

On Time, On Budget: Tips for Managing Your Home Renovation

A big concern for many homeowners who embark on a renovation is whether the work will be completed on schedule and on budget. Everyone has heard stories about projects that went off course, but in reality these represent a very small percentage of all renovations.

The more care you take in preparing for your renovation, the less likely you are to run into problems, according to experienced renovators. Learn about the process beforehand, understand what's involved and hire the right people for the job. Then any changes to the original timelines and budget will be the result of decisions between you and the renovator during the work—not the result of poor management.

- The key is to hire a professional renovator with the right skills and expertise for your job. Experienced renovators understand what it takes to do the work and how to schedule it, they have a network of reliable subcontractors and suppliers, and they know how to avoid problems that can undermine the project's schedule or budget.
- Book your renovator early. Good renovators may be booked weeks and months ahead. If you are in a hurry to get started, you risk ending up hiring someone with less experience, who may not be able to deliver on time or on budget.
- Many types of projects require a permit. The time involved to get a permit can vary, and must be calculated into the timeframes for your renovation. In some cases, a zoning variance or adjustment may be needed. This may require a public hearing, which can push the start-up of the project back for months. The sooner the application is made, the sooner you can get going.
- Have the design and specifications (materials and products) completely done before starting the work. Don't leave any loose ends by taking the approach that "we'll decide on that once we get to it", or the whole schedule may start to unravel. Exceptions to this are allowances where you and the renovator will allocate a certain amount in the budget for items to be selected by you during the course of the project, such as kitchen cabinets, flooring or light fixtures.
- Make sure the renovator explains the timelines for the project and notes when you have to make any outstanding decisions and selections. Don't wait until just before the deadline, or you risk jeopardizing the work schedule or just as important, regretting a rushed decision later.

- Keep changes to a minimum once the work has begun. Changing your mind on something may affect both timelines and cost, because the renovator may have to redo work, order new materials or wait for subcontractors to fit the revised work into their schedule. Most renovators will be pleased to accommodate your changes if at all possible, but will treat it as an amendment to the contract, and may need to set a new completion date. These types of scheduling changes are not a delay or cost overrun, but represent a change in your project plan.
- Discuss your expectations with the renovator upfront. You may be surprised that a bathroom or kitchen upgrade will take weeks or even months to complete. The renovator can explain the work involved in detail—each step, each subcontractor, each permit and inspection.
- Experienced renovators can also explain the possible “surprises” that can affect the timing and budget once the work gets under way. For instance, wiring and plumbing behind walls, not visible during the renovator’s initial assessment, may need replacing. Previous renovation work may have compromised your home’s structural integrity, requiring additional work. Depending on the project, the renovator may advise you to set aside a contingency fund, rather than to “guesstimate” the costs of dealing with surprises.
- Recognize that there are things that neither you nor your contractor can control, such as poor weather, someone falling ill, a wrong shipment or items not in stock or on backorder. If such an event does occur, your renovator will discuss the possible impact on your project, including solutions and possible adjustments to the schedule and budget with you. Most renovation contracts include provisions to deal with delays due to such uncontrollable circumstances.

*This backgrounder has been prepared by the Canadian Renovators’ Council
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