



Construction Services Corner

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For those of you who do not already know, our department is involved with reviewing plans, permitting construction projects, inspecting construction work for structural safety, energy conservation, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical safety, and inspecting practices utilized for minimizing erosion and storm water runoff. In addition to the execution of these services, we are hoping to build the knowledgebase of the community through the development of a series of educational articles to expand your awareness and safeguard your health, safety, and property.

Exterior Improvements

When making improvements to the exterior of your home, there are many different products to choose from. You might choose siding with its many different styles, colors and looks from a wide variety of different materials. Or, you might choose to paint the materials you already have installed on your home. Obviously, your decision will depend on the condition of your home's exterior, the desired look for the home and your budget.

The least expensive option is to paint your home. You will have many choices with respect to colors and textures. Almost all surfaces can be painted, providing you use the correct paint and the proper application. The condition of the exterior will be a determining factor when deciding whether to paint or re-side. There is plenty of prep work involved in any paint job, including sanding, repairs, priming and more. It should be done correctly so you get the clean look as well as a job that will last for many years. Iowa weather can be quite harsh on your exterior. It is vital that the painting or siding job is completed with attention to detail and applied according to manufacturer specifications. A professional painting contractor should be able to evaluate your home's exterior and recommend the proper fix.

If you have existing siding on your home that has weathered or has been saturated with water, or you want a new look for your home, then new siding might be in your near future. There are several materials you can use for siding. Some of these are stone or cultured stone, brick or brick veneer, wood clap, shingle style, fiber cement, stucco, engineered wood clap, seamless steel, aluminum or vinyl. Each of these materials has different styles, strengths and pricing. Let's take a closer look at some specifics of the various products mentioned above:

Stone and Cultured Stone – Stone and cultured stone are very popular choices used today. They are most often used on the front of a structure to give it added curb appeal or highlight a chimney or other feature. Natural stone is more expensive of the two and will likely need a footing ledge below to support the weight. Cultured stone is far cheaper than natural stone and in most installations does not require a footing for support. Many contractors are also taking the cultured stone and applying it to interior wall surfaces because of its friendly installation procedures. As with any exterior siding product the installation should follow the manufacturer's specifications for installation. These specs will detail

flashing requirements and will give reference to the appropriate weather resistant barrier needed behind the product. The installation of this product is more time consuming than traditional siding, which is the reason these products are more expensive. Once installed, the products are very durable and can offer an elegant, rustic or sophisticated look.

Brick and Brick Veneer - Brick has many advantages. It's durable, fireproof, doesn't rot or fade or require painting. Brick is made from fired clay and comes in a range of attractive, earthy tones. Brick or brick veneer can last your lifetime and beyond and repair or maintenance may not be required for many years. Most repairs will consist of patching or re-mortaring the joints. Brick isn't the cheapest option, but brick veneers can be much cheaper. Veneers are also durable and fireproof, although they won't last as long as real brick. Manufacturer specs will often recommend installing a water repellent coating over the brick. Brick installation requires special tools and a special skill level that should be handled by a professional.

Wood Clapboard Siding - Wood siding offers many advantages from its many different styles and looks, to its ease of installation. Wood siding species to choose from are cedar, redwood, fir, pine, spruce, larch or cypress. Cedar and redwood tend to be a little pricier as they offer natural qualities that prevent rot and resist many wood hungry insects. Wood siding can be installed with many different looks from differing lap sizes, or even shiplap or tongue and groove. With wood being an organic material, a maintenance review should be completed each year. Caulked joints at corner boards and around windows, doors, and other penetrations should be resealed on an annual basis if signs of detachment are visible. Wood siding will also need re-painting within 5-7 years. With proper maintenance, wood siding can last longer than vinyl siding or other manufactured products.

Cedar (or shake) Shingle Siding - Shingle siding is an alternate to wood clap siding and will give a different look. Contractors often use this type of siding on gable ends or may complete one whole exterior wall to break up a pattern of lap siding. Shingles can be painted or stained. Staining usually is a better finish as the finish absorbs into the material instead of creating an exterior shell like paint. Paint can peel, while stain will not. Staining should be redone every 4 or 5 years to maintain a good wood seal. Maintenance on this type of siding is like wood clap siding, although shingles can crack or curl more easily than clapboard siding. When this happens, the only repair is to replace the damaged shingles. Shingle siding is beautiful, organic, and will give the structure a rustic look.

Fiber Cement Siding - Fiber cement siding is manufactured to look like many other siding materials, such as wood, stucco, or masonry. It is very durable, termite-proof, won't rot, weathers well, is fire resistant and takes paint very well. Fiber cement usually comes in shorter pieces than wood siding, which will give you more wall splices. It is also much heavier to install because of its cement base in the siding. Like that of wood siding, a maintenance review should be done on an annual basis. Caulking and surfaces should be looked over and appropriate repairs should be made as needed. Most fiber cement siding products will offer a 50 year warranty with the product. The warranty is only valid if the manufacturer installation procedures and maintenance procedures are followed with detail. These specifications will give a detailed explanation of proper flashing methods and appropriate distances to hold the cement product up from grade, concrete, or roof surfaces. Fiber cement is a very popular choice today because of its durability and price.

Stucco Siding - Stucco siding is one of the oldest forms of siding in existence. Stucco is a form of cement created by combining water with sand and lime. It can be troweled on or sprayed on with finishes ranging from smooth, swirled, or a raked design. Sand and pebbles can be added in for a coarser finish.

Stucco can be mixed in different colors or can be painted. Synthetic stucco has the same look as real stucco, but is lighter weight and less durable. Stucco is not used very often in industry today because it has the ability to absorb water and can crack easily with annual shifting of soils. Once water is absorbed, deterioration of the building envelope can occur. Some insurance companies will not even insure a house with stucco installed on the exterior surface.

Engineered Wood Siding - Engineered wood, also known as composite wood, is made from wood products mixed with other materials, bonded with resin or a similar product and then compressed. It can be fire-resistant, insect resistant (depending on the resin), stronger than real wood and lighter weight than some natural wood siding. Like fiber cement siding, engineered wood is produced in many different styles and textures to resemble real wood. It can also be cheaper, can offer more protection from weather and other elements and has lower maintenance than real wood. Some engineered wood, like fiber cement, also comes with a 50 year warranty and requires installation and maintenance according to manufacturer specifications. Engineered wood is a very popular choice used today.

Seamless Steel and Aluminum Siding - Steel and aluminum siding are not used very frequently today. Although extremely durable, fire-resistant, insect resistant, rot resistant, and virtually maintenance free, steel and aluminum siding is custom made and can be very expensive. Although durable, aluminum and steel siding can dent rather easily and will need repainting occasionally. It is recommended that insulation is installed between the siding and the exterior as steel and aluminum offer no additional r-value like wood, fiber cement and engineered products.

Vinyl Siding - Vinyl siding is a very popular choice today because it is economical and durable. Vinyl comes in a wide array of colors and most vinyl siding has the color baked in at production. This makes it colored throughout, so scratching is not an issue. Vinyl's popularity has grown because of its low maintenance, resistance to rot and termites will not eat it. Vinyl can also withstand excessive temperature differences, which makes it a great product for Iowa weather. Some of the disadvantages of vinyl include fading, cracking, and expansion and contraction with temperature changes. Also water can get behind the siding, so an appropriately installed weather resistant barrier is a must. Vinyl siding should also be washed at least once a year and the product has a relatively low r-value compared to that of other siding materials. It is very important again to follow manufacturer specifications for installation with this product.

As you can see, each siding material has different qualities and price ranges. Your siding contractor will be able to help you decide which siding will fit your budget and give you the look that will delight you and your visitors for decades to come.

Choosing a Home Siding Contractor

Once you have established that you need to replace the siding on your home, it's time to find a trustworthy contractor to complete the task.

It's recommended that you compile estimates from at least three contractors. This will give you a sense of where industry is at with pricing and will give you a stable idea of what to expect. All estimates should contain a specification sheet detailing the manufacturer, installation procedures, and any other details that may set this contractor apart from others. It is very important to also have the contractor spell out how charges will be set for problem areas identified after the old siding is removed. It's amazing how fast these types of repairs will add up. It's a good idea to know how this will be addressed

up front. Also make sure to ask if this is an estimate or a set price. An estimate is just that, it does not represent final charges. It's also important to have in writing how long an estimate is good for since materials and labor rates change as the economy fluctuates. When choosing a contractor, it's a good idea to choose a contractor who comes recommended from a friend, family member or neighbor. These people can give you a strong idea of how the contractor performs. When you schedule your meeting with the contractor for the first time, here are some questions to ask:

1. How long have you been in the siding business?
2. Is your business registered with the state of Iowa?
3. Are you insured and bonded in case of accidents and can you provide proof?
4. Is siding your main business?
5. What types of siding/material choices can you offer me?
6. How soon can you begin the work?
7. How soon can you complete the work?
8. How long will the project take?
9. Will you be on site daily?
10. How many employees do you have?
11. How clean do you typically leave your jobsite on a daily basis?
12. What is your weather policy?
13. What hours do you work?
14. Do you have references?
15. Have you had problems with the removal of the type of siding that is on our house? If so, what were those problems?
16. How will trash be disposed of?
17. What discounts can you offer me? (Senior, winter, etc.)
18. With regards to your past 5 jobs, how close has your estimate been to the final price?
19. Where do you buy your materials?
20. What type of warranty do you offer?
21. What is the payment schedule?

These simple questions will help you to choose the best siding contractor for your project and help you feel confident that you have identified the contractor who is going to give you the best product, installation and price. Be sure you choose a contractor not only for the affordability factor, but also for their ability to provide you with the best finished product possible. A good siding job is worth paying for because it will last longer and look better over time. In some instances, you really do get what you pay for, so it's important to do your homework before you sign on the dotted line.