

## WHAT TO EXPECT DURING A TUCKPOINTING JOB

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Savvy owners of historic brick rowhouses in the Washington DC area know that, when they see cracks in the brick façade, it's time to call an expert. Tuckpointing old brick requires a specialized kind of expertise. As a homeowner you have concerns about the historic authenticity and structural integrity of your old brick home. Your task is to find the right masonry contractor.

### Signs of Trouble to Initial Contact

When you spot the signs of trouble, your first step is to contact a contractor for an onsite evaluation. Not all masonry contractors are equally experienced in "reading an old building," so your selection is important. Look for a company that has experience with historic brick buildings, ask neighbors for recommendations and check out customer reviews of each contractor.



Communication will be the basis for a successful project and your satisfaction. If you report holes in the mortar or water penetration inside your home, pay attention to what the contractor recommends. As a homeowner and customer, you should be informed and educated at each step. Ask questions and expect answers.

The problems you identify may not always be the result of breakdown in mortar joints. A quality contractor will tell you if their service is not the right solution to the problem. Rather, what you see may be caused by water seepage from the roof and windows or poor exterior drainage. If that is the case, an appropriate referral to another specialist may be warranted. Tuckpointing experts may recommend that certain kinds of drainage issues be addressed before starting repair and restoration work on your brick façade, or included in a total solution.

## Proposal and Work Plan

Soon after the onsite evaluation you should receive a written proposal for your consideration that lays out the following:

- Scope of the project – a detailed description of the existing conditions and specifications of the work to be performed. This may include specifying which of the exterior walls is to be completed; issues to be addressed and rectified; composition of the work crew; plan for erecting scaffolding; description of the techniques and materials to be used in the tuckpointing; and outline of site-work expectations.
- Cost of the project – itemized cost of all aspects of planned work.
- Timeline for project – start date (usually determined by contractor project schedule and extent of permitting required) and estimated completion date.

Before you sign a contract make sure that you understand and agree with all the terms and conditions. Any changes to the proposal should be negotiated prior to the start of work.

## Permits and Forms

The permitting process in Washington DC and surrounding areas can be complicated and challenging. If your home is in a historic district, the requirements are rigorous. The process usually takes 2-4 weeks and may involve multiple agencies and processes. In certain situations additional permissions may be needed:

- Public space permit for work performed adjacent to a public alley
- Neighbor permission form – notification to adjoining property neighbors
- Permit for scaffolding – if visible from street

Find out which contractors will handle the permitting process for you – they



have the expertise and experience in navigating the bureaucratic process. The availability of this service may help you choose your contractor.

## Your Home Becomes a Work Site

Before production begins – before the work crew assembles and begins setting up the job site – you should have a pre-production meeting with the construction manager. This meeting can be brief – some contractors schedule it first thing on Day 1 of the project. Think of it as your last chance to review the contract, discuss your expectations, and clarify what you and your family can expect on a daily basis. What kind of access to water and electricity will the crew have? Will they need to bring a porta-potty onsite? Will you see the same crew members each day, or will they be rotated between jobs?



The work of tuckpointing is messy. The grinders that remove old mortar can be noisy and dirty. To minimize the amount of dust penetrating the building's interior, your windows and those of the neighbors should be covered, and protection added to landscaping if possible. Some things to look for:

- Scaffolding erected per OSHA regulation.
- Daily cleanup of the work by crew.
- All removed mortar placed in heavy-duty/contractor bags and removed from the job site on a regular basis.
- All bricks and mortar joints cleaned by hand before installation of new mortar.
- Entire wall washed carefully with water [low pressure, not power washed] to remove dust or debris.
- Damaged bricks repaired and reset, or replaced only as needed.
- Lime-based mortar mix prepared according to traditional methods to ensure an appropriate match to the original.

## Final Clean up and Walk-Through

When your tuckpointing project is completed, your historic brick home should look refreshed. That includes restoring its curb appeal. Look for a final cleanup that includes window washing – yours and the neighbors – washing the exterior walls, and repairing your landscaping. Your final walk-through should reinforce your investment in maintaining the structural integrity and historic authenticity of your home.



Tuckpointing done the traditional way restores the classic beauty of brick and mortar and lasts for many years. It's what preserves the allure of the classic brick homes in DC's historic neighborhoods.

*Located in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington DC, Renaissance Development specializes in the restoration of a historic building's mortar joints using traditional tuckpointing methods and materials. Led by CEO Dr. Christina Wilson, an architectural historian, the team offers expertise and commitment to preserving the authenticity of historic brick homes. From the initial contact, the crew is professional and responsive to the concerns of homeowner and neighborhood.*

## Additional information and resources:

**Permits and forms.** There is lots of information available from various agencies about the permitting process and required forms. The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) is the place to start. You will find all the forms and requirements for your particular job.

DCRA <http://dcra.dc.gov/page/about-permits>

**Historic districts.** If your home is located in a historic district, you should familiarize yourself with the specific requirements and restrictions on building permits.

Homeowners in the **Capitol Hill Historic District** can refer to the resources of the Capitol Hill Restoration Society (CHRS).

CHRS <http://chrs.org/>

- For exterior modifications on a historic home:  
<http://chrs.org/living-on-capitol-hill/owning-property-in-the-historic-district/>
- History of brick construction in urban neighborhoods:  
[http://chrs.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/04/11\\_CHRS\\_Brick.pdf](http://chrs.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/04/11_CHRS_Brick.pdf)

The Citizens Association of **Georgetown** (CAG) offers resources to residents:

- Historic preservation <http://www.cagtown.org/content/historic-preservation>
- Guide to historic preservation in Georgetown  
<http://www.cagtown.com/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/CAG%20Guide%20to%20Historic%20Preservation%20Work%20in%20Georgetown.pdf>
- Permits and process <http://www.cagtown.com/historic-preservation-apply-for-permit>