

What will it cost to build my Traverse City Home?

The average cost-per-square-foot to build a home on site is between \$95 and \$150 but Contractors generally agree that cost-per-square-foot is a terrible way to budget for a home, because there are so many variables involved. Do you insist on top-of-the-line cabinets and appliances for your gourmet kitchen, or will mid-range ones do? Are you planning to side the house with cheap vinyl or expensive stone brick? Is the house going to be one story, or two? (The latter is generally cheaper because the foundation is smaller.) Will you have simple, rectangular rooms that minimize the materials and the labor required for framing, or unusual shapes like octagons with vaulted ceilings? What sort of flooring, bathroom fixtures and heating and cooling system will you have? Is the lot easy to access, relatively flat and easy to dig, or is it rocky, heavily wooded and uneven?

There are a few Web-based calculators that can help you make rough cost calculations which adjusts not only for the quality levels of finishes and fixtures, but also for location, down to the city level. But bear in mind that this and other calculators won't give you an exact estimate, since ultimately that will be determined by the profit margins of the contractor you hire -- information you can't really know in advance.

So if you go the site-built route, I suggest that you start with a dollar amount that you're willing to spend. Interview at least three contractors and check their licenses and references and look at their work.

Once you've found someone you like and trust, the two of you can take your preliminary budget and work backwards, including the must-haves and eliminating the mere wish-I-hads as money allows.

Be sure to keep a cushion of at least 10% to 20% of the total project cost to cover last-minute changes, delays and other problems you can't foresee (for example, the cost of lumber spiking mid-project).