

OTTAWA CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Basement Renovations

Basement finishing, waterproofing, and renovation questions

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

ottawaconstructionnetwork.com/construction-brain

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Who should I hire first for a basement finishing project?

For a basement finishing project in Ottawa, hire a general contractor first who can coordinate all trades and pull the necessary City of Ottawa permits.

A licensed general contractor will handle the permit application process through ottawa.ca/building, which typically takes 15-25 business days for basement renovations and costs \$200-500+ depending on scope. They'll also coordinate the required inspections throughout the project.

Why Start with a General Contractor

Your general contractor will create a comprehensive plan that addresses Ottawa's specific requirements for basement finishing, including proper egress windows, ceiling heights (minimum 6'6" under beams in Ottawa), and moisture control. They'll determine which trades are needed and in what order - typically starting with any structural work, then rough electrical and plumbing, followed by insulation, drywall, and finishing trades.

The contractor will also ensure all electrical work meets ESA (Electrical Safety Authority) requirements. Any electrical modifications require an ESA permit, and only Licensed Electrical Contractors can pull these permits. You can verify their ESA license at esasafe.com/contractor-locator.

What to Verify Before Hiring

Check that your general contractor has:

- Valid WSIB clearance certificate (wsib.ca/clearances)
- Proper liability insurance (\$2M minimum recommended)
- Good standing with the Better Business Bureau
- Local Ottawa references from similar basement projects

Get detailed written quotes from at least three contractors. The quote should specify which permits they'll obtain, inspection schedules, and material allowances. In Ottawa's current market, basement finishing typically runs \$40-80 per square foot depending on finish level.

Red Flags to Avoid

Don't hire contractors who want full payment upfront, can't provide proof of insurance, or suggest skipping permits to "save money." Under Ontario's Construction Lien Act, you should hold back 10% of payments for 60 days after substantial completion to protect against liens.

Getting Started

Contact City of Ottawa Building Code Services at 613-580-2424 if you have questions about what permits your specific basement project requires. They can clarify requirements for secondary dwelling units if you're planning a separate apartment, which has additional zoning considerations in Ottawa.

For verified contractors in the Ottawa area, check our directory to find properly licensed professionals who understand local requirements and can guide your basement finishing project from permits to completion.

Q2

Do basement bedrooms need egress windows in Ottawa?

Yes, basement bedrooms in Ottawa absolutely require egress windows to meet Ontario Building Code requirements and obtain proper permits from the City of Ottawa.

Under the Ontario Building Code (OBC), any room used for sleeping must have a window or door that opens directly to the outside and meets specific size requirements for emergency escape. This applies to all basement bedrooms in Ottawa, whether you're finishing an existing basement or creating a secondary dwelling unit.

Ottawa's Egress Window Requirements

The City of Ottawa Building Code Services (613-580-2424) enforces these specific egress requirements for basement bedrooms:

Window Size Requirements:

- Minimum opening width: 15 inches (380mm)
- Minimum opening height: 24 inches (610mm)
- Minimum net clear opening: 3.3 square feet (0.35 square meters)
- Maximum sill height: 60 inches (1.5m) above floor

Window Well Requirements:

- Minimum width: 36 inches extending at least 8 inches beyond window opening on each side
- Minimum projection: 24 inches from foundation wall
- Proper drainage system required
- Steps or ladder required if well depth exceeds 24 inches

Ottawa Permit Process for Basement Bedrooms

When applying for a basement renovation permit through ottawa.ca/building, the City will specifically review your egress window plans. Typical costs for basement renovation permits in Ottawa range from \$300-800 depending on scope, with processing times of 15-25 business days.

The permit application must include detailed drawings showing window dimensions, window well construction, and drainage plans. Many Ottawa homeowners discover during the permit process that their existing basement windows don't meet egress requirements, requiring costly window enlargement or replacement.

What to Watch For When Hiring Contractors

Be extremely cautious of any contractor who suggests skipping permits for basement bedrooms or claims egress windows aren't necessary in Ottawa. This is a major red flag. Unpermitted basement bedrooms can:

- Fail home inspections during sale
- Void insurance coverage in emergencies
- Result in City of Ottawa compliance orders
- Create serious safety hazards for occupants

Always verify your contractor understands OBC egress requirements and has experience with City of Ottawa basement permits. Check their ESA license at esasafe.com/contractor-locator if electrical work is involved.

Official Resources

Contact City of Ottawa Building Code Services at 613-580-2424 or visit ottawa.ca/building for specific guidance on your basement bedroom project. They can clarify requirements for your particular situation and provide current permit fee schedules.

For secondary dwelling units in basements, additional zoning and parking requirements may apply depending on your Ottawa neighborhood (Kanata, Orleans, Barrhaven, etc.). The City's Building Code Services can explain these requirements during your pre-consultation.

Q3

Do I need parking for a basement apartment in Ottawa?

Yes, you typically need to provide parking for a basement apartment in Ottawa, but the requirements vary by zoning and location.

The City of Ottawa's Zoning By-law generally requires one parking space per dwelling unit, which includes secondary dwelling units like basement apartments. However, the specific requirements depend on your property's zoning designation and location within the city.

Ottawa Parking Requirements for Secondary Units

In most residential zones (R1, R2, R3), you'll need to maintain the original parking requirement for your main house PLUS provide additional parking for the basement apartment. This usually means:

- Single-family home: 1-2 spaces originally required
- Basement apartment: 1 additional space required
- Total: 2-3 parking spaces on your property

The parking space must meet City standards - typically 2.7m x 6m (9ft x 20ft) with proper access to the street. Tandem parking (one behind the other) is often acceptable if both spaces serve the same property owner.

Exceptions and Reductions

Ottawa does offer parking reductions in certain areas:

- **Transit-Oriented Development zones:** Reduced parking requirements near LRT stations and major transit routes
- **Downtown core:** Some areas have reduced or no parking requirements
- **Heritage districts:** May have different standards due to lot constraints
- **Properties near frequent transit:** Potential for reduced requirements

Getting Approval Through the Process

When applying for your secondary dwelling unit permit through ottawa.ca/building (613-580-2424), the parking requirement will be reviewed as part of your zoning compliance. If your property can't accommodate the required parking due to lot size or configuration, you may need:

- **Minor Variance Application** - Apply to the Committee of Adjustment for relief from parking requirements (~\$1,500 fee, 6-8 week process)
- **Site Plan Approval** - For more complex situations requiring detailed review

What to Watch For

Don't assume you can skip the parking requirement - this is one of the most common reasons secondary unit applications get delayed or rejected. The City takes parking seriously because of neighborhood impact concerns. Some contractors or property owners try to proceed without proper parking compliance, which can result in:

- Permit application rejection
- Order to cease occupancy
- Difficulty selling the property later
- Neighbor complaints and bylaw enforcement

Getting Definitive Answers

Before investing in basement apartment renovations, contact City of Ottawa Planning at 613-580-2424 or submit a pre-consultation request through ottawa.ca. They can review your specific property and zoning to confirm exact parking requirements. This typically costs \$200-400 but can save thousands in potential redesign costs later.

The parking requirement often determines whether a basement apartment project is feasible, so verify this early in your planning process before hiring contractors or applying for building permits.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Construction Network. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of February 23, 2026 and may change. Visit ottawaconstructionnetwork.com for the latest answers.