

How to Interview a Contractor



Helpful Questions to guide your Clean Energy Future

Choosing the right Energy Contractor is an important first step to improving your home's energy efficiency and lowering your utility bills. You should start with a Home Energy Audit especially if your home was built before 1990. They'll provide recommended improvements and cost estimates. A sample report can be found at www.CleanEnergyCapitalRegion.org. Use the following questions to help you choose the right contractor and make informed decisions.

What is your area of expertise? Contractors tend to specialize in different technologies within the energy efficiency world. From insulation and building science- understanding how a space functions best- to high efficiency heating systems, such as heat pumps, to assessment and energy saving measures, it can be challenging to determine the right contractor to best fit your energy needs. Take a quick look on the website of any contractor to see what they may offer. It may be useful to ask this when and if you decide to move forward and ask for an estimate as well. It is likely that some contractors will promote their primary offering first without mentioning other options. For example, a contractor that only does spray foam is likely to say spray foam is your best or only option. You'll gain valuable information if you take a broad look at all your choices.

- **Energy Efficiency** - NYSERDA's home energy assessor and efficiency contractors must be Building Performance Institute certified guaranteeing a level of knowledge in their field. Ask about air sealing and insulation options as well as ventilation strategies that inhibit the growth of mold inside your home.
- **Heat Pump** Contractors can assess which types of systems would work well in your home. They should perform a calculation called a "Manual J" which takes into account the size, orientation, number and size of windows, insulation and air sealing of your home to ensure that the system is designed to operate efficiently in exactly your circumstances. Oversized heat pumps not only cost more money but often are actually less efficient and can cause temperature swings in the home.
- **Building Type** - each type of home has different challenges and opportunities. Has the contractor worked in your type of home before? Brick buildings, mobile homes, homes in historic districts all benefit from an experienced eye.
- **Program Participation**- Is your contractor signed up to participate in incentive programs? NY Clean Heat, Empower+, Comfort Home and/or Residential Financing programs can all help reduce the cost of your project but contractors have to opt in to participate with these savings. A Capital Region Clean Energy Hub Advisor can help you navigate the programs you qualify for. Some contractors also provide their own financing or guidance on additional grants.

www.CleanEnergyCapitalRegion.org

How to Interview a Contractor



Helpful Questions to guide your Clean Energy Future

How do you handle work outside of your expertise? Do you work with subcontractors? How long have you worked with them? What is the process for letting me know who will be working here and when? Does the subcontractor need to have a license to work in my municipality?

How can I best prepare my home for a Home Energy Assessment? Contractors will need access to many areas of your home you may not visit regularly such as attics, basements, crawlspaces. Take a moment to see if there is a clear path to the heating system, hot water tank, electric panel and other noteworthy areas. Contractors should be made aware of any area that could potentially be a hazard- old, less stable basement stairs, asbestos pipe wrap, etc. Your assessment may include a blower door test which will help detect air leakage in your home. Note- if your home has mold or asbestos, a blower door test can not be performed. A blower door test is not appropriate for all buildings, and you may not qualify for a free test if your income is considered 'high'. If you do have a blower door test, you'll want to clean out the ash from your wood stove or fireplace first. Your contractor may have other advice, so check to make the experience positive and productive for both of you.

Does the proposed work require a building permit? If so, does the contractor handle that or do you the customer?

Will my Electric Panel need to be upgraded to install Heat Pumps? Load calculations determine if your electric panel has capacity for the additional power needed for Heat Pumps. If a panel upgrade is necessary, it is an added expense but much safer than overloading the current system. Ask your Energy Advisor about programs and tax rebates to help with this. When comparing quotes from different companies, look to see if these extras are included in one and not another.

Can you help me to estimate the electric load increase to my electric bill? Heat pumps most often will increase your electric bill. Ask your contractor to show you the projected savings/cost compared to what you are currently spending.. Cost savings will depend on your previous heating system (oil, propane or natural gas), your current building energy efficiency and the efficiency of the new system. Ask the contractor to show you how long it will take to make back your investment based on projected energy savings.

Does my utility require me to remove my old heating system to qualify for the utility rebates? Currently, some Utility Companies give substantially higher rebates to "decommission" old heating systems. Others do not. Some people prefer to keep old systems in place to have a backup.

What is your current timeline for services? How soon can you schedule an in person estimate, how long before a project could begin and how long will the project take to complete.

Can you provide references? Speaking to former customers is a great way to learn about the company you are considering. If they do not have references handy, check out Google and Yelp reviews. See if there are comments from former clients on the company's social media.

www.CleanEnergyCapitalRegion.org