

A CHINBURG BUILDERS GUIDE TO EVALUATING FLOOR PLANS



Your vision. Our expertise.

How much will it cost to build that house? It’s one of the first questions most people ask if they’re looking at plans and thinking of buying a “to be built” new home. The answer depends on many, many things. But a general understanding of construction issues will help any prospective buyer begin to evaluate the relative cost of a given house plan. First, some disclaimers... the cost of a building lot, the site work (driveway, septic system, well, etc.) are independent of any house plan and contribute a significant portion of the overall costs of a new home. Therefore the focus of this Guide, “How to Estimate Preliminary Costs of your New Home” will focus exclusively on the Build Price or Construction Costs of the home.

SIZE MATTERS.

There is a direct correlation between the heated or conditioned living space and the construction cost of a given home. The bigger the home, the more expensive it will be. Most builders will indicate both the size of given rooms and the total square footage of their plans.



The Linden is 2,670 square feet

Make sure you understand how they’ve defined the total square footage. Generally speaking, it should be the “Exterior Dimensions of the Conditioned Space”.

The total square footage marketed should not include garages, unfinished bonus rooms or unfinished basements/third floor attic space. However, unfinished bonus rooms translate into value for the buyer with future expansion possibilities and storage space. When you look at price per square foot make sure you are comparing apples to apples – that bonus room should translate into greater value in your home as additional usable space, as compared to a cathedral ceiling or open space.

Where things start to get complicated is that specific characteristics of a house plan can then adjust the “cost per square foot” either up or down. There is often a trade-off between personal aesthetic preferences and actual cost efficiencies of a plan.

SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS TO CONSIDER ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Attached Garages Cost More than Drive-Unders

Is there an attached garage or is it a “drive under” (part of the basement)? An attached garage means additional costs for a slab, framing and a roof without adding any additional conditioned space. This adds cost without making a bigger house. A “drive under” can be more efficient by using the home’s foundation and enclosed in the anticipated framing and roof system. The tradeoff, of course, is a smaller basement and having to walk upstairs with your groceries!

2. Make Sure to Compare “Apples to Apples” with Costs Per Square Foot

The ratio of the conditioned space on the second floor compared to the first floor also impacts the cost per square foot. A two story foyer can create a dramatic entry to a home, and a vaulted ceiling in the family room can provide a luxurious setting, but there’s living space missing from the second floor with little reduction in overall costs. The extreme example of this would be a rambling one-story ranch. The costs of the foundation and roof system (expensive elements) would only result in half of the living space of a two story home with a comparable footprint. therefore the ranch would result in a higher per square foot cost.

3. Simplicity in the Frame and Footprint will Reduce Cost



The Maple features a simple frame and foundation.

A simple foundation and frame will reduce costs. A square or rectangular footprint requires less labor and material than a complex frame. Lumber is sold in standard sizes. There will be less cutting and less waste. A 24' x 40' frame will use less sheets of 4' x 8' plywood than a complex home of similar size. Simplicity also reduces material and labor costs of the foundation.

4. Exterior Architectural Details Add Cost

Exterior details add to the overall cost of a home without increasing living space. Architectural details including dormers, porches, decks, patios, landscaping and trim detail all increase overall cost. However, these elements add to the curb appeal and the resale value of your home. The very popular book by Susan Susanka called “Building the Not So Big House” has attracted a large following of buyers who are willing to pay a premium for quality design features in a more compact home.



The Mulberry features many exterior and interior architectural details. It is compact and energy efficient, but more expensive per square foot than a simpler floor plan and exterior.

5. Price per Square Foot of Kitchens and Bathrooms is Higher than Other Rooms

Kitchens and bathrooms are the most costly rooms per square foot in most homes. There is a significant investment in cabinetry, counter tops plumbing fixtures, flooring and appliances. A home with a large kitchen and many bathrooms will cost more.

6. Level of Interior Fit and Finish Will Significantly Impact Cost per Square Foot

Finally, the interior fit and finish of a home can add significant cost to a home. Most buyers are more familiar with these items as they represent the selections and upgrades of items that consumers may have priced in a retail setting. If the price of your home is exceeding your budget, you can compromise on fit and finish and plan to upgrade later. It would be much more expensive, if even possible, to go back and improve the underlying quality of the structure later.

We hope that you have found this “Guide to Evaluating House Plans” helpful. For more information about your specific floor plan please contact Jon Chinburg, Design and Estimating, Chinburg Builders, Inc. Jon can be reached at (603)868-5995, ext. 12 or jchinburg@chinburgbuilders.com.