



HERITAGE HILL BUILDERS

CALGARY · AIRDRIE · CHESTERMERE

The Heritage Hill Calgary Custom Build & Renovation Planning Guide

What actually decides whether a build runs smoothly — written for homeowners in Calgary, Airdrie and Chestermere

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Worth knowing. This guide is general information for homeowners, not construction, legal or financial advice, and it is not a quote. Requirements and costs vary by property and by municipality, and they change over time. Confirm anything that matters to your decision with your municipality and with a written quote for your own site.

1. Why this guide exists

Most of what goes wrong on a residential build or renovation is decided before anyone picks up a tool. It is decided in the scope document, in the permit queue, in the allowances buried on page three of a quote, and in whether the person who sold you the job is the same person who will answer the phone in month four.

This guide is not a sales brochure and it is not a price list. It is the set of things we think a homeowner in Calgary, Airdrie or Chestermere should understand before they sign anything — with us or with anyone else. Where we do not know a number, we say so and tell you where to get it. Where something depends entirely on your site, we say that too.

Worth knowing. A note on numbers: this guide deliberately contains very few of them. Construction costs in Alberta move with material pricing, labour availability, municipal processing times and the specific condition of your property. Any guide that quotes you a confident per-square-foot figure without seeing your site is guessing. Where we give ranges, they are illustrative planning brackets to help you frame a conversation — not estimates, not quotes, and not a commitment.

2. The four project types — and why they plan differently

Heritage Hill Builders works on four kinds of residential project. They look similar from the outside and they are genuinely different to plan.

1. Custom homes. A new build from an empty lot. This is the longest-lead project type and the one most exposed to things outside anyone's control: development permit and building permit timelines, engineering, utility connections, weather, and the order in which trades can physically get on site. The design and approval phase typically takes longer than people expect, and the framing-to-lockup phase typically moves faster than people expect. Plan the front end generously.

2. Renovations. Work inside or onto an existing home. The defining risk here is not scope — it is discovery. Until walls are open, nobody knows for certain what is behind them: undersized electrical, old plumbing, moisture damage, structural work done by a previous owner without a permit, or a load path that is not where the drawings say it is. A good renovation quote tells you what happens — and what it costs — when something unexpected turns up, rather than pretending nothing will.

3. Secondary suites. A self-contained legal dwelling unit, most often in a basement. This is the project type with the most rules attached, because you are creating a second home inside an existing one. It is also the one where 'can this property even support it?' is a real question that needs answering before you spend money on design. More on this below — it has its own section.

4. Garage builds. Detached or attached, and the most self-contained of the four. Still permitted work, still inspected, still subject to setbacks and lot coverage limits, but with far fewer moving parts than the other three. This is usually the shortest project on this list.

3. Budgeting: how to think about it before you have a quote

You cannot budget a construction project the way you budget a purchase, because you are not buying a finished object — you are buying a scope of work plus a set of decisions you have not made yet. Here is a more useful way to frame it.

- Separate the structure from the selections. The structural, mechanical and envelope work is largely fixed by the design and the building code. The finishes — tile, cabinetry, counters, fixtures, flooring — are where the same project can swing dramatically in price. Two homeowners can build the identical floor plan and land a long way apart purely on selections.
- Understand what an allowance is. An allowance is a placeholder amount for something you have not chosen yet. If a quote carries a \$6,000 tile allowance and you select \$14,000 of tile, the quote was not wrong — you changed the input. Low allowances are the single most common reason a quote that looked competitive finishes well above the other one you turned down.
- Hold a real contingency. On a new build, a contingency covers the decisions and small changes that every project generates. On a renovation it also covers discovery. A contingency you never spend is a good outcome; a project with no contingency turns every surprise into a financing conversation.
- Price the things that are not construction. Design and drafting, engineering where required, permit fees, surveys, appliances, window coverings, landscaping and temporary accommodation if you are moving out are all real line items that sit outside a construction quote unless the quote explicitly says otherwise.

Worth knowing. Illustrative planning brackets only — confirm everything against a real quote for your own site. As a very rough way to frame the conversation: a garage build is typically the smallest of the four projects; a single-room renovation is usually measured in tens of thousands; a legal secondary suite is a substantially larger undertaking than most homeowners initially assume because of the mechanical, egress and fire-separation work involved; and a full custom home is in a different category again. We are deliberately not attaching dollar figures to those brackets, because any figure we gave you without seeing your property would be a guess dressed up as information.

4. Secondary suites in Calgary: what to check first

A legal secondary suite is a genuinely good idea for a lot of Calgary homeowners, and it is also the project where the most money gets wasted on designs for suites that were never going to be legal on that property.

Calgary, like Airdrie and Chestermere, has a process for secondary suites that involves both land-use rules (is a suite permitted on this parcel?) and building requirements (can this space be built to code as a dwelling unit?). Both have to work. The City of Calgary also maintains a public registry of secondary suites, and registration matters if you intend to rent the suite out.

Worth knowing. Requirements, processes and fees for secondary suites change, and they differ between Calgary, Airdrie and Chestermere. We have deliberately not printed specific bylaw numbers, fee amounts or processing times in this guide, because a stale number in a PDF is worse than no number at all. Check the current requirements directly with your municipality — for Calgary, calgary.ca is the authoritative source — or ask us to walk through it with you at the consultation.

Regardless of which municipality you are in, these are the physical questions that decide whether a basement can become a legal suite. Any one of them can stop the project, so they are worth checking before you spend anything on design:

- **Ceiling height.** Basements in older homes are frequently too low, and lowering a basement floor is a major structural undertaking, not a finish-level change.
- **Egress windows.** Every bedroom in the suite needs a compliant means of escape. This usually means enlarging window openings and excavating window wells.
- **A separate entrance.** The suite needs its own way in and out that does not require passing through the main dwelling.
- **Fire separation and sound separation.** Between the suite and the main home, including the ceiling assembly, shared walls, and any shared mechanical spaces.
- **Mechanical.** Heating, ventilation and, in many cases, separate or upgraded systems for the suite. This is a large and frequently underestimated part of the budget.
- **Parking and lot rules.** Whether the property can provide what the land-use rules require for a second unit.

We assess all of the above at the free on-site consultation and tell you honestly whether your property can support a legal suite — including when the answer is no — before you commit to anything.

5. Timelines: what is realistic

The most useful thing to understand about a construction schedule is that the on-site work is usually not the long part. Design, approvals and lead times are.

- Design and documentation comes first and is entirely within your control to speed up or slow down. Projects stall here more often than anywhere else, almost always because a decision is outstanding.
- Permits and engineering sit between design and the first day of work. Municipal processing times vary through the year and are outside any builder's control. Ask what your municipality is currently taking — and treat any builder who promises to shortcut it with suspicion.
- Construction is the visible phase and the most predictable one, provided selections are made and materials are ordered ahead of when they are needed.
- Inspections and close-out happen throughout, not just at the end.

In broad terms: a garage or a single-room renovation is measured in weeks. A legal secondary suite typically runs a few months. A full custom home runs considerably longer and is heavily affected by permits and weather. Alberta winters are a real scheduling input for anything involving excavation, concrete or exterior work, not an excuse invented after the fact.

What you should expect from any builder is a realistic schedule in writing with your quote, and a phone call when something changes — before it becomes visible, not after.

6. Questions to ask before you hire a builder

Print this page. Ask every builder you are considering the same questions and write down the answers. The differences between the answers will tell you more than the bottom-line numbers will.

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|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | Is the quote itemised, and can I see the scope written out line by line? |
| ☐ | What allowances are in this quote, and what does each one assume I will choose? |
| ☐ | What is specifically excluded from this quote? |
| ☐ | Which permits does my project need, and who applies for them — you or me? |
| ☐ | What is the municipality currently taking to process those permits? |
| ☐ | Is engineering required for my project, and is it included in this price? |
| ☐ | Who is my single point of contact, and are they the same person from quote through handover? |
| ☐ | Who is actually on site day to day, and are they your people or subcontractors? |
| ☐ | What happens — in writing — when something unexpected is found behind a wall? |
| ☐ | How are change orders priced and approved? Do I sign off before work proceeds? |
| ☐ | What is the payment schedule, and what does each payment correspond to? |

- ☐ For a new home: are you licensed under Alberta's New Home Buyer Protection Act, and which new-home warranty provider covers this build?
- ☐ Do you carry liability insurance and WCB coverage, and can I see current certificates?
- ☐ Can I speak to a recent client, and can I see a project you finished in the last year?
- ☐ What does your schedule look like — when could you realistically start mine?

Worth knowing. Two of those questions deserve special attention. The licensing and warranty question is not optional in Alberta for new home construction — it is a legal requirement, and a builder should be able to answer it instantly. And the 'itemised scope' question is the one that makes the other quotes comparable: two prices only mean something if they describe the same work.

7. How Heritage Hill Builders actually works

For the sake of being concrete, here is our own process. It is the same five steps described on our website, and it is what you should expect if you call us.

- 1. A conversation. You tell us what you are thinking about. We tell you whether it is something we can do properly, and whether we are honestly the right fit. This costs nothing and carries no obligation.
- 2. A free on-site consultation. We come to the property and walk the space with you. For a suite, this is where we check ceiling height, egress, entry, separation and parking. For a renovation, this is where we look at what is actually there rather than what the drawings say.
- 3. A written, itemised quote. Scope spelled out, allowances stated, exclusions stated, and a realistic schedule attached. It is written so you can compare it fairly against anyone else's.
- 4. Permits, engineering and the build. We handle the development and building permits, engineering where it is required, and the scheduling of municipal inspections. We build to the requirements rather than around them.
- 5. Handover. Deficiencies addressed, documentation handed over, and the same person you have been dealing with the whole way through still answering the phone.

One point of contact from quote through handover. You will not be passed between a salesperson, a coordinator and a site lead who each tell you something different — which, if you talk to enough homeowners, you will hear is the most common complaint about the industry generally.

8. Before you call anyone: a short preparation list

You will get a far more useful first conversation — with us or with anyone else — if you can answer these before you pick up the phone.

- ☐ What are you actually trying to achieve? (More space, rental income, resale value, fixing something that does not work — these lead to different designs.)
- ☐ What is your realistic budget range, including a contingency?
- ☐ When do you need it finished, and is that date flexible?
- ☐ Do you have any existing drawings, a real property report, or a survey?
- ☐ For a suite: what is the basement ceiling height, and is there an existing side or rear entrance?
- ☐ For a renovation: is there any known history of water, structural or electrical issues?
- ☐ Will you be living in the home during the work?
- ☐ Who else is involved in the decision, and will they be at the consultation?

9. A last word on choosing

The cheapest quote is only the cheapest quote if it describes the same work as the others. Ask for the scope, read the allowances, and compare like for like. If a builder will not put the scope in writing, that is the answer to the question you were asking.

If you would like us to look at your project, the on-site consultation is free, it carries no obligation, and we will tell you honestly if it is not something we should be doing. That is a real offer, not a closing technique.

Want us to look at your project?

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