

Mt. Lebanon Historic Preservation Board's Guide to Finding and Vetting a Contractor

It can be overwhelming to begin thinking about renovations to your home. How can you find a good contractor? How can you tell if they will help you match your project to your home's style? How can you ensure the character of your home will be preserved? How to do you protect yourself against those who might not be responsible? This worksheet, developed by the Mt. Lebanon Historic Preservation Board, is a good start. It includes a variety of questions you can consider asking of potential contractors. Do not feel a contractor needs to have answers to everything listed.

You also can ask members of the Historic Preservation Board for advice. A group of seven Mt. Lebanon residents volunteer on the board, with the goal of educating the public on renovations that preserve the integrity of our historic character. The board, which has experts in many fields from architecture to real estate, is anxious to help you find answers and solutions. To get in touch, email staff liaison Laura Pace Lilley at lpace@mtlebanon.org and we'll put you in touch with a board member who can help.

General Questions Prior to Hiring a Contractor:

1. How long have you been this business?
2. Will you use subcontractors on this project?
3. Are you licensed?
 - a. Ask for a copy of the license.
4. Do you have worker's comp and liability insurance? (\$500k should be carried)
 - a. Ask for a copy of the insurance policy.
5. Do you have a list of references?
6. Have you ever had disciplinary action filed against you?
7. Will you obtain permits and set up the inspections required for this job?
8. Will I have a dedicated team working on my job?
9. How will you communicate with me? (i.e. phone, text message, or email)
10. How often will communicate with me about my project?
11. How many concurrent projects are you working on?
12. What is your typical workday schedule?
 - a. What are your typical start and end times each day?
 - b. Will noise be an issue?
 - c. Can I be home?
13. How will you clean up at the end of each day?
14. Where will your tools and materials be stored?
15. What steps will you take to protect my property?
16. How will additional charges be handled?
17. Are there warranties for service and/or materials?
 - a. Ask for a copy of these warranties.
18. How will disagreements be resolved?

Finding a Contractor Specializing in Historic Renovation:

1. Contact local American Institute of Architects (AIA) www.aiapgh.org to find a list of preservation architects that have worked on homes (not commercial buildings) in your local area.

2. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission – Consultant’s List -
<http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation/About/Pages/Consultants-List.aspx>

Historic Preservation Specific:

1. Have you ever worked on an historic house or building?
2. Are you certified and licensed by the state and the Environmental Protection Agency to work around lead paint?
3. Can you provide information on your firm as it relates to historic preservation? (i.e. experience, qualifications, and personnel)
4. Can you provide your past five years of experience on similar historic renovation projects with a similar scope and budget?
 - a. Can you provide references for some of these projects?
 - b. Can you provide before and after photos?

Specific Items Contractor Should Provide:

1. Costs and Payment Structure:
 - a. Is a retainer used for the client to ensure the work is done per the agreed contract?
 - b. Will you provide itemized costs, including but not limited to materials, labor, set-up, and mobilization?
 - c. Will you provide breakout pricing for materials and labor? (i.e. what is the cost per square foot of ceramic floor tile?)
 - d. Can the resident purchase the materials and contractor install them? (Some contractors will allow this; others will not. This can be a cost savings measure for the client.)
 - e. What amount is required upfront? (Should not exceed 50 percent. Client should only be paying for materials upfront.)
2. Project schedule:
 - a. Will you provide a project schedule with critical milestones?
 - b. Assuming a larger project, will you provide a breakout for critical path items? (i.e. expected days for sheathing on a roof or wall)? Theoretically, this keeps the contractor accountable for their work and timeline.
 - c. Will you accept payment retainers to ensure completion of work?
 - d. Will you work with me to construct an agreed upon draw schedule detailing what work will be done before payment is made?
3. Ask for details on the following items:
 - a. What are your standards for demolition?
 - b. How will parts of the home be sealed/isolated from hazardous materials during construction?
 - c. How will you dispose of hazardous materials?
 - d. How does the contractor protect the home during construction while holes remain in exterior walls and/or roof?