

GUIDE 05 OF 6 | WE BUILD NH

THE 10/100/1000 PRINCIPLE

Questions to Ask Before Breaking Ground

Ten minutes of honest reflection saves a hundred hours of revision.

I have a philosophy I have held for forty years: ten minutes of the right thinking saves a hundred hours of planning, and a hundred hours of careful planning saves a thousand hours of rework.

This principle applies directly to value engineering. The time to make the hard budget decisions is before you break ground -- when changing a material costs nothing but a phone call. A value-engineering conversation mid-build costs time, money, schedule, and sometimes your relationship with the contractor. Answer these questions honestly before you start. Your future self will thank you.

ABOUT YOUR VISION

- * Can you describe your project in three sentences without using the word 'nice'? Vague vision leads to vague contracts and expensive revisions.

- * Are you building for how you live now or how you want to live in ten years? These produce very different homes.

- * If you had to cut 20% from the budget, what goes first? Know your priorities before the contractor proposes cuts -- because they will.

- * Have you experienced a New Hampshire winter in a home like this one? Heating costs, access, and maintenance are genuinely different here.

- * Is this a primary residence, second home, or short-term rental? This changes almost every design and material decision.

ABOUT YOUR BUDGET AND VALUE ENGINEERING

- * Do you have a hard budget ceiling or a soft one? Contractors can work within real constraints. They cannot work within imaginary ones.

- * Have you identified which materials and systems are non-negotiable? Write them down. These are your no-value-engineering list. Common items: roofing, windows, insulation, waterproofing, and structural systems.

- * Do you understand the long-term cost of saving short-term? A \$5,000 savings on windows today can mean \$50,000 in energy costs and early replacement over 20 years in NH's climate.

- * Have you accounted for soft costs? Design, engineering, surveys, permits, and temporary housing add 15-25%.

- * Do you have a 15% contingency set aside and committed to not touching? If not, set your hard budget 15% lower than your available funds.

- * Have you spoken with a lender? Construction loan draw schedules affect when you can approve and pay for materials.

ABOUT MATERIALS AND WARRANTIES

* Have you reviewed manufacturer warranties for your major specified materials before signing the construction contract? You should know what is covered before the material is ordered.

* Do you understand the difference between a limited warranty, a full warranty, and a prorated warranty? Ask your contractor to explain each material's warranty in plain language.

* Who is responsible for registering each warranty? This must be assigned in the contract. An unregistered warranty is a void warranty.

* What is the contractor's workmanship warranty? Minimum one year on labor. Get the scope and term in writing.

* If a specified material becomes unavailable, what is the substitution approval process? Your approval in writing, with a full specification comparison, before any substitution is made.

ABOUT YOUR SITE

* Do you have a current survey? Do not assume lot lines are where you think they are.

* Have you checked for wetlands, shoreland buffers, or conservation easements?

* What is your septic situation? No passing perc test means no building permit.

* Is there ledge? GPR scan before excavation. Budget for it.

* What is the driveway situation in winter? A 15% grade that is beautiful in July may be inaccessible from November to April.

ABOUT YOUR READINESS

* Are all material selections made before you sign the construction contract? Decisions made during construction cost more, delay the schedule, and create substitution pressure.

* Is there a single decision-maker? Know this before the contractor asks.

* Are you prepared for the project to run longer than scheduled? Weather, inspections, and supply chains are real.

* Have you thought about resale? A home built entirely to your specific taste carries risk if you ever need to sell.

BEFORE BREAKING GROUND -- SELF-ASSESSMENT

Project vision written in specifics -- not adjectives

No-value-engineering list established for critical systems and materials

Long-term cost of material downgrades evaluated

Hard budget ceiling set and shared honestly

Soft costs included in total budget

15% contingency reserved and locked

All major material warranties reviewed before contract signing

Warranty registration responsibility assigned in contract

Substitution approval process written into contract

- Workmanship warranty scope and term in writing
- All material selections completed before signing
- Current survey in hand
- Wetlands, shoreland, conservation restrictions reviewed
- Perc test passed
- GPR scan completed if ledge likely
- Single decision-maker identified