



CHOOSING A QUALIFIED CONTRACTOR

Selecting and working with a contract can be an intimidating process for many. The following guide is intended to help homeowners with researching and choosing a qualified contractor to meet your needs.

- Make sure that you have a clear understanding of the work you want accomplished, what materials you want used, the level of involvement and guidance you want from your contractor, whether additional professional assistance may be required (i.e. architectural or engineering services), and what your budget is. Communicating clear, realistic expectations will help ensure all parties are on the same page.
- Learn what permits will be required, if any. Other agencies that may require permits include:
 - o Alderwood Water & Wastewater District (Water and/or Sewer)
 - o Labor & Industries (Everett – Electrical)
 - o Puget Sound Energy (Gas)
 - o Snohomish PUD No. 1 (Electrical Connection)
 - o State and/or Federal Agencies, typically for projects involving a critical area
- Develop a list of potential contractors. Look online or ask trusted sources who they have used. Find out if their experiences were good or bad, and why. Ask if they would use the contractor again.
- Ask contractors for references. Contractors should be able to provide a list of customers or locations of completed jobs. Call references and ask whether they were satisfied with the work, if the contractor kept to the agreed-upon schedule, and whether they would use the same contractor again.
- Ask which trade associations the contractor belongs to. Membership in a professional organization is one sign the contractor recognizes the responsibility of the work.
- Ensure the contractor has a valid Washington State Business license (<https://secure.lni.wa.gov/verify/>). A Brier Business License is required prior to starting work.
- When hiring a contractor, obtain at least three competitive bids. Make sure to provide each contractor with the same information and list of requested services. If the City has provided you with information about requirements or about your proposal, provide these to the contractor to assist with compiling an accurate bid estimate.
- Obtain and evaluate all bids carefully. Ask for a free written estimate of the work you want done. Be sure everyone is bidding on the same scope of work using the materials you want.
- Remember, you get what you pay for. A higher bid may be worth the price for better workmanship and reliability.
- Make sure you fully understand the different bids you may receive. Be careful about hiring a contractor on an hourly time-and-materials (or cost-plus) basis. Although the price may seem high at first, a fixed-price bid may give you the best protection and price. Completely review and understand the contract prior to authorizing work.
- Also beware of scams and offers that sound "too good to be true." Warning signs of a scam include:
 - o Provides a credential or reference that can't be verified.
 - o Offers a special price only if you sign today, or use other high-pressure sales techniques.
 - o Only accepts cash, require large deposits or the entire costs up front, or asks you to make the payment in their name.
 - o Does not provide a written contract or complete bid.
 - o Asks you to get the building permit. In most instances, if you have hired a contractor, the contractor is required to take out the permits. Permits are your protection and help ensure that work will meet local construction and building codes.
 - o Offers exceptionally long warranties.
 - o Wants to do most or all the work on weekends and after hours.

Additional information about hiring a contractor can be found at <http://lni.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Contractors/HireCon/>.