



Sometimes, the best location is the one you're already in

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As everyone knows, "location, location, location" is the real estate mantra. When it comes time to consider a move to a new home, sometimes, the perfect location still may be the house that suddenly seems too small or needs overall improvement.

In today's economy, it often is better and more economical to improve your current home than to uproot the family. On the practical side, the children already are settled in school and you love the block you're on.

On the strictly financial side, along with the purchase price of a new house, there are moving and closing costs to consider. Additionally, since it's often difficult to find a house that's already perfectly suited to one's particular needs or lifestyle, a new dwelling may need as much of an overhaul/improvement as the one you presently are in.

For these reasons, it might make more sense to stay put and renovate one's current home into one with updated features, a solution that adds value to the residence and allows the homeowner to enjoy the end result for years to come.

Home improvements come in many shapes and sizes and can include a wide range of construction options. There are cosmetic changes that will add curb appeal and upgrades that can help trim energy costs. Among



Photos Courtesy of AIA Staten Island Chapter

This one-story ranch was outgrown by its occupants, but rather than move, they worked with an architect to design the alteration that transformed it into a two-story dwelling and expanded their living space.



other means of adding value to an existing home are rearranging interior partitions to create a different layout or adding a back deck.

For the family looking to expand their living space, solutions can include a complete second-story addition with bedrooms and baths; a new kitchen; refinishing the basement or adding a room at the rear of the house.

Even though the scale of the work involved may change, the steps to a successful home improvement project remain the

same and there are a few important things to keep in mind before the first wall comes down or any concrete is poured. Â□

IS IT LEGAL?Â□

First, is it legal? If you are considering an addition or making substantial changes to your home, you must make sure it legally can be done, by getting the proper approvals from the New York City Department of Buildings (NYCDOB) and obtaining the required permits. A licensed architect should be consulted to determine whether what you are intending to build can be approved.

Through a zoning analysis, the architect will make an educated assessment to evaluate the size of an enlargement and onto what portion of the house the new work can be added. The structural condition also will be considered. Due diligence is required to evaluate design options.

Once the necessary paperwork has been filed and approved, establishing legality, it's time to develop a program of your goals for the project, establish a budget to meet them and then stick to it. Too often, changes are made mid-construction and the original budget is exceeded. Â□

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HIRE PROS

It is critical to hire the right professionals for the job, to make sure it goes smoothly, gets done on time and on budget. An architect will help you establish a program and budget, design the home improvement and make sure it gets built properly. He or she also will file all the necessary plans with the NYCDOB and advise the homeowner what permits are necessary for the job.

From there, a licensed, professional contractor will obtain the permits and, following the architect's plans, build the home improvement using all licensed and insured subcontractors.

Home improvement is a process that can be long and often messy and disruptive, particularly if you are living in the space under construction. Remember, the key to a successful project is sticking to the program, hiring the right professionals for the job and being patient. Â□

Architect's Corner, written by members of the Staten Island Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), appears twice a month in home. Â□

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