

## Home improvements in a down economy

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Typically, February is the time of year many of our Naperville clients focus on how to improve, update and maintain their homes. Currently, our conversations have the additional concern of the impact of the economy on their plans.

We advise our clients that now is a great time to take advantage of opportunities to continue with home improvements. Investing in your most valuable asset should always be a top priority. We suggest the following:

**Take stock and make plans for your home.** Organize your analysis into two categories -- maintenance and improvements. Under your maintenance category are all the items involved in keeping your home working well. Depending on the age of your home, these items can be activities you perform yearly or less often. As your home's exterior ages, interior and mechanical reviews are required.

Your improvement analysis offers you the opportunity to make plans for changes in your home. We encourage clients to consider how their home functions for their family now and for the future. Then decisions can be made about changes they would like to make. Improvements tend to be cosmetic updating, renovations or adding on needed space.

Once your maintenance and improvement analysis is complete, prioritize each list. Be sure to take your time and be clear about your priorities.

**Hire a professional contractor.** Do thorough research. Interview contractors who have a reputation for quality craftsmanship. Search out contractors who have been in business for a long time. Call current references. Hire someone you trust and like -- after all they will be spending a lot of time with you and your most valued asset. A quality contractor will offer suggestions on making changes in your priorities that could save you money and avoid costly mistakes. The value of their experience will ensure a successful outcome for your projects.

**Budget and timeline.** Finally, your contractor will develop a budget and timeline for your home improvement projects. Now is a great time to do your projects in phases. Moving forward with your plans in today's market offers many advantages. Working within your timeline is easier. A quieter market, allows contractors more flexibility in scheduling. Never sacrifice quality craftsmanship for cost. However, the current market is an ideal time to take advantage of cost saving on materials. Many vendors are offering discount incentives, providing additional savings for your project.

Act now! You will be glad to be among those who took advantage of the current opportunities in the market to maintain your home's value.

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