

OTTAWA BASEMENTS

Before You Start

What to know before starting a renovation project

3 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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How do I plan an Ottawa basement reno for multigenerational living?

Planning a multigenerational basement in Ottawa starts with understanding your goals — whether that's a private suite for aging parents, a space for adult children, or a flexible layout that works for both — because the design and permit requirements differ significantly depending on how "separate" the unit needs to be.

A true secondary suite (also called an accessory dwelling unit or in-law suite) is the most common approach for multigenerational living, and Ottawa has a well-established framework for these. The key distinction is whether the basement will function as a **fully independent unit** with its own kitchen, bathroom, and entrance, or as an **integrated living space** that shares some amenities with the main home. Independent suites trigger more regulatory requirements but offer far more flexibility and privacy for multi-gen families — and they add significant resale value.

Understanding Ottawa's Secondary Suite Requirements

If you're going for a fully separate unit, the City of Ottawa requires zoning compliance (most residential zones permit one secondary suite), a **building permit**, and the finished space must meet the Ontario Building Code. Minimum unit sizes are **37m² for a one-bedroom** and **28m² for a bachelor unit** — so measure your basement footprint early. You'll also need a **45-minute fire separation** between the units, which typically means Type X drywall on ceilings and walls, interconnected smoke alarms, and carbon monoxide detectors on every level. A **separate entrance** is required, which often means an egress door or a walk-up addition.

Ceiling height is one of the first things to assess. The OBC requires a **minimum 1.95m (6'5") finished ceiling height** in habitable rooms. Many Ottawa homes — especially those built before the 1980s — fall short of this, which may mean underpinning or benching the foundation to gain height. This is a significant cost factor and something to evaluate before finalizing your budget.

Typical Costs in the Ottawa Market

Multigenerational basement suites in Ottawa generally fall into these ranges:

- **Basic integrated space** (bedroom, bathroom, kitchenette, shared entrance): \$60,000–\$90,000
- **Full secondary suite** (private entrance, full kitchen, bathroom, living area): \$90,000–\$140,000
- **Premium suite with underpinning or major structural work**: \$140,000–\$200,000+

These ranges include permits, labour, and standard finishes. Separate electrical panels, egress windows, and HVAC zoning are common add-ons that affect the final number.

Planning the Layout for Multigenerational Life

Beyond code minimums, think practically about the people who will live there. If it's aging parents, **accessibility features** matter — wider doorways (minimum 32", ideally 36"), a curbless shower, grab bar blocking in bathroom walls, and lever-style door hardware. If it's adult children who may eventually move out, design the suite to function as a **rentable unit** so it serves you long-term. A separate hydro meter is worth considering if you want to split utility costs fairly.

Getting Started

The permit process through the City of Ottawa typically takes **4–8 weeks** for a secondary suite application, so build that into your timeline. Total project duration from design to move-in is usually **3–6 months**. Start by having your basement assessed for ceiling height, existing plumbing rough-ins, and electrical capacity — these three factors will shape your budget more than anything else.

Ottawa Basements specializes in exactly this type of project. If you'd like a free on-site consultation to assess your basement's potential and walk through what a multigenerational suite would involve for your specific home, reach out — we're happy to help you plan it right from the start.

Q2

Is it worth getting a home inspection before starting a basement renovation?

Absolutely yes - a pre-renovation home inspection is one of the smartest investments you can make before starting a basement project. While it adds \$400-600 to your upfront costs, it can save you thousands by identifying potential issues before they become expensive surprises mid-renovation.

A qualified home inspector will assess your basement's **structural integrity, moisture issues, electrical systems, and HVAC components** - all critical factors that directly impact your renovation scope and budget. They'll identify problems like foundation cracks, water infiltration, outdated electrical panels, or structural concerns that need addressing before you start framing walls or installing flooring. In Ottawa's climate, moisture issues are particularly common in older homes, and catching these early prevents costly mold remediation down the road.

The inspection becomes even more valuable for secondary suite conversions, which are a specialty of ours at Ottawa Basements. The inspector will identify whether your basement meets the basic requirements for a legal dwelling unit, including ceiling height (minimum 6'5" in Ottawa), proper egress windows, and structural capacity for additional loads. They'll also assess your electrical panel's capacity - many older Ottawa homes need panel upgrades to support a secondary suite's electrical demands, which can add \$2,000-4,000 to your project if

discovered later.

From a permitting perspective, having an inspection report strengthens your building permit application with the City of Ottawa. It demonstrates due diligence and can actually speed up the approval process when the inspector has documented the basement's current condition. For insurance purposes, addressing any safety issues identified in the inspection protects your coverage and ensures your renovation investment is properly protected.

Professional guidance is essential here - while you might be tempted to skip this step to save money upfront, experienced contractors know that surprises during renovation are always more expensive than planned work. A good inspection reveals the true scope of your project, allowing for accurate budgeting and realistic timelines.

Next steps: Schedule your inspection with a certified home inspector who's familiar with Ottawa's building requirements and basement renovation considerations. Once you have the report, you can make informed decisions about your renovation scope and budget. For a free consultation on how inspection findings might impact your specific basement project, contact Ottawa Basements - we're experienced in working with inspection reports to develop realistic renovation plans.

Find a Basement Renovation Contractor

Ottawa Basements connects you with experienced contractors through the <https://justynrookcontracting.com>:

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- BFI Renovations ?
- Dump n Dash Hauling ?

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Q3

What is the typical deposit amount that contractors in Ottawa ask for before starting a basement renovation?

In Ottawa, reputable basement renovation contractors typically request 10-25% of the total project cost as a deposit, with most established companies asking for around 15-20% to secure your project start date.

The deposit amount often depends on the project scope and timeline. For smaller basement finishing projects (\$30,000-\$60,000), you might see deposits in the \$5,000-\$12,000 range. Larger secondary suite conversions

(\$80,000-\$150,000) could require \$12,000-\$30,000 upfront. **Never pay more than 25% upfront** - this is both a red flag for potential issues and often violates consumer protection guidelines in Ontario.

Legitimate reasons contractors request deposits include securing your spot in their schedule, ordering custom materials specific to your project, and covering initial permit fees. At Ottawa Basements, deposits help us pull building permits through the City of Ottawa (which can take 2-4 weeks) and order specialty items like egress windows or custom millwork that have longer lead times.

Be cautious of contractors demanding large upfront payments - especially those asking for 50% or more before starting work. Under Ontario's Consumer Protection Act, contractors cannot legally demand payment exceeding the value of work completed, plus a reasonable amount for materials delivered to your property. If a contractor is asking for a massive deposit "to buy materials," this could indicate cash flow problems or worse.

Payment schedule best practices in Ottawa typically follow a structure like: 15% deposit to start, 25% when framing is complete, 25% at drywall stage, 25% when flooring and fixtures are installed, and final 10% upon completion and your satisfaction. This protects both you and the contractor throughout the renovation process.

For secondary suite projects requiring City of Ottawa permits, expect the deposit to cover permit fees (\$1,500-\$5,000+) and architectural drawings if needed. **Always ensure your deposit is refundable** if permits are denied or if the contractor fails to start work as scheduled.

Red flags to avoid: contractors asking for full payment upfront, those without WSIB coverage demanding large deposits, or anyone pressuring you to pay immediately. Take time to verify their license, insurance, and references before writing any checks.

Want to discuss deposit structures for your specific basement project? Ottawa Basements provides transparent pricing and reasonable payment schedules with every free estimate.

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Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Basements. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority before starting any construction or renovation project. Information is current as of August 30, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawabasements.com** for the latest answers.