

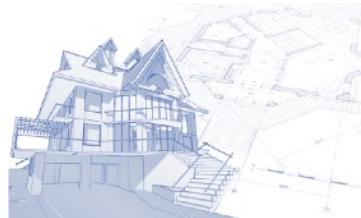
# Pre-Construction Planning Agreements

***How collaboration, clarity, and upfront planning protect your budget, timeline, and peace of mind.***

Before becoming a home builder, my career spanned several decades as a sales executive for a Fortune 5 global information technology company. In that world, clients were always billed for work performed. Planning, analysis, strategy—none of it was free.

In residential construction—whether new builds or renovations—that mindset has traditionally been very different. Builders are often expected to invest significant time and expertise upfront with no guarantee a project will ever move forward.

Let's pause and consider how other professionals operate.



- Would an architect provide full design services only if their client ultimately built the project?
- Would an attorney take on a complex case—spending countless hours researching, preparing arguments, and building a strategy—without a retainer?
- Would your accountant determine their fee only if you received a refund?

In all of these cases, the answer is no. These professionals don't work for free—and rightfully so.

So why has the home building industry long accepted the tradition of unpaid pre-construction work?

The reality is that many projects never make it past the planning stage. When that happens, builders are left with dozens—sometimes hundreds—of hours of uncompensated labor. That work has real value, and it deserves to be recognized.

Home builders are professionals, just like architects, attorneys, and accountants. Our expertise, time, and experience matter—and should be compensated before construction begins.

## Where the Traditional Model Breaks Down

A common scenario plays out like this: an owner hires an architect to design their dream home, assuming multiple builders will later bid the project. When those bids come in, the numbers are often all over the map—some low, some extremely high, and frequently well beyond the owner's expectations. Too often, the result is disappointment, redesign, or a project that never gets built at all.

For a reputable custom home builder to properly price a set of plans requires far more than a quick estimate. It involves detailed takeoffs, writing scopes of work, coordinating with trade partners, and gathering real pricing. That process can easily exceed 40 hours of professional labor. When done without a pre-construction agreement, all of that effort is at risk of producing no return.

I love architects. They are artists, and many are exceptional at what they do. But not all architects are trained to manage costs. They listen to what their clients want—and draw it—often without clear budget constraints. Then come the selections.

Have you priced a kitchen lately? Cabinetry alone can account for up to 20 percent of the total construction cost. Add in fixtures, finishes, site conditions, and inevitable changes, and budgets can spiral quickly out of control.

## A Better Way Forward

There has to be a better way to set expectations and avoid surprises.

In my opinion, the pre-construction planning agreement addresses many of the biggest challenges in custom home building—budget, design, selections, and timeline. Instead of working in silos, the owner, designer, and builder collaborate from the very beginning as a unified team.

The benefits are significant:

- Realistic designs that align with budget goals
- Clearly defined allowances and selections
- A construction timeline that is achievable
- Minimal surprises during construction



When everything is addressed upfront, the entire process becomes more predictable, efficient, and enjoyable.

## How We Approach Pre-Construction at ZAMKRO Homes

At ZAMKRO Homes, we offer two levels of billable pre-construction planning: **Standard** and **Premium**. The right fit depends on the owner's experience, desired level of involvement, and the amount of detail required.

With new construction costs approaching—and often exceeding—\$1 million, this upfront investment is both justified and invaluable for peace of mind.

Our **Standard Pre-Construction Planning** includes:

- Preliminary design coordination
- Budget estimates based on defined allowances

- A preliminary production schedule

Our **Premium Pre-Construction Planning** takes the process to the next level by providing:

- Detailed selections to accurately define allowances
- 3D renderings
- Full-scale 2D floor plan walk-throughs

While this level of detail may seem excessive, it is actually cost-effective. It reduces change orders, clarifies budgets, and accelerates the build process once construction begins.

## **Final Thoughts**

If your goal is to build a custom home while knowing as much as possible *before* construction starts, a pre-construction planning agreement is the smart first step.

If that sounds like the way you'd like to approach your project, give us a call. Let's start the conversation.