

Construction Tips: Lessons Learned and Local Lore

1. Mountain Time. Time in the construction industry does not appear to coincide with the average person's concept of how quickly work should begin or proceed. In the mountains, this situation is especially true. A project promised to begin in a “couple” weeks will likely not begin for “several” weeks. And a project anticipated requiring several weeks for completion may require several months. Do not expect your new house to be constructed in 4 to 6 months. It will likely require 12 to 16 months. Mountain Time is pretty standard operating procedure.
2. Fixed Prices. Good luck. Most of the local contractors are honest, capable builders. Their estimates are generally “in the ball park”. If you must have a guaranteed price, get it in writing and have a very tight and detailed contract. I have had fixed prices quoted to me for the past three small projects. On two of the projects, the contractor actually charged me less than he quoted and on the third, he wanted more than he quoted---we negotiated a compromise---all this with a “hard quote”. The work was well done and I was pleased with the jobs. The concept of a guaranteed cost is just not common practice here.
3. Many of the local, small contractors will help you reduce the cost of the work by changing materials, timing, etc, but the concept of offering them less than they have quoted or deducting miscellaneous dollars from the final costs will quickly earn you an adversary. AND---they do talk among themselves. If you get a reputation of being difficult or trying to cut their payment, you could find that you are unable to get any help in any area without difficulty. You may find yourself having to go outside the county for labor.
4. Water Wells. Recommend that the well be installed very early in construction of a new house. Well depths vary from 150 to 800 feet depending where your lot is located. Multiple holes may be required to hit water. Hydrofracting is commonly required to get adequate flow. The drilling contractor will want to select the location for the well that is most convenient and accessible for his benefit. BUT—he will also have the most/best knowledge of where to locate water. There will be a large slag heap at the well site that will require clean up after the well is drilled. The deeper the well, the bigger the mess. REMEMBER: your well site must be accessible for a boom truck, when it becomes necessary in the future to pull the pump or to perform certain other procedures. Consider building location and landscaping before locating the initial well site. You do not want to damage your building(s) or destroy mature landscaping to repair your well. Bury all water lines exterior to the building a minimum of 18 inches below finished grade. It can freeze quite deeply up here. It is preferable to have all electrical components and pressure regulators located inside your building rather than at the well head. Everything MUST be freeze-proofed! It is preferable to have nothing that can freeze located at the well head. Mice, insects, snakes, etc love to nest adjacent to the well head, especially if there is insulation there.

5. Weatherproofing. On the ridges and mountain tops, the weather assault upon your facility is MUCH more intense than normally expected. Wind is much stronger in the mountains and valleys. It swirls and twists as it blows across these hills and valleys. A house on a ridge or at the top of the mountain will be susceptible to winds from ALL directions----UP(yes, rain will blow UP the slopes under some conditions creating very unusual leak potentials), DOWN (normal) and from any side or angle. In the most exposed locations (think best views), construction should be similar to a submarine. Consider only the best roofing materials. Do not consider the less costly shingles. The flapping you hear on your roof, fairly often, is the shingles trying to fly away. The air is thinner at the higher elevations and ultraviolet rays are more intense than in the lowlands. During a sunshiny day, the temperature will be likely lower and a cooling breeze will make you feel comfortable, but the UV will blister your skin quite rapidly. Likewise, the exterior finish of your building will take quite an assault. On the primary exposure (sun) areas, natural materials will deteriorate much more rapidly, paint will require more frequent attention, and leaks due to material shrinkage will cause maintenance issues. CAREFULLY CONSIDER EXTERIOR CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS with this in mind.
6. Have vendors who have not been in Wynngate review our roads before sending trucks to the site especially due to the steepness and short turning radius of the roads. Property owners should have a discussion with suppliers about breaking down heavy loads (like concrete) into multiple loads (e.g. 6 yards max of concrete per truck not 8 or 9 yards per truck). Please keep in mind that Wynngate property owners are responsible for the cost of maintenance for all roads within the development.