

Most people don't ever have to build a new home during the course of their lifetimes, and are thus unprepared when faced suddenly with the task of needing to make rebuilding decisions. We have prepared this short guide to assist you in the decision-making process associated with selecting a builder who can work with you to ensure you get the durable, quality home you seek. While the inclination to want to build back as soon as possible is natural and understandable, we stress the importance of patience at a time like this. Building a home is a major financial investment, usually the biggest of most people's lives. And of course the home you construct will likely be with you for a long time. If you have to wait 6 months or longer to research, learn, and practice due-diligence, it is worth the time spent. We have heard this time and again from residents we have worked with who have rebuilt after losing their home after a disaster.

What Does a Contractor Do?

A general contractor is responsible for the day-to-day management of a building project, including providing the material, labor, equipment and services necessary, and the communication of information and progress to all involved parties for the construction of the project. The general contractor hires specialized subcontractors to perform all or portions of the construction work.

Responsibilities can include applying for building permits, securing the property, providing temporary utilities on site, managing personnel, providing site surveying and engineering, disposing or recycling of construction waste, monitoring schedules and cash flows, and maintaining records.

Where Do I Start?

If you've decided to incorporate sustainable practices (also referred to as 'green' practices) into the construction of your home, it's important to hire a contractor with some experience or, at a minimum, a willingness to learn. Below are our recommendations:

- 1.) Educate yourself on the basics of green construction so you can communicate confidently with your contractor. Perform internet research, ask questions, and, if available, attend seminars.
- 2.) Research green homes similar to what you are looking to construct. Learn about what features went into the construction of that home.
- 3.) Check to see if there are any green home tours in your area, or if there are homeowners who are willing to open their homes and answer questions. You can also check with GreenTown for a reference to someone that has built a sustainable home that might be willing to be a buddy.
- 4.) Ask questions of anyone with expertise and experience.

When you have a sense of what you are looking for, you can begin seeking an experienced builder.

- 1.) Prepare a list of features and goals to discuss with your contractor.
- 2.) If you found a green home in your area that you like, find out who the contractor was and contact them for an interview. (See reverse for sample interview questions.) Ask to see other examples of completed homes in person, or at a minimum, a portfolio of projects. Are they of similar size and scope as what you are looking for? Are any of them touted as being 'green' or energy efficient?
- 3.) Check references with past clients. Ask questions like: How is the quality of the work? What was the process like? Was the builder willing to learn new techniques? Was the project on budget and on time? Why or why not? How did the contractor manage the inevitable hiccups that occur during construction?
- 4.) Check with local and state consumer protection agencies to verify that the contractor is licensed in the state you live in. (<http://www.contractors-license.org/>)
- 5.) Consider looking for a builder with a green building certification such as:
 - U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) "Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design" (LEED) program. Look for a green builder with the certification "LEED AP Building Design and Construction" (LEED AP BD+C).
 - National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)
 - National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI) for remodeling projects.
 - Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC)
 - Green Contractors Certification
 - Green Advantage (GA)
 - Energy Star

Sample Interview Questions

Now that you are ready to find a contractor, what questions should you ask? We recommend speaking to at least 3 different contractors at a minimum. Below are some suggested questions to get a better sense of their experience and how willing they are to learn.

- 1.) What experience do you have building green or energy efficient homes?
- 2.) Do you take any or teach any classes on green building?
- 3.) What's more important – cost or quality? How do you achieve balance between the two?
- 4.) How long do you expect a new home to last?
- 5.) What wall system do you normally use? Are you willing to try something different?

Where to Find Green Contractors

Below are a few resources to help you start your search:

- 1.) Build It Green (www.builditgreen.org)
- 2.) United States Green Building Council (www.usgbc.org)
- 3.) Green Home Guide's Service Directory (<http://greenhomeguide.com/findapro>)
- 4.) Mean Green List (<http://meangreenlist.com/>)

One Final Thing To Remember

Not all green builders identify themselves as green builders. Here are some signs that they might be:

- 1.) How much do they value insulation?
- 2.) Are they familiar with a variety of wall systems (e.g., 2x4, 2x6 wood, concrete, SIPS panels)?
- 3.) What heating and cooling systems are they familiar with?
- 4.) What do they have to say about the building envelope (air-tightness)?
- 5.) What do they know about how to site a home on a property (passive solar)?
- 6.) What are their thoughts on indoor air quality? (This is essential in tight, energy efficient homes.)

For more information, please visit www.associationforsustainability.org/



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