

The Do's and Don'ts of Hiring Contractors

You have made the decision to make improvements on your property. There are several steps that you should take in order to get the work you are paying for done the way you want.

Do...

- ... Ask for written estimates from at least three different contractors.
- ... Ask for three references from each contractor who submits a bid and check them! If possible, visit previous worksites; view their workmanship, ask whether the job was completed in a timely manner and within budget. In the event you cannot make the visit, make contact by phone.
- ... Check that the contractor's license is valid and if the company has had any prior adverse actions. You can also check the Better Business Bureau to see if any complaints have been filed.
- ... Insist on a written contract that states the total cost, including start and finish dates. Make sure you and the contractor both sign the document. We use our own contracts drafted to better protect our clients.
- ... Set up your own financing with a trusted lending institution such as your bank or credit union.
- ... Make sure all the proper releases are obtained and you get copies of all permits for your records.
- ... Verify that all people who will be working on your project, including subcontractors, have insurance with a minimum of one million dollars in liability coverage.

Don't ...

- ... Do business with anyone that knocks on your door and wants to do an immediate repair job just because they happen to be in the neighborhood.
- ... Pay anyone more than 10% down on a contracted job. You can arrange for another payment midway through the job, and then the balance upon completion. Always retain 10% until all the work is complete and approved by the City building inspectors.
- ... Allow a contractor to say a job is done until you can verify there are no contractor liens against your property for unpaid materials. Ask for and receive documentation showing all liens have been removed. Also, have the contractor sign a lien waiver before the final payment is delivered.
- ... Accept a bid just because it is a lower dollar amount. A bid must respectfully cover the quality of work, materials and guarantee a timely finish date.
- ... Allow anyone to push you into a decision. It is your job, and your money. Take the time you need to make an informed decision.
- ... Ever feel you cannot state your opinion or ask questions. It is your satisfaction that has to be met.

Establishing solid ground rules with any contractor will clearly define expectations and foster an effective line of communication. Which in the long run will get quality work done and provide a basis for a continued business relationship in the future.