 | Fees of viewers; neglect of duty. |
| 90.07 | Division of partition fence. | 90.16 | Record of partition. |
| 90.08 | Partition of fences in water. | | |

90.01 Fence viewers. The supervisors in their respective towns, the aldermen of cities in their respective aldermanic districts, and the trustees of villages in their respective villages shall be fence viewers.

History: 1971 c. 304 s. 29 (1).

Town supervisors are not authorized by this chapter to settle boundary disputes. 70 Atty. Gen. 187.

90.02 Legal fences; space between ground and bottom.

(1) The following and none other are legal and sufficient fences:

(a) A fence of strong woven wire not less than twenty-six inches wide with three barbed wires above.

(b) A fence of strong woven wire not less than thirty inches wide with two barbed wires above.

(c) A fence of strong woven wire not less than forty-six inches wide with one barbed wire above.

(d) A fence of strong woven wire not less than fifty inches wide.

(e) A fence of boards firmly fastened to posts well set, not more than eight feet apart, the space between the boards to the height of thirty inches to be not more than six inches and at no point to be more than ten inches.

(f) A fence of two boards with three barbed wires above, firmly fastened to sufficient posts well set not more than eight feet apart, the space between the boards to be not more than six inches.

(g) A fence of three or more wires not less than No. 12, with pickets not less than four feet long properly woven in or fastened thereto, and set not more than six inches apart.

(h) All fences consisting of rails, boards, wires or walls, or any combination thereof, and all brooks, rivers, ponds, creeks, ditches, or hedges, which shall, in the judgment of the fence viewers, be equivalent to either of the fences before mentioned.

(i) The following minimum requirements shall constitute a standard electric fence and shall be a legal fence when agreed to in writing by the adjoining property owners. Such a fence shall consist of 2 strands of strong, tightly stretched wire, charged by a standard approved electric or battery fencer, and the top wire not over 36 inches and not less than 34 inches from the ground, measured at the post, and firmly fastened with insulators to sufficient post, firmly set, and not over 2 rods apart.

(j) A fence not less than 48 inches high of 4 or more barbed wires spaced evenly on a steel post of any diameter or on a wood post at least 3 inches in diameter, which posts are spaced one rod or less apart. Existing fences of a lesser standard are legal until they are rebuilt, repaired or replaced.

(2) The strands of woven wire shall not be smaller than No. 12 wire and the cross wires and meshes shall not be smaller than No. 16 wire; the strands shall not be more than eight

inches apart, and the cross wires not more than twelve inches apart, and the meshes shall not exceed eight inches square. All wires must be tightly stretched and securely fastened to sufficient posts firmly set not more than sixteen feet apart. The space between barbed wires shall not exceed eight inches; and the space between the top board or upper edge of woven wire and the bottom barbed wire shall not exceed six inches.

(3) Fences shall not be less than fifty inches high, and the bottom of the fence shall be not more than four inches from the ground, measurements to be made at the posts.

90.03 Partition fences; when required. The respective occupants of adjoining lands, used and occupied for farming or grazing purposes, and the respective owners of adjoining lands when the lands of one of such owners is used and occupied for farming or grazing purposes, shall keep and maintain partition fences between their own and next adjoining premises in equal shares so long as either party continues to so occupy the same, and such fences shall be kept in good repair throughout the year unless the occupants of the lands on both sides otherwise mutually agree.

90.035 Public fences. Where the 2 parties, one of whom is the state or a subdivision thereof, agree that a fence is reasonably necessary, the duty to erect and maintain partition fences shall apply equally to the state, as provided in s. 90.03, and its subdivisions as occupants of lands whenever such lands are bounded by privately owned agricultural or grazing lands.

90.04 Effect of fences on action for trespass by animals. Owners of lands who do not maintain and keep in repair lawful partition fences shall not be entitled to recover any damages whatever for trespasses by the animals of owners of any adjoining lands with whom partition fences might have been maintained if such lands had been enclosed; but the construction of such a fence shall not relieve the owner of swine from liability for any damage they commit upon the enclosed premises of an adjoining owner.

90.05 How partition made. (1) Every partition of the fence or of the line upon which partition fences are to be built between adjoining owners, made by the owners thereof in writing, signed, sealed and witnessed by two witnesses, or by the fence viewers, in writing under their hands, in the cases and in the manner hereinafter provided, after being recorded in the town clerk's office, shall oblige such owners, their heirs and assigns, so long as such adjoining land on each side respectively shall remain in the same ownership, and after a severance of ownership until a new partition of such fence shall be made, to build and maintain such fence agreeably to said partition. But neither such owner nor his heirs or assigns

90.05 FENCES

89-90 Wis. Stats. 1968

shall be bound to build or maintain any part of such partition fence during any time when none of such adjoining lands shall be so occupied.

(2) If a fence is constructed by a subdivider under a town ordinance adopted under s. 60.23 (19) and the land adjoining the subdivision is not subdivided, the partition under sub. (1) shall require that an undivided one-half of the fence be maintained by the owner of the adjoining land not subdivided and one-half of the fence divided into equal shares be maintained by all of the owners of the adjoining subdivided land.

History: 1977 c. 229; 1983 a. 532 s. 36.

90.06 Removal of fence. When any owner or occupant of land shall build a fence before the location of the boundary line between such land and any land adjoining the same and the location of such line shall establish the fact that said fence is on such adjoining land, the ownership thereof shall be in the person who built it or his grantee, devisee or heirs, but such fence shall be removed to the boundary line within 30 days after the location thereof and the service of written notice upon the person who built it or who has acquired his rights, by the owner or occupant of the land upon which the fence is situated; such notice shall be served personally or by leaving a copy thereof at the usual place of abode of such person with some member of his family of suitable age and discretion who shall be informed of the contents thereof; if the removal is not made within 30 days thereafter the party who served or caused such notice to be served may remove the fence to the boundary line and set it up there and recover the expense of so doing from the other party; provided, that no such fence shall be removed by the party giving the notice during a time when annual crops will be damaged unless by agreement of the owners or occupants of the adjoining lands.

90.07 Division of partition fence. (1) A division of a partition fence, or the line upon which a partition fence between adjoining lands shall be built, may be made by fence viewers in the following cases:

(a) When a division of a partition fence, or the line upon which a partition fence between adjoining lands shall be built, shall not have been made in the manner prescribed by s. 90.05, either of the owners of adjoining lands may have the line between his land and the adjoining land of any other person divided, and the portion upon which the respective owners shall erect their share of the partition fence assigned, regardless of whether his land be enclosed or not and regardless of whether such adjoining land be enclosed or not.

(b) When any lands belonging to different persons in severalty shall have been occupied in common or without a partition fence between them and one of the occupants shall be desirous to occupy his part in severalty, and the other shall refuse or neglect, on demand, to divide with him the line where the fence ought to be built or to build a sufficient fence on his part of the line, when divided, the occupant desiring it may have the same divided and the share of each assigned.

(c) When any controversy shall arise about the right of the respective occupants in partition fences or their obligation to maintain the same, either party may have the line divided and the share of each assigned.

(2) In either such case application may be made to 2 or more fence viewers of the town where the lands lie or to 2 or more fence viewers of 2 towns, if the lands lie in 2 towns, who, after 8 days' notice in writing to each party to be served as a summons is in a civil action in a court of record or by registered mail with return receipt requested in the case of a party who does not reside in this state, shall, in writing, divide the partition fence or line and assign to each owner or

occupant his share thereof; and in each of said cases they shall also therein direct the time within which each party shall build or repair, as may be proper, his share of the fence, having regard to the season of the year, and shall file such decision in the town clerk's office, who shall record the same. If either party refuses or neglects to build or repair within the time so assigned his part of the fence the other may, after having completed his own part, build or repair such part and recover the expense thereof as provided in s. 90.11.

(3) Whenever practicable, in determining the division of a new line fence, when facing a farm, going around the farm to the right, the first one-half of the line fence belongs to the farm faced.

90.08 Partition of fences in water. Where a partition fence running into the water is necessary to be made the same shall be done in equal shares unless otherwise agreed by the parties, and in case either party shall refuse or neglect to make or maintain the share belonging to him similar proceedings shall be had as in case of other fences and with the like effect.

90.09 Partition when land bounded by water. When the boundary line between enclosed lands of different persons is a river, brook, pond or creek, which of itself is not a sufficient fence, and it is impracticable, without unreasonable expense, for a partition fence to be built on the true boundary line, and either owner or occupant shall refuse to join in making a partition fence on either side thereof, or if they shall disagree respecting the same, either party may apply to two or more fence viewers of the town, who, after giving notice as provided in s. 90.07, shall proceed to view such river, brook, pond or creek; and if they shall determine that the same is not a sufficient fence and that it is impracticable, without unreasonable expense, to build a fence on the true boundary line they shall, in writing under their hands, determine how or on which side thereof the fence shall be built or whether partly on one side and partly on the other, and assign to each owner or occupant his share thereof and the time within which the respective parties shall build the same, and file such determination in the office of the town clerk, who shall record the same. If either party shall refuse or neglect to build within the time so assigned his part of the fence the other may, after having completed his own part, build such part and recover the expense thereof as hereinafter provided. If said fence viewers shall determine that it is impracticable, either from the formation of the banks of such river, brook, pond or creek or from any other cause, to maintain any fence along or near said boundary line they shall give written notice to the parties of such determination.

90.10 Compulsory repair of fence. In case any person shall neglect to repair or rebuild any partition fence which by law he ought to maintain the aggrieved party may complain to two or more fence viewers of the town, who, after giving notice as provided in s. 90.07, shall examine the same, and if they shall determine such fence is insufficient they shall signify the same to the delinquent party and direct him to repair or rebuild the same within such time as they shall deem reasonable. If such fence shall not be repaired or rebuilt within the time so fixed, the complainant may repair or rebuild the same and recover the expense thereof as hereinafter provided.

90.11 Cost of repairs. (1) Whenever any owner or occupant shall have built, repaired or rebuilt any fence in pursuance of the preceding sections which the adjoining owner or occupant shall have been lawfully directed by fence viewers to build, repair or rebuild, and have failed to do within the time

prescribed, he may call upon any two or more fence viewers of the town, who shall, after having given notice to such adjoining owner or occupant as provided in s. 90.07, examine such fence and ascertain the expense thereof; and if they shall adjudge such fence sufficient they shall give to such party a certificate under their hands of such decision and of the amount of the expense of such building or repairing, and the fees of the fence viewers who made such order and of their own; and thereupon such party may demand the amount of such ascertained expense, together with such fees, from such adjoining owner or occupant; and in case of neglect and refusal to pay the same for one month after so demanded the amount of such expenses and fees together with interest at the rate of one per cent a month shall constitute a special charge and lien against such adjoining lands and may be recovered in the manner provided in sub. (2).

(2) The person to whom such certificate shall be executed and delivered may file the same with the town clerk of the town in which the lands charged with such expense are located. Upon the filing of such certificate such town clerk shall issue his warrant for the amount thereof upon the town treasurer payable to such person. The amount so paid together with interest at the rate of one per cent a month shall be included by the town clerk in the next tax roll as a special charge against such lands and such charge shall be collected by the town treasurer with the other taxes in such town. Any such charge remaining unpaid shall be added to the list of delinquent taxes returned to the county treasurer, who shall collect the same or sell the land as for delinquent taxes; and all proceedings in relation thereto shall be the same in all respects as in the case of land sold for other delinquent taxes. Every county treasurer who shall collect or receive any moneys on account of such delinquent charges shall pay the same to the treasurer of the proper town.

90.12 Apportionment of cost of fence. When, in any controversy that may arise between occupants of adjoining lands as to their respective rights in any partition fence, it shall appear to the fence viewers that either of the occupants had, before any complaint made to them, voluntarily erected the whole fence, or more than his just share of the same, or otherwise become proprietor thereof, the other occupant shall pay for so much as may be assigned to him to repair or maintain; the just value thereof which he ought to pay shall be ascertained by proceeding as prescribed in s. 90.11.

90.13 Partition fence on newly-enclosed land. When any unenclosed land shall afterwards be enclosed the owner or occupant thereof shall pay for one-half of each partition fence standing upon the line between his land and the enclosure of any other owner or occupant, unless such line shall have been theretofore divided, in which case he shall pay the value of the fence on the part of such line so assigned to him; and the value thereof at the time in either case shall be ascertained on the application of either as provided in s. 90.11, in case the parties do not agree; and if such owner or occupant shall neglect or refuse to pay the same for sixty days after the value has been so ascertained and demand made the proprietor of such fence may recover such value with the fence viewers' fees and costs.

90.14 Fence on town line. In all cases where the line upon which a partition fence is to be made or to be divided is the boundary line between towns or partly in one town and partly in another a fence viewer shall be taken from each town; and divisions of such fences by them or by agreement of the parties shall be recorded in the office of the clerk of each town.

90.15 Fees of viewers; neglect of duty. A fence viewer is entitled to the following fees and expenses for services rendered under this chapter: daily employment, mileage, service of notice or process and folios written. The rate of pay for the fees and expenses shall be set by the viewer's city, village or town. The fees and expenses shall be paid equally by the parties to the controversy, and if any of them neglect to pay the same within 30 days after the services are performed, each fence viewer may recover from delinquent parties jointly double the amount of the fees and expenses. A fence viewer who neglects to perform his or her duties shall forfeit \$5 and be liable to the injured party for damages. Fence viewers may administer oaths for purposes of this chapter.

History: 1979 c. 221.

90.16 Record of partition. Every partition of a division fence or line made by fence viewers, signed and recorded as hereinbefore provided, and the record or a certified copy thereof, shall be presumptive evidence of the regularity of all the proceedings prior to the making thereof.