

The Renovation Roadmap

Start your Plan

Whether you are renovating to improve your living space, or simply making necessary repairs to your home, careful planning lets you get the most from your home renovation dollars.

The first step is to set renovation goals that reflect your lifestyle and priorities. By defining what you want to achieve, the contractors and trades you hire will be better able to deliver great results.

There are a number of steps you should take to begin the planning process.

- First, write down your specific goals - the things you want to change in your home.
- Second, give some thought to both your current and future needs, so that renovations made today will accommodate changes in your lifestyle later.
- Third, put together a wish list of the things that must be included in the project as well as others items you'd like to include, if your budget allows.

These three steps will help clarify your renovation goals and priorities - essential information when you begin talking to contractors.

This website provides useful information and checklists to help you through these steps.

Setting Your Renovation Goals

Your home renovation should provide you with improved functionality, comfort and convenience. When completed, your home should also be more energy efficient and healthier to live in.

It's important to set some general goals for your renovation project. These goals should address both the things you want to change in your home, and anything new you want to add. In some cases, such as simple repairs or maintenance projects, your goals will be straightforward. However, if you are considering more significant renovations such as major improvements or an addition to your home, more detailed goal setting can be very helpful.

Renovation goals should reflect your day-to-day experience living in your home and describe what you want to achieve, rather than dealing with the "nuts and bolts" of how the actual work will be done.

In most cases, there are three aspects you should consider when drawing up your renovation goals:

- **Use of Space** - How you use a room determines the amount of space required and the extent to which this space needs to be open or closed to surrounding areas. Consider how you plan to use renovated areas of your home, what furnishing must fit into it and whether noise from one area of your home will be disruptive if not contained.

- **Movement of People** - What are the traffic patterns in your home? Do access requirements between rooms conflict with activities? For example, do people have to pass through the television room to get to a bathroom? Are there areas of your home that currently cause "traffic jams" or that are too restrictive at certain times of the day?
- **Light Requirements** - You need to consider the lighting requirements for activities planned in each room. Do the existing windows provide adequate daytime lighting? Do you want the room to feel more spacious and brighter? Will you use the space more during the day or evening? What sort of lighting fixtures are best suited to the space e.g., task lighting, area lighting?

A major benefit of setting renovation goals is that it helps you identify the existing problems you

Your Lifestyle Checklist

Developing Your Lifestyle Checklist

When you renovate your home, it's important to make sure your plan suits both your present and future needs. There are a variety of lifestyle changes that can alter your housing needs, including:

- Changes in your family situation, such as the arrival of a new child or an aging parent, or having grown children move away from home. Each of these changes can mean changing how you use space in your home. You may want to convert an extra bedroom into a home office or create a living area on the main level of the home.
- Increased accessibility needs due to health or mobility impairment. Stairs may cause difficulties. Bathrooms may need security handholds, wider doors and special fixtures.
- The length of time you expect to live in your home may influence your renovation investment choices. With the possible exception of kitchen and bathroom upgrades, not all of your renovation investment is likely to be recovered when you sell your home. If you expect to be moving within a few years, you should take this into account. If you expect to live in your home for many years to come, the financial return on your renovation investment may be of less concern.
- Your long-term financial goals should also be considered. For most Canadians, their home is their single largest financial asset. Renovation investments should be part of, and consistent with, your overall personal financial plan.

Developing Your Renovation Wish List

A renovation wish list identifies the specific features you want to include in your renovation. It also allows you to decide which items are "must-haves" and which are "like-to-haves" - features that you'll include if your budget allows.

This is the stage of renovation planning where you need to get out and see what others have done, what new products are available and what design features, finishings and furnishings are right for you. There are many potential sources for your renovation wish list ideas:

- Family, friends and neighbours who have had renovations done. Design and home improvement magazines from your local news stand. Cut out and collect pictures of homes, rooms or products that appeal to you. This can be a great help when you sit down to discuss your project with a renovation contractor.
- The Internet is a great source of design ideas and inspirations. Most product manufacturers have websites and many renovation contractors also use the Internet to showcase their services and projects.

- In larger centres, visit kitchen, bathroom and building products showrooms to see what's new.
- Home shows and open house events are another great way to see new products and design ideas. Check with your local Home Builders' Association to find out what events may be planned in your community.

It is a good idea to organize your renovation wish list into categories that deal with design, products and materials. As you build your list, give careful thought to what items are most important to you, i.e., the "must-have" features. This will provide you and contractors you hire with a clearer sense the priorities for your project.

Make Your Home Energy Efficient

Finding opportunities to cut your energy bills is an important step in renovation planning. Improving your home's energy efficiency not only saves you money year after year, it can also be the key to increasing the comfort of your home. And by using less energy, you will help protect our environment by producing less of the greenhouse gases that harm our environment by contributing to climate change.

Energy saving measures can easily be incorporated in most home renovation projects. And by combining energy improvements with other renovation activities, saving energy will cost you less.

The most cost-effective approach to energy efficiency will depend on the age and condition of your home.

You can get a detailed assessment of your home's energy performance and how you can cut energy use from a licensed home energy advisor. Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) licenses companies across Canada to provide this service using its ERS home energy rating software. Obtaining an independent assessment from a licensed home energy advisor will help you and your renovator identify energy efficiency improvements you can carry out as part of your renovation project.

This website provides information about many energy efficiency improvements you should consider, from sealing air leaks and adding insulation to upgrading windows and selecting energy efficient appliances and heating equipment.

Home Energy Assessment

Getting a Home Energy Assessment

Natural Resources Canada licenses independent home energy advisors who offer home energy assessment services across Canada.

The home energy assessment is a professional evaluation of your home's heating, hot water and ventilation systems, insulation and air leakage. Specially trained advisors carry out this evaluation. The process involves a careful assessment of your home's energy systems and their performance. Advisors use computer software modeling and their own experience to assess performance and propose the best upgrade options for your home.

The home energy advisor will explain the results of the assessment and point out where efficiency improvements can be made cost effectively. As well, you will receive a written report on the evaluation results.

Your home energy assessment report will highlight how your home can be improved to reduce energy costs and improve comfort. This information can be particularly valuable as you set your renovation priorities and meet with contractors.

How the Home Energy Assessment Works

Your home energy advisor will conduct a walk-through assessment of your home to gather information on all components and equipment that can affect energy efficiency. This data is then analysed using the ERS computer program developed by Natural Resources Canada. The condition of your home, your heating system, local climate conditions and energy costs are all factored into this analysis.

As part of the assessment, the advisor also performs a blower door test which measures the amount of uncontrolled air leakage in your home. During the test, the advisor will show you the exact points in your home where significant air leaks exist so that you will know where caulking and sealing are needed.

When the assessment is completed, the advisor will explain the results and answer any questions you have. Your written home energy assessment report will suggest cost-effective improvements that will increase your home's energy efficiency, reduce energy bills and increase your home comfort. You will also receive an ERS rating label for your home that shows how its energy efficiency compares with other homes.

The ERS Computer Analysis

More than 20 years of research by Natural Resources Canada led to the development of the ERS computer program that licensed home energy advisors use to produce an accurate analysis of your home's energy efficiency. The analysis considers the many different factors that can affect your home's energy efficiency, including:

- heating and air conditioning equipment
- ventilation equipment
- domestic hot water systems
- the rate of air leakage or infiltration
- air/vapour barriers
- insulation levels

The software models the energy performance of the home based on standard operating conditions and determines its rating. The advisor's expertise combined with the software's modeling options help to identify the most effective way to deal with any home comfort problems while reducing your home's energy consumption and heating costs.

The ERS Blower Door Test

To perform a thorough energy efficiency assessment of your home, licensed home energy advisors use specially designed blower door test equipment to measure your home's rate of air leakage.

The blower door is a variable-speed fan mounted on an adjustable panel that can fit into any exterior door opening of your home. When the advisor turns the fan on, air is drawn through your home at a constant speed to allow outside air to flow in through unsealed openings or cracks in the house structure. Pressure sensors connected to the fan measure the rate of airflow required to keep your home at a constant pressure, allowing the advisor to measure the amount of air leakage taking place.

The Home Energy Assessment Report

Your home assessment report is an important tool for improving the energy efficiency of your home through properly planned upgrades and renovations. In the report you will find a breakdown of the amount of energy used for space heating, water heating, lighting and appliances an estimate of where energy is lost throughout your home (basement, windows, doors, main walls and ceiling, etc). This lets you see where energy upgrades would be most effective. It will also outline your home's current ERS rating and the rating you can expect if you complete all the recommended improvements

Your energy advisor will go through the report with you to explain all the recommended improvements. At the same time they will answer any questions you may have regarding the results of the assessment, the ERS rating your home achieved and any aspects of the assessment.

Make Your Home Healthier

Today, Canadians are much more aware of the link between indoor environments and their health. Poor ventilation, moisture-related mold problems and many common chemicals released in the home can affect your health and well-being.

Home renovations provide the ideal opportunity to make your home a healthier place to live. This is especially important if you or a member of your household suffer from allergies, asthma or other health-related conditions that can be aggravated by poor air quality. As part of your renovation planning, you should determine whether there are any areas of your home that have moisture or air-quality problems that need attention.

Ensuring that your home is a healthy place to live will not only increase your comfort, it will protect your investment - many of the conditions that cause poor air quality can also lead to deterioration of a home's structure.

CMHC is Canada's Healthy Housing™ expert. Their research and publications provide a wealth of information you can use when planning your renovation.

Remember that a healthy house is not only better for you and your family, it also makes environmental sense by conserving resources.

Dealing with Radon in Your Home

You may or may not have it in your home. You may have an acceptable amount of it, or too much. If the latter, you should get rid of it, and there is no better time to do so than when you are renovating your home.

The “it” is radon, an invisible, odourless soil gas that occurs naturally in areas across Canada. Radon is not a health concern outside in the open air because it exists in very low concentrations. But when it finds its way into your home, it can build up to a level where it may have a detrimental effect on your health, if you are exposed for a prolonged period. Radon has been linked to lung cancer, and smokers in particular are vulnerable to its effects.

Essentially, the soil around your home exerts pressure on the foundation and under the slab. Where present in the soil, radon can seep into your home through dirt floors, cracks and fissure in the basement floor and walls, sump pumps, and other openings. While the highest concentrations are usually found on the lowest level, radon can disperse throughout the whole house, including your living and sleeping areas.

You can't smell or see radon, so the only way to know if you have it is to test for it. Some areas in Canada are more prone to radon than others, but radon can occur anywhere. And just because your neighbour doesn't have it, or only at a low acceptable level, it doesn't mean that you don't need to bother about testing. Your home could have an entirely different reading.

Testing is easy. There are a number of do-it-yourself radon test kits on the market, or you can hire someone to do it. Be aware that the best and most reliable tests take time—several months or longer. It is a good idea to start testing well in advance of doing any renovation work so you can incorporate any radon-related work into the project.

Testing need not delay your plans—usually there is a considerable lagtime between when people first start thinking about renovating and when the work gets underway. And of course, you don't have to wait until you decide to renovate—it is a good idea to test your home for radon anytime, just to be certain.

In 2007 Health Canada lowered the acceptable level for radon in homes to bring it into line with international guidelines. It also made recommendations for new home construction and measures to deal with radon problems in existing homes.

If your home shows that radon is present above acceptable levels, there is a whole range of things that can be done to bring it down. Possible measures to prevent radon from entering the house include sealing cracks and other openings or depressurizing the basement (essentially sucking the air out from below the slab). Installing a heat recovery ventilator (HRV) to increase ventilation in the whole house can also reduce the amount of radon in the air. This is where a professional renovator can be very

helpful, and can discuss with you how to integrate these measures with the rest of the renovation work, and how they may affect the work and your budget.

There is a wealth of great information and advice available from a number of sources, including Health Canada and the Canadian Lung Association to help you learn more about radon and its effects, myths and facts, how to test for it in your own home and approaches to deal with it, should this prove necessary. Provincial governments may also have helpful information.

Find the Right Contractor

Once you have set your renovation goals and priorities, you need to find the right contractor to carry out your project. The type of renovation professional you need will depend on what's involved in your project.

- For simple projects involving only one activity such as replacement of roofing, siding or windows, a specialized trade contractor or contract installer may be best.
- If your project involves changes to your heating, electrical or plumbing systems, you should consult a licensed trade contractor.
- For renovation projects that will involve more than one trade or require structural changes to your home, you should look for a general renovation contractor who can manage all aspects of the work, including development of detailed plans.

Regardless of the type of work involved in your project, you need to make sure that any contractor you hire has the necessary skill and experience to do the job right. Professional contractors run their businesses properly, have a track record of satisfied customers and will provide you with customer references upon request.

To get the names of contractors in your community, contact your local Home Builders' Association or use the search engine located to the right. You can also often get contractor leads from friends and neighbours who have carried out renovations similar to those you plan.

It is important to interview any prospective contractor and discuss your project in detail before deciding who to hire. This website contains downloadable worksheets to help you with this process.

What if I Want to Do It Myself?

Many homeowners enjoy taking on home improvement projects. Today, there is a tremendous amount of do-it-yourself information available from building supply retailers, specialty television programs, bookstores and on-line through the internet.

If you're considering doing your own renovation work, but are uncertain if this is the right choice for you, here are a few things to consider:

- Think about your skills and capabilities, and the complexity of the project, before jumping in to it. Do you have the tools needed or will these need to be purchased? If you have experience in residential construction, doing your own work can make a lot of sense. On the other hand, if you lack the necessary skills, or if the work is complex, doing it yourself may be a mistake.

- Give some thought to the work schedule and your own free time. Will you be able to complete the work on time? Are you willing to devote this much time to the project or is it likely to drag on longer than you want?
- If you act as your own general contractor, you are taking on responsibility for managing the project. Make sure that all legal aspects of the project are handled properly including building permits and required inspections.
- If you hire tradespeople to do some of the work, remember that you still need a proper written contract covering this activity. Without a contract, you could be exposed to significant legal and financial risk in the event of a work-place accident.

If saving money is the main reason you are considering doing the work yourself, consider talking to a professional renovation contractor first. They may be able to suggest ways they could do the work while controlling costs or they may be able to divide the work into more affordable stages.

Get it in Writing

Once you have found the right contractor for the job, make sure to get a proper written contract before the work begins. Never accept a verbal agreement. Never hire someone who offers to give you a "special price" if nothing is written down and you pay for the work in cash.

Professional renovation contractors always provide customers with a proper written contract. Here's why:

- A proper contract spells out what work is to be done, when and how much it will cost. Without a contract, you have little protection from overcharging, incomplete work or excessive delays in completing the project.
- A proper contract includes a clear warranty on the work being done. Without a contract, it can be difficult or impossible to get faulty work repaired.
- A proper contract specifies the materials and products to be used in your project. Without a contract, you could end up with inferior materials and little recourse.
- A proper contract includes proof that the contractor has up-to-date workers' compensation coverage and liability insurance. Without a contract, you could face enormous financial and legal costs if anyone is hurt on the job, or if there is damage to your home or neighbouring properties.
- A proper contract includes payment holdbacks in accordance with provincial lien regulations. Without a contract, you could be held responsible if the person you hired fails to pay for materials or subcontract labour, even if you have already paid the contractor.

When you hire someone to work on your home, a proper written contract isn't an option, it's a necessity. It protects you.

When you hire a contractor for your home, a pen is your most important tool!

There are many experienced and reliable contractors doing business in your community. Unfortunately, there are also some "underground" operators who offer a "great price" so long as nothing is written down and you pay in cash.

Don't make the mistake of falling for the "deal" that could turn into a real nightmare, exposing you to lawsuits, financial liens or liability for workplace accidents or injuries.

Find the right contractor: someone who is skilled, knowledgeable and does business fairly and honestly. In short, a professional. Finding someone who is right for you and your project is not difficult if you take this simple advice:

- **Get Recommendations**

Start by asking friends, family members and neighbours for recommendations. Have they hired a contractor to do building, renovation or repair work recently? Were they happy with the contractor's performance and would they hire the contractor again? Ask about the quality of the work and whether it was completed on time at the agreed price. Make sure the contractor provided a written contract and didn't ask for payment in cash "under the table".

Use the search engine located to the right or call the Home Builders' Association in your community and ask for a list of professional new home builders and renovators.

- **Get Customer References**

A good contractor has satisfied customers. Ask contractors for a list of customer references: people who can verify the contractor's past performance. Follow through and call the homeowners. Ask the same questions as you did when gathering recommendations. Was the work done properly, on time and on budget? If there was follow-up warranty work, was this completed satisfactorily? Would the homeowners hire the contractor for future work? If any contractor is unable or unwilling to provide references, don't hire them.

- **Get Protection from Risks**

It's important that any contractor you hire operates their business properly. If not, you could face some serious risks. Poor quality work, extra costs and no warranty service are just some of the pitfalls. You could also face very expensive legal problems. A professional contractor always carries liability insurance and workplace compensation coverage (when required) and complies with municipal building permit and licencing rules. This protects you. Without this protection, you could be liable for any injuries or damages that result from your building or renovation work.

Make sure you get proof of protection from these risks. Ask the contractor for insurance and Workplace Compensation certificates. Make sure your written contract with the contractor spells out who is responsible for getting building permits and approvals. And because most homeowner's fire and liability insurance doesn't cover construction-related risks, contact your insurance company before construction begins, inform them about your renovation project and make arrangements for any additional coverage needed.

- **Get It In Writing!**

Always get a written contract that states what work will be done, what it will cost and how payments will be made. Never agree to anything before you have it in writing!

A contract is important for a number of reasons. Without one, there is little you can do if the work is of poor quality or incomplete. You risk being charged far more than you expected. And it's unlikely that you can enforce any warranty or after-sales service promises.

Also, a proper written contract gives you specific legal protection, should your contractor go bankrupt or fail to pay for the materials and labour that go into your project. Without this, you could face liens and have to pay suppliers, even if you already paid the contractor.

Professional contractors always provide customers with a clear, written contract.

- **Be Very Careful About "Great Deals"**

Not every contractor plays by the rules.

An underground contractor may offer a very low price provided nothing is written down and you pay in cash, without a receipt. This sort of "deal" is only possible because they don't do business properly. They don't protect you from their mistakes. If anything goes wrong, you could end up with serious legal and financial problems. At the very least, there will be little you can do about poor quality or incomplete work.

Real professionals care about their reputation and want every customer to be satisfied. Underground operators don't care about these things.

So don't be taken in by promises of a low price by someone who's cutting corners. It could end up being a real nightmare for you and your family. Hire a professional contractor and get value for your money.

A detailed written contract between you and any contractor you hire is essential for any home repair or renovation project-no matter the size. Even the smallest job should be put in writing. Why? Because without a proper contract you face serious legal and financial risks.