

## **Home Remodeling Survival**

Although residential remodeling occurs during all seasons of the year, the spring and summer months are the busiest times. It's the time of year for renewal. The snow has melted, the trees and flowers are in bloom, and your thoughts are churning with ideas for changing and rearranging your home. For many, this means considering a new deck or maybe a three-season or screened porch in defense of our state "bird" the mosquito. You've done your spring-cleaning, but your closets are still bursting at the seams. The countertops in your kitchen are cluttered because of lack of cabinet and drawer space, and the eating area is too small.

Your growing family requires another bathroom or bedroom or even a second story. A dining room would be nice for entertaining friends and family. A home office or study would provide the privacy needed for your work projects, the kid's homework and for organizing family finances and correspondence. You could use a new space for family activities or a playroom, because your living area is overcrowded with toys, books, etc. You've dreamed of having a master bedroom suite with all the amenities.

You love your neighborhood and the great schools, churches, shopping centers and other resources nearby. You really need to remodel or add on for comfort and convenience. Financing rates are at or close to the lowest point they've been for many years. The possibilities are endless and home improvement can be an extremely attractive alternative to moving. So, it's time to start planning.

### **The Remodeling Contractor**

Select a remodeler who is established and reputable and can assist you with careful planning, preparation and attention to detail. Look for a remodeler who will provide you with personal and professional service, and has expertise and experience with design options and building codes. The following guidelines can assist you in selecting the right remodeler for your project:

- Take your time: most problems occur when homeowners fail to investigate remodelers carefully before hiring them.
- Call the Builders Association of the Twin Cities, the National Association of the Remodeling Industry or the National Kitchen and Bath Association for a list of their remodeler members.
- Call the Better Business Bureau and inquire about any unresolved complaints.
- Call the Minnesota Department of Commerce to verify that the remodeler is licensed to conduct construction business by the State of Minnesota.
- Inquire about the remodelers Worker's Compensation and General Liability insurance.
- Ask for a contact name and phone number at the remodeler's bank.

- Ask for a few supplier references and call to inquire whether the remodeler adheres to their payment policies.
- Ask to see written customer testimonials and photos of completed projects. Check the quality of design and workmanship.
- If you haven't already spoken to past clients, request the names and number's of a few that would be willing to share their experience with you.
- Verify that the remodeler has a permanent business location.
- Ask to see the remodeler's written warranty.

Be skeptical of any unusually low bid or low advertised price. Remember, "the bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten". If a remodeler cannot pay for materials, subcontractors and labor, you are both in trouble.

If you are getting competitive bids, be sure that each remodeler is using the same set of plans and verify that all of the same details are incorporated into each bid.

Select a remodeler you are confident in and that you feel comfortable communicating with.

### **Designing your project**

Building an addition and remodeling your present space can add lasting value when designed consistent with the architectural lines and in proportion with the rest of your home. For your plan to be effective, you should:

- Look at your home as a whole to see where changes could be made.
- Make a prioritized ("needs" verses "wants") list of all the items you wish to incorporate into your plans.
- Establish a preliminary budget, so that the contractor can work realistically with your available resources.
- Make a list of any wasted areas of your home, areas that are used very little or not at all.
- Plan around possible future projects that aren't affordable now, but may be added later.
- Consider all possible options (remodeling, adding on or up).
- Incorporate energy saving measures.
- Consider traffic patterns, furniture placement and ease of movement.

- Once the preliminary design has been set, your contractor will take all necessary measurements and will prepare a complete set of plans and specifications that will:
- Provide a clear picture of what your project will involve.
- Eliminate or bring to light any questions or misunderstandings.
- Give you an opportunity to make desired changes.
- Allow construction to proceed smoothly and without unnecessary delays.
- Become the basis for the construction agreement.
- Be used to obtain building permits and financing.
- Clearly separate each party's responsibilities.

With a complete set of plans and specifications, your contractor can determine a fixed price, draw up the construction agreement including general conditions, possible alternates, and a clear payment schedule. To avoid delays, review your plans and specifications. Any changes should be made before beginning construction, to avoid costly change orders and/or delays during construction.

### **Preparing for Construction**

The homeowner can assist in timeliness and efficiency by following these guidelines:

- Contact your homeowners' insurance agent and follow their recommendations for updating your policy to include your remodeling project.
- Make all your selections promptly, and if you are providing any materials, have them available. Write down all information and check availability of your selections while you are at the supplier's showroom. Your contractor should provide you with a list of required selections, and supplier showrooms.
- For the convenience of the construction crew and your family, have an extra key available to be placed in a lockbox, or another safe location.
- Designate one family member to communicate with the job supervisor and the project manager/estimator. Also, designate a specific area in your home to be used as a message center for you and the remodeler.
- Clear all walls, cabinets and counters near construction area(s).
- Move all furnishings and accessories from the construction area to avoid any damage to possessions.

- Clear traffic area(s) to allow access to the work area for tools and materials.
- Consider access to secondary construction areas. Such as electrical service, ductwork, plumbing, etc.
- Clear exterior areas to allow adequate room for construction activities, as well as access and storage of materials and equipment. This may include your garage and driveway.
- Remove any shrubbery, flowers, etc. that you may want to save.
- Typically, your remodeler will remove or recycle all waste and salvageable materials. Please identify and clearly label any items you wish to retain.
- Designate bathroom facilities so the remodeler can protect flooring for access to bathroom facilities.
- Make arrangements for your pets to be away from the construction area. Take precautions so that pets are contained and away from the exits when materials are being delivered.
- Your contractor will take precautionary measures to confine dust and debris to construction areas; however, it is impossible to totally contain drywall dust since it is very light. If drywall is involved, it will be necessary for you to cover furnishings and close the doors to adjacent areas and vacuum regularly to help control dust from spreading.
- Finally, for safety's sake, talk to your children about construction dangers and keep children clear of the construction area(s), and away from tools and materials.

### **The Construction Phase**

A construction supervisor should be in charge of scheduling material deliveries, assigning work crews, handling change orders, if any, and all other day-to-day activities.

Your designated family member should refer any questions or concerns to him, or leave a note in the message center. You should both check for messages daily. Most remodelers utilize cellular phones and/or voice mail, making it easy to contact them with any questions or concerns.

For those of you who are not totally familiar with construction techniques and sequences, don't be alarmed if any item appears incomplete. Some stages of construction are very visible and happen quickly, while some take a longer amount of time and occur in phases.

Your contractor will schedule your project to be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible. Keep in mind that there may be unavoidable delays such as change orders, weather, unforeseeable conflicts in the contractor's or your schedule, material availability, special order items, etc. Remember that these things are just as trying to the contractor as they may be for you.

Depending on the type of remodeling you have chosen to do, the first few phases of construction will probably include the demolition, footings, rough framing, windows, doors, and the roof deck. This is the quickest, most visible step and probably, next to completion, the most exciting.

The next phase will be to rough-in the necessary mechanical elements (plumbing, heating, electrical, telephone, cable and other wiring).

Once the mechanical work is roughed in and approved by your local building inspector, a somewhat tedious phase will begin, applying sheetrock, taping and sanding (Drywall). Drywall is a time consuming project. After the drywall is hung, the applicator will have to apply several coats of compound to the taping, and the compound must dry between coats until the final coat is done and sanded smoothly.

With drywall completed, the trim and cabinets and other built-ins will be installed, followed by tile, floor and plumbing fixtures. Painting and wall covering should be completed before the electrical fixtures and outlet covers are put into place, the carpeting laid down, and the last doorknobs and hardware items are all put into place.

Your contractor's crew will clean up the debris, and you can get busy decorating, organizing and adding the final touches to your new addition or remodeled area.

All of your planning, preparation, patience and awareness of the construction phases will have paid off, and it's time to plan your open house and show off your completed project to your family, friends and neighbors.