

[A House Plan Overview + Handling Lot and Zoning Considerations](#)

The documents that tell your builder or subcontractors how you want the house built are called plans and specifications. These plans should include the floor plans, elevations of the front, side, and rear of the building, the foundation plans, footings and framing specifications, the roof plan, the kitchen layout, the electrical layout, and any construction details.

The specifications include the material quality description and detailed finish work. By providing all of this material to your builder or contractor, you will be more likely to get an accurate estimate on your new home construction. Worksheets in Step 2 (Before You Build) will help you specify your specifications.

Before you create plans and specifications, have the design of your house done or choose a pre-designed plan. The following steps are provided to help you narrow down the many choices and decisions. This may help you better choose to suit your individual needs and tastes.

Stock Plans: The easiest method to obtain home plans is by choosing stock plans. These are custom home plans they could have been specifically designed for a client or for the general public. Stock plans have been edited and refined over time, so they are lower cost and better tested. Using these plans can save thousands and offer the dream home opportunity to more individuals. Start by searching the 'Detailed Plan Search' on 'The House Designers' website. Specify the choices of your program to see a list of plans that are closest to your requirements.

The plans you find may not match your requirements perfectly, but you will now be able to change and edit them to suit your taste and local codes. Many providers of these stock plans also offer customization and modifications services. If they do not, they will most likely be able to point you in the direction of a company that can. Further information on making changes will be provided in a future article. Keep any eye on our blog for it.

Many designers also offer study plans or review sets. These are mini scaled plans for studying and preliminary budgeting. Study plans are not intended for construction and detailed budgeting, but could be helpful in making your decision about a particular plan. Thousands of stock plans in every size and style, can be found on our website and in home plan catalogues sold in bookstores.

Residential Architects and Designers: Local architects and residential design specialists have knowledge of local styles, ordinances and building requirements. Be sure to check the designer or architect's certification. If you choose an architect, they should carry AIA credentials (American Institute of Architects). A residential designer should be certified or belong to a professional organization such as AIBD. Discuss your budget and the lot you purchased upfront with the designer or architect so they thoroughly understand it. Expect costs for services to be between 2% -15% of the cost of the home, depending on the services provided.

Computer Plan Software: Computer software programs provide amateur designers the opportunity to design homes. These programs can be powerful and easy to use, but not all are capable of warning you of design or structural violations.

Using one of these programs to arrange your plans in different ways to help you make decisions would be a good idea. You have the comfort of many edits and arrangements at your convenience, but make sure you have both the design reviewed and construction drawings prepared by a professional before proceeding.

Lot, Zoning, and Code Considerations

Other considerations you have about the lot are what will work best for that lot. When choosing your house design, think about the width of the lot and what designs will work with that width and still allow yard space. Consider a home with a walkout basement or garage below on lots that are significantly sloped. Basements, crawl spaces, and multi-level homes are good choices for a slight slope.

Before beginning construction you or your builder will have to confirm the plans meet your local code requirements. You may have to consider zoning limits that may be set by your local municipality. These could include setbacks, floor to area ratio, height restrictions or even square foot limitations for your lot. Most localities use one of the three main building codes as a base for their local codes, although certain states, such as Florida, have adopted their own independent code. Most municipalities make changes to the codes.

It is best to talk with your local inspector before you begin to build to be sure you are within regulations and requirements.

The three main codes include:

- * The Uniform Building Code: <http://www.ubc.org>
- * The National Building Code (BOCA): <http://www.bocai.org>
- * The Standard Building Code (SBCCI)

Most locations that use the BOCA or SBCCI codes have now also adopted the International Residential Code [IRC], or a local version of it.
<http://www.icbo.org>

About the Author

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