



Lakewood Design Brief: Porch Railings

Before you start any work on your porch, please contact the City of Lakewood Building Department for permit and approval requirements. building.permits@lakewoodoh.gov or 216-529-6270.

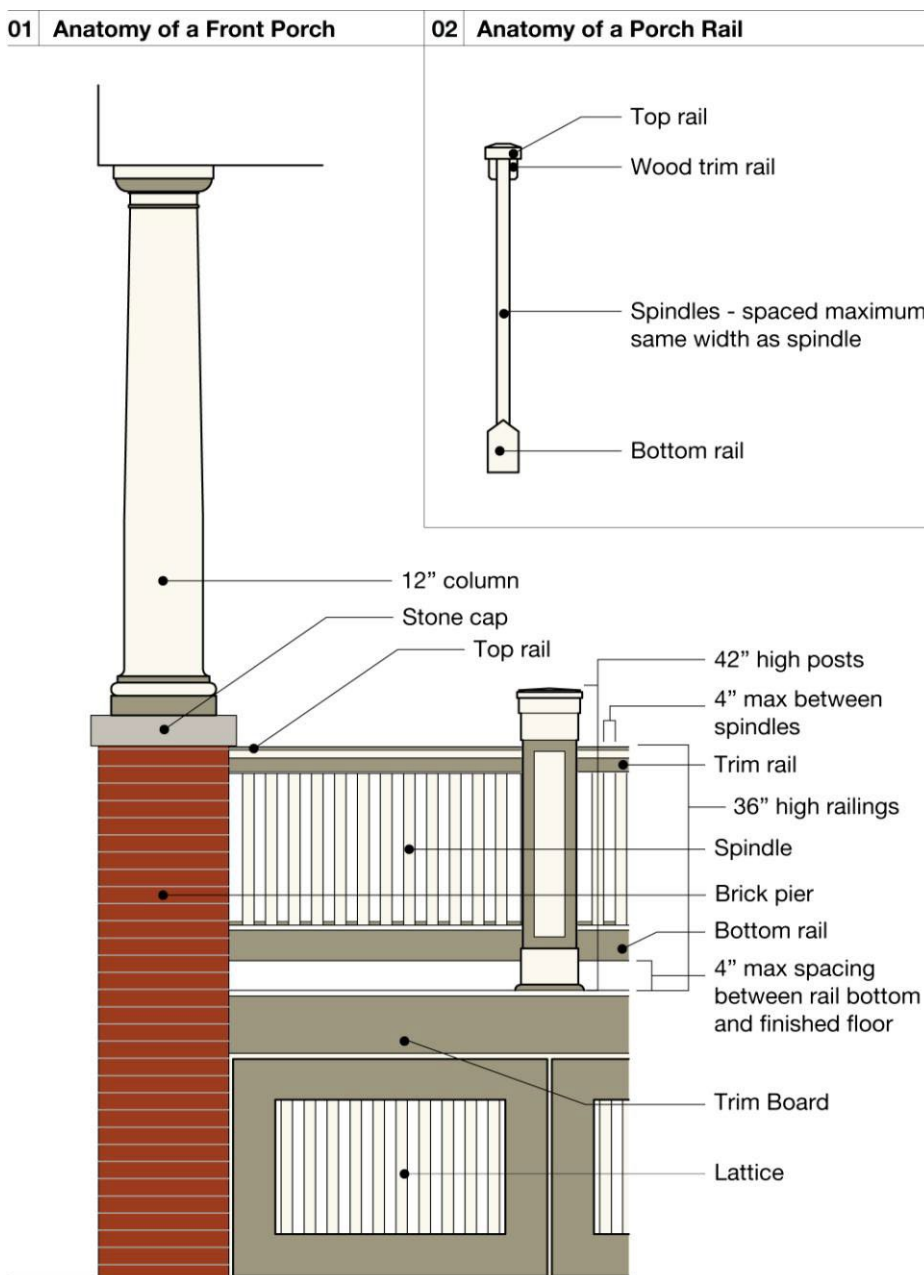
Porch railings are important

The porch is often the most prominent part of the front of a Lakewood house, and railings create much of the design character of porches.

Repairing an Original Railing

Original Lakewood railings are old growth wood, which makes them more durable than the wood bought today. Original railings can be tightened and/or stripped of peeling paint. Replacement pieces can be made, and epoxy fillers – which can be sanded and painted – will repair damaged wood.

Remember: If you tear off an original porch railing, the building code requires that the replacement must be 36 inches above the porch floor on the first floor and 36 inches above the porch floor with 42-inch-high posts on the second floor, which looks out of scale on Lakewood homes. Original Lakewood front porch railings were often in the 26-to 32-inch height range. Very often the porch rail is the same height above the porch floor as the top of the windowsill on a front window.



Replacing a Previously Replaced Railing

Some houses in Lakewood already have replacement railings, and often they don't look good because of material, design, or construction techniques. Use traditional and durable materials to build a new railing, such as cedar, cypress, mahogany, or old growth fir. The City may allow composite materials in some situations.

Find Old Photos

Old photos are a great source to discover the appearance of an original railing. The Cuyahoga County Archives has photos of most buildings from the 1950's. The Archives is located at 2905 Franklin Ave. in Cleveland (216.443.7250). The Lakewood Historical Society also has photos of many buildings (216.221.7343).

Find the Right Pieces

When shopping for railing parts, lumberyards in older neighborhoods are more likely to have items that look good on Lakewood homes (Yellow Pages – 'lumber – retail'). At a big box retailer, go to the 'pro desk' and look in supplier catalogs. Also, don't forget about online sources such as the 'Old House Journal Restoration Directory' (<http://www.oldhousejournal.com>).

Baluster Spacing

The building code requires that the parts of a porch railing must be close enough so that a four-inch sphere will not slip through. Traditional railing design meets that rule, because the space between two balusters should equal the width of one baluster. So, if a railing has two-inch square balusters, the space between should be two inches.

Height above the Porch Floor

Railings should attach to columns above the column base. Support a long section of railing at the midpoint with a small wood block between the bottom rail and porch floor.

Railing Height

If old photos or physical evidence on the house show the height of the original porch railing, and you would like to install a new railing at that height, talk to the City's Department of Planning & Development for advice.

If a new rail will be the code-required height, you can make it appear shorter by installing a continuous horizontal piece about six inches below the top rail. This extra rail will help avoid the look of a 'playpen.'

Finishing Touches

Porch railings and columns should be finished with paint or opaque stain that matches or complements the house colors.

More Information

For more information on the history and maintenance of Lakewood's Front Porches, visit the Heritage Advisory Board webpage on www.lakewoodoh.gov.