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Handyman Articles - Planning Your Remodeling Project

By **Gayle Sanders**, [GRS Home Design](#)

Have you dreamed about remodeling your home for years? Do you want to get started, but are uncertain how to start the process? Step one, planning your project, is critical. This is where you will have to prioritize your dreams and make tough decisions as few of us have an unlimited budget. You can find experienced architects or home designers who can help you match your goals to your budget.

Building Your Remodeling Team

For any home, there are an infinite number of possible improvements that can be made. Start out imagining what would transform your house into the home of your dreams. Which ones are right for you and make sense for your lifestyle, budget and priorities? Which improvements are structurally feasible? Which improvements can you afford? The possibilities can seem overwhelming. When you are ready to take the first step, start building your remodeling project team with an architect or home designer to help you get the project requirements right from the beginning and ensure that each dollar spent brings real benefit to you and your family.



Creating Your Wish List

What improvements are right for you? If you never use the front door and hardly ever entertain, why divert money from the master bedroom and bath that you would enjoy daily to create an impressive, grand entrance? If reallocating floor space within the existing footprint can create traffic flow that works for you, why devote those precious dollars to building an expanded exterior shell, more costly than interior renovations? If there is a floor plan that meets your needs without moving existing utilities, why incur the expense of moving them? At this point, you have narrowed your dreams to those improvements which will bring real value to you and your family.

Searching the Attic

Any existing construction documentation about your home will be useful as the remodeling project progresses. Original blueprints and papers from prior improvements are often passed on to the new owner when a home is sold. Check your files and look in the attic. The building inspector or tax assessor may be able to provide you with a site plan and blueprints or other construction documents in their files.

Obeying the Law

While you are at the building inspector's office, inquire about building permit requirements and applicable local, state and federal regulations. These include the building code, zoning restrictions, septic requirements and wetland restrictions. This knowledge will help you avoid non-compliant improvements. If you are intent on a noncompliant improvement, it may be possible to apply for a waiver, adjustment or variances. Local officials can provide information on the application process.

Evaluating Structural Integrity



It can be helpful to add a builder or structural engineer to your remodeling team during the planning process to evaluate the existing structure and identify conditions that may impact your renovation plans. For example, the existing foundation must be as robust as any new foundation required for an expanded footprint. The existing roof must be able to support any new roof portions that bear on it. If a bearing wall is removed, structural components such as beams and columns must be included in the design to carry the load. Understanding the limitations imposed by the

existing structure during planning will help avoid designs that are impossible or too costly to implement.

Understanding Your Budget

Knowing how much you can afford in the long and short term is another important aspect of the planning process. How much can you afford to invest in your remodeling project? In addition to the cost of construction, consider the likely increase in appraised value of your home which may result in higher real estate taxes and insurance premiums. Your utility bills may increase as well as the cost of routine maintenance.

Increasing Resale Value

Although your primary motivation for remodeling is making your home better for you, it makes sense to consider the impact on your home's value. To get the most value, the look of your remodeled home must fit in with other homes in the neighborhood. The level of luxury should also be in line with neighboring homes. How do the improvements you are planning measure up to what home buyers want? Our article, [Top Remodeling Projects in 2007](#), can help you understand which remodeling projects have the most value when you sell your home.

Getting Started

When you are ready to get started, answering the following questions will help you evaluate and prioritize the improvements you are considering. With the help of your architect or home design, the information and knowledge gained from this exercise will help you match your goals to your budget.

1. Will this improvement really make a difference in your daily life?
2. How frequently will you enjoy the benefits?
3. Are there any unusual structural or construction issues?
4. What is the estimated construction cost?
5. What are the estimated long term costs?
6. What is the impact on resale?

Next Steps

If you found this article helpful, we think you would find the remainder of our series, [Creating Your Dream Home](#), equally helpful:

1. [Planning Your Remodeling Project \(This Article\)](#)
2. [Designing Your Remodeling Project \(Coming Soon\)](#)
3. [Finding a Contractor \(Coming Soon\)](#)
4. [Working with Your Builder / Remodeler / Contractor](#)

Gayle Sanders, owner of GRS Home Design in Stratham NH, contributed this article for publication. Gayle is a member of the [Home Builders and Remodelers Association of NH](#) and [4 Walls 1 Roof](#), a network of women owned businesses helping home owners Create - Maintain - Enhance their homes. She works with home owners and builders throughout southern NH. Copyright © 2008 4 Walls 1 Roof LLC.