

10 Mistakes to Avoid

Custom home renovations And additions

Designing your custom home can be an exciting and rewarding process. It's an opportunity to create the perfect environment for your family and entertaining your friends. However, there are common mistakes that homeowners often make that can make the experience more difficult and frustrating than need be.

1. BUYING THE PROPERTY BEFORE DOING THE RESEARCH- ZONING

Especially in a tight real estate market, homebuyers often need to make quick decisions when they see a property they love. They may have ideas of how their dream house will look, however it is vital that they know what the local zoning ordinances will allow before taking the plunge.

There are restrictions on building within property line setbacks, total building area, and total lot coverage in most towns. The information can be found online or at the local building department. See if the seller has a property survey, you'll need that to assess compliance with zoning. In older neighborhoods, it's not uncommon that current zoning regulations were adopted since the houses were built, and your property might be non-compliant. In this case, it's usually possible to get variances as long as you can demonstrate that you will comply with the intent of the zoning, but you should be aware that the variance approval process can add cost and delay the start of construction. **Keep in mind that zoning rules usually vary from town to town, and between neighborhoods within a town.**

A SMALL SAMPLE OF TYPICAL MUNICIPAL ZONING RULES.

ZONE	MAXIMUM HEIGHT	MINIMUM LOT AREA (SQ. FT.)	MINIMUM LOT AREA PER UNIT (SQ. FT.)	MINIMUM LOT WIDTH (FT.)	MINIMUM FRONT YARD (FT.)	MINIMUM SIDE FRONT YARD-CORNER LOT (FT.)
R-1	2 ½ stories and not exceeding 35'	80,000	80,000	150	40	40
R-2	SAME AS R-1 Sen. C.H. - 3 stories not to exceed 37'-8"	40,000	40,000 Sen. C.H. - 650 per unit	125 Sen. C.H. - 200	35 Sen. C.H. - 40	35 Sen. C.H. - 40
R-3	SAME AS R-1	20,000	20,000	100	35	35
R-3AH	SAME AS R-3	10,000/ 12,500 (See 25-31)	See 25-31	See 25-31	30	30
R-4	SAME AS R-1	15,000	15,000	100	30	30
R-5	SAME AS R-1	10,000	10,000	75	30	25
R-6	SAME AS R-1	6,000	6,000	60	30	20

2. BUYING THE PROPERTY BEFORE DOING THE RESEARCH- COST

You have a vision about what the property you've fallen in love with will be; It can be expanded, new windows and siding, new roof, a big new kitchen and master suite. You have a budget in mind that seems like it should be enough to accomplish your goals. **Unfortunately, many homebuyers have unrealistic expectations of how far their budget will take them.** Quality construction and finish work is often more expensive than imagined. Try to get a consultation from an architect or contractor before you commit to something you may later regret. **In our experience most homebuyers underestimate cost, often very significantly.**

3. HIRING THE WRONG ARCHITECT

A friend or family member might recommend an architect to you. While this is often a great way to find your architect, maybe they were right for that person, but you may want someone who has a different style, or someone you feel truly listens to you and understands your personal needs and aspirations. Make sure you select someone who feels like a good fit for you. **The architect will be the primary factor in determining the success of your project, and you will be working with them in an intimate way for a long period of time.**

4. RUSHING INTO YOUR PROJECT

You might be anxious to get the construction going, but careful planning takes time, and ideas develop and evolve as you start to explore your options. If you take the time to think things through before construction starts, you'll end up with fewer costly change orders and delays, or compromises that could have been avoided with more foresight.

5. MICRO-MANAGING YOUR ARCHITECT

You should be as clear as possible in your mind about your needs and goals, and be able to articulate your vision to your architect. But hopefully, you've been careful about your selection of an architect and you've hired someone because you trust their creativity and ability to guide you through the process. **If you give them creative license, you might be surprised and delighted by solutions you had never considered.** Trust their expertise and expect that they have your best interest at heart.

6. ALWAYS HIRING THE CONTRACTOR WITH THE LOWEST BID

If you are getting multiple bids for your construction project, and one bid is substantially lower than the others, this could be a warning sign. Sometimes a contractor really needs the work and will come in with a low bid just to get a foot in the door. Or **they didn't really pay close enough attention to the drawings and specifications, and are later surprised by what is being asked of them.** They may try cut corners or find as many opportunities as possible for change orders. I've seen contractors walk away from projects before their completion because they knew they were going to lose more money the longer they stayed on the job. If the bid documents are clear and reasonably complete, and if you're talking to contractors who are qualified for the type of project you are planning, their bids should be within a spread of 10 - 15% of each other. Get references for contractors from clients who have done projects similar in scope to yours. And carefully review, or get your architect's help in reviewing all the bids for an apples to apples comparison.

PARTIAL COST BREAKDOWN EXAMPLE	
Framing	\$ 126,800.00
Siding	\$ 8,650.00
Roofing	\$ 28,895.00
Gutters and Leaders	\$ 4,225.00
Exterior Trim	\$ 28,800.00
New Windows and Patio Doors	\$ 39,950.00
Front Door and Hardware	\$ 6,500.00

7. NOT ALLOWING FOR COST CONTINGENCIES

You've set a budget for yourself, you have bids, and have selected a contractor. However, **unexpected and un-foreseen conditions are common with renovations and additions**. You can't always know what's inside the walls that are coming out. The contractor may uncover work that wasn't done to code or is a safety hazard, or rotting structural members, mold, etc. And regardless of how much advance planning you've done, as the project is coming together, you might want to make a change. It's prudent to allow an additional 15 - 20% for these unexpected costs.

8. CHANGING YOUR MIND. A LOT

Extensive changes during construction gets expensive and cause delays. **Don't be persuaded by friends or family to second guess all the hard work you've put into the planning**. Some changes are inevitable, but the more you can anticipate beforehand, the smoother the process and the fewer costly change orders.

9. WAITING UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO MAKE DECISIONS

Often construction starts before you've picked every fixture or finish. But if you put off the selections for too long, you may find you have to compromise to find products off the shelf (and you'll be living with these for a very long time), or delay the project while you wait for that perfect tile to arrive. For example, plumbing fixtures that have components inside the walls (shower and tub fittings, wall mount faucets), are needed quite early during the construction schedule and **delays in small but important decisions can have a snowballing effect**. Knowing which tile you are going to use may make a big difference in getting details to align properly. Try to make as many decisions as possible well in advance and you'll avoid the stress and regret (and cost overruns and time delays) that come from indecision.

10. LACK OF COMMUNICATION

A major building project involves a lot of people and can be challenging for a family to live through, but it can also be a wonderful and exciting experience. Don't assume that everyone on the project knows exactly what you want and expect. **Create a communication protocol with all involved to prevent important information or ideas from slipping through the cracks**. Be prepared for the unexpected and know who to discuss it with and how to make your voice heard. Don't suffer disappointment in silence. Sometimes it's easier than you think to correct something that you don't like. In the end, your architect and contractor want you to be as happy as possible with the final results. After all, they want your recommendations and referrals.



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