

How to Select a Building Contractor

Building or remodeling can be an exciting and challenging experience. One of the most important decisions you will make is selecting the right contractor. When you have found the contractor that is right for you, working out the agreement for your project is the next step. Here are some basic factors to consider:

REFERENCES

- Start by looking for a contractor with a good track record. The best source is a recommendation from someone whose judgment you trust.
- Check credentials. Contact the better business bureau and government consumer affairs office. Get references. Check on past business practices. Ask how this contractor has stood behind the work performed. If possible, look at previous projects.
- Check insurance coverage. Make sure there is coverage for workman's compensation, liability and property damage.

PROPOSALS

- If you ask more than one contractor to bid, make sure the specifications are identical and that they include all aspects of the project. When you receive proposals, check to insure that they conform to the specifications. If not, or if you are unsure, ask for clarification.
- Most important of all, talk about your ideas and plans and ask for the contractor's input. This will help you select a contractor you will enjoy working with and whom you feel you can trust to carry out your ideas.

THE CONTRACT

- After you have selected your contractor, discuss the project in detail and put it in writing. Going over the specifics of a contract will clarify it for all parties and avoid possible misunderstandings later.

- Specify as much as possible. If the brand and models are not known, describe the type and category.
- Talk about warranties. Find out what guarantees are specified by the manufacturer and what the contractor provides.
- Set down the expected start and completion dates. Allowances must be made for unavoidable delays. Find out how these will be handled.
- Get specific about money and payment. Know when payments are due, how much they will be, and what they cover. Be sure you understand how changes to the contract can be made and what they entail.
- Sign when the contract is acceptable and complete. Be sure to keep a copy signed by both parties.

PERMITS

- Make sure that the contractor is responsible for getting the necessary permits and complying with applicable building codes.
- Find out what inspections will be required and ask that you be notified when they are done.

WORKING WITH YOUR CONTRACTOR

- Discuss the project schedule and how the work will be performed. Clearly explain the things which are important to you and work out a plan that will make the process less stressful and even enjoyable.
- Approve plans before work starts, but don't hold up your project by withholding necessary decisions. If you are supposed to make product selections or provide fixtures, plan ahead to have them available before they're needed.
- Make sure all substantial changes are added to the contract with enough detail so that everyone involved fully understands and agrees with them.
- Make sure your contract has a method of resolving disputes without halting work or inflaming discussions.