

Home Improvement Guide

In a Nutshell

Home Improvement is the construction, repair, or remodeling of a piece of land or building designated as a residence. Home Improvement Guides allow local municipalities to simply describe which home improvements are encouraged, which are prohibited, and the necessary permits that are required to accomplish improvements. Home Improvement Guides should contain building codes and compliance regulations to help ensure that residents have proper installation, construction materials, and meet minimum standards that promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the neighborhood. Overall, city residents should enjoy their renovations while the neighborhood's ambiance and property values increase.

The “How To”

Municipalities' building codes and ordinances establish minimum standards for the health, safety, and welfare of their communities and their residents. Although many of the codes follow the [International Code Council](#), other building ordinances may be tailored to specific issues within a neighborhood. As residents want to remodel a kitchen with new appliances, install a downstairs bathroom, or relax in that new spa, they must abide by municipal building codes. Home Improvement Guides provide clarity and coherent steps to additions and renovations. Permits, costs, applications, and codes are some of the resources that are helpful in these home improvement guides. Neighborhoods wanting to compile a guide should look to include the features below.

- Gather building codes that apply to specific areas. These areas may include front and back porches, sheds and gazebos, decks, parking spaces and structures, fences and barriers, spas, pools, hot tubs, and paint color. The extent of your guide depends on municipal building codes.
 - Identify neighborhood forms, identities, architectural, historic districts, and styles. Neighborhoods may restrict improvements based upon material used or architectural types to keep a neighborhood's integrity intact. For example, a historic district built in the 18th century may prohibit front porch additions due to the lack of neighborhood conformity.
 - Identify the type of permits and where to apply for a permit that the municipality and/or the larger county may require. Electrical projects may require permits for new room additions or adding on a garage. Adding a new bathing facility may require a plumbing permit.
 - List the information required such as applications, architectural drawings or building plans, and size regulations.
 - List the most current fee amounts. Some fees are flat rates. Other fees are based upon project size or cost and use a multiplier. Please view the “Dollars & Cents” tab for more on the multiplier.
 - Identify allowed improvements and prohibited improvements. Also provide a list of improvements that do not require permits or compliances. When repaving a driveway, some neighborhoods may have a rule for the material used, and others do not. In any case, the homeowner should be aware of any possible restrictions.
 - List the largest and smaller sizes.
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Individual counties may have their own home improvement manuals for residents. Municipalities can view a number of other cities that have their own guides.

- The City of Maryland Heights, Missouri published their “[A Guide to Home Improvements](#)”
 - Kansas City’s [Energy Works KC](#) for home energy efficiency for homeowners
 - Massachusetts [Consumer Guide to Home Improvement](#)
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Disabled Persons Home Improvements

Disabled accessibility is another popular home improvement. For example, a resident may require wheelchair accessibility for entry to a house with steps. Ramp specifications may be included in the guide. One home design feature of Universal Design (housing accessibility for all populations) is no-step entry for house entrances. These options should be included in guides for residents to know their options. Please view OneSTL’s [Universal Design](#) and [Multigenerational Communities](#) tools for resources.

Planning & Zoning

Cities may want to consider adopting some type of standard for housing if they have not already. The International Code Council (ICC) provides building code standards for governmental entities to adopt. Many cities such as the City of Saint Louis use the International Building Code, 2009, as published by the ICC. For example, the City of Ferguson follows the (ICC). The ICC provides standards for what materials can be used in projects, replacing, tearing down, or changing walls, alternations and additions for the foundation, or adding any type of fence, and more changes. Please view the [ICC 2006](#) for more home improvement information.

Most cities require permits for significant alterations and additions. This ensures improvements are safe, meet minimum standards, and comply with the municipality’s building codes. To obtain a permit, either visit your municipality’s office of inspections or department of building codes. Before obtaining a permit, Saint Louis County requires that projects must:

- Review the zoning
- Review property materials are being used
- Review the project complies with Saint Louis Building codes
- Undergo inspection to ensure the building plans are as followed
- Meet approval from the city and issue a Certificate of Use and Occupancy.

St. Louis County Department of Public Works is responsible for code enforcement of County ordinances that regulate building construction within the County. This [homeowner services list](#) includes residential guides, documents, permits, services, and more. The City of St. Louis [residential code](#) can be found under Chapter 25.11. [Franklin County Building Department](#) provides permit information for residential uses. Information includes permit application, building permit application checklist, electrical & mechanical spec. sheet, mechanical modification or replacement worksheet, driveway declaration, and more. [Jefferson County code of ordinances](#) within section 500 provides code information on homeowner permits. [St. Charles County Community Development Department](#) issues various permits, applications, and licenses for buildings, back flow prevention, fence, and more. [Madison County Ordinances](#) for building and zoning code. Madison County also shares FAQs about decks, detached buildings, pools, fence regulations, building additions and more. Monroe County [General Development Regulations](#) contain the building codes. St. Clair County [code ordinances](#)

7-1-43 provide information for residential permit fees and alterations.

Lead

HUD provides [Guidelines for the Evaluation and Control of Lead-Based Paint Hazards in Housing](#). These guidelines offer helpful advice for property owners and landlords to reduce the risk of lead paint within households. Compliance of the guidelines are not mandatory. Cities and local governments could set a standard for steps to remove lead. The EPA does require renovators and home sellers of houses built prior to 1978 to distribute the EPA pamphlet “[Renovate Right: Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Child Care Providers, and Schools](#)”.

Dollars & Cents

Residents interested in improving their home may face costs other than the costs of construction. Drawings of the building plan may cost as well. Cost varies with contractor. Permit fees may cost money. The [City of Maryland Heights](#) for example requires a permit fee of $\$0.0025 \times$ the cost of construction or $\$0.0045 \times$ the cost of construction depending upon what is being improved. For example if the construction cost of remodeling a bathroom is \$20,000. Then the permit fee would be $\$20,000 \times .0025 = \50 . There is a \$50 minimum for most permits in Maryland Heights. For swimming pools, spas, room additions, and walls, the rate is $.0045 \times$ construction cost.

Homeowners may claim a tax credit for purchase of Energy Star qualified windows, doors, and skylights in 2012 or 2013. Find out if you qualify for [tax credits](#) Energy Star provides a list of savings, including the average for Saint Louis. Find out how much on average you can save with [tax credits and energy-efficient windows](#).

Measuring Success

Energy Star provides a tool to measure the energy efficiency of your home. See how your home [measures up](#).

Discover More

For Residents

Cities may want to include some helpful tips for their residents when improving their residence such as hiring contractor and installing energy efficient appliances. The Better Business Bureau provides tips on home improvements and repairs. Here are some tips for [driveway improvements](#), [roofers](#), and even [swimming pools](#). Sealing and insulating the "envelope" or "shell" of your home — its outer walls, ceiling, windows, doors, and floors — is often the most cost effective way to improve energy efficiency and comfort. [ENERGY STAR](#) provides information for energy efficient appliances. When hiring a contractor, prior to signing a contract, always have the project written in detail. Be sure the contract contains the following:

- Contractor identification, registration number, and insurance
- Price of the work
- Payment schedule
- Provision for changes
- Detailed list of specifications and materials

- Duration of the project
- Cancellation notice if applicable

[Consumer Reports'](#) Home Improvement Guide discusses helpful hints for materials and practices for remodeling projects. This report provides bathroom, bedroom, and kitchen remodeling ideas. Sink, toilet, siding, and window ratings and recommendations.

Lead

[Lead](#) is very dangerous to people's health and particularly dangerous to children. Normally, lead is found in paint. Lead paint was commonly used within exterior and interior walls, doors, and windows. Exposure may occur from deteriorating lead-based paint onto soils and dust in the air. Homes built in or after 1978 should not contain lead-based paint. If your home was built prior to 1978, find a trained inspector at (314) 526-4911 for Missouri residents, (800) 545-2200 for Illinois residents or visit the [Missouri](#) Department of Health & Senior Services or the [Illinois](#) Lead Poisoning Prevention and Healthy Home Program Grants are available from the Community Development Division of [St. Clair County](#). Their Lead Hazard Reduction Program provides funding to assess and remediate lead based paint hazards for homes and rental properties.

Case Studies

Maryland Heights' Guide to Home Improvements

Contact

Randy Noland
Building Commissioner
314-738-2241
rnoland@marylandheights.com

Description

Identifying home improvements can assist homeowners who are seeking to reduce the functional obsolescence of their home or make other renovations. Not only will the current homeowner benefit from the upgrade, but it will also add value to the property and make the home more marketable to future buyers. Sustainable home improvements, which are increasingly growing in priority, would financially benefit the homeowner, add to the value of the home, and diminish harmful impacts on the environment. The City has developed this guide to help with the process. The Maryland Heights Guide can be found [here](#).