

# LEWIS COUNTY CHAPTER OF OLYMPIA MASTER BUILDERS



## Tips for hiring a contractor



Most homeowners will experience the need to hire a contractor. This could be an unplanned event, such as needing to hire a contractor quickly to make repairs after damage is done by a broken pipe or fallen tree. Or this could be the culmination of a years' planning to transform your dated kitchen into a gourmet cook's dream, or to enlarge your cramped bedroom into a luxurious master suite. Whatever the situation may be, hiring a contractor to make repairs or improvements to your home is not a decision to take lightly. Below are some tips and suggestions to help you make good decisions when hiring a contractor.

### 1. Is the contractor licensed, bonded, and insured?

You can verify this by calling the State of Washington's Department of Labor and Industries at 1-(800) 647-0982 or visit the L&I website at [www.lni.wa.gov](http://www.lni.wa.gov).

Ask if there have been any complaints about the contractor,

and if any, their status.

### 2. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

Good communication with your contractor is vital to a successful project, as it helps clarify exactly what you want done. Get the answers that satisfy your needs; after all, it is your home!

- Are they a local company?
- How long have they been in business?
- What types of work are they licensed to do?
- To what local trade associations do they belong?
- How many jobs have they done similar to yours?
- Have they done work before that requires a permit?
- Who are their materials supplier references?

### 3. Does the contractor possess a good reputation among customers and industry peers?

Ask the contractor to share names and numbers of customers. Check references thoroughly. Visit past work

done by your contractor, and ask the homeowners for their opinions on the work done.

### 4. Examine your bids carefully.

Bids that are noticeably lower than all others should be questioned. The difference may be in the quality of the materials used, experience of the crew doing the actual work, something is missing on the bid requirements, or it can be an indication that the contractor is not covering all the legitimate business costs. Don't automatically disregard a high or low bid, ask questions!

### 5. Obtain a written contract.

Be sure that it includes price, payment terms, sales tax, permit fees (if applicable), the specific work to be performed, materials to be used, warranties, and payment schedules. It is also a good idea to include change-order processes, final review, sign-off procedures, and cleanup. Put all change-orders in writing and ask questions as work progresses. Avoid verbal

contracts and be very cautious about paying for incomplete work.

### 6. Permits are for your protection!

Make sure permits are in place, and inspections are made as the work progresses. Make sure the name of your contractor appears on the permit.

### 7. Does the contractor offer a warranty?

If so, what kind, and for how long? Be sure you understand what is covered under the warranty and what isn't.

### 8. Is the contractor a member of Olympia Master Builders?

The Olympia Master Builders (OMB) is a professional trade association representing member companies. OMB helps educate members on new products, construction techniques, business practices, and industry issues.

### Want to Be Rewarded for Safety in Your Workplace?

Join us for the November Lewis County Chapter Meeting on Wednesday, November 19, 2025 at 6:00 PM at The Chehalis Moose Lodge.

We're excited to welcome ROII (Return on Industrial Insurance) next month for a special presentation on how your business can save money and be rewarded for maintaining a safe workplace. ROII is the state's largest and longest-operating Retro (Retrospective Rating) safety incentive program—and it's been rewarding members with real results for decades.

Whether you're an OMB member or a local business owner curious about joining, this is a great opportunity to learn how ROII and OMB can work together to support your business success. For more information, contact Jenn at [membership@omb.org](mailto:membership@omb.org).

## Building Industry Update from Olympia Master Builders: What's New for Homebuilders Across Lewis County

### Countywide Planning & Policy Update

The Lewis County 2045 Comprehensive Plan was adopted September 23, 2025, marking one of the most significant planning shifts in the past decade. The new plan introduces a "Small Towns & UGAs" framework - adding Packwood as an official

Urban Growth Area (UGA) and updating standards for Onalaska. Builders can expect:

Expanded infill and mixed-use opportunities in Onalaska and Packwood, with reduced parking minimums and live-work zoning to encourage smaller-scale development.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) now allowed countywide (max 1,296 sq

ft), exempt from density caps inside UGAs - creating new options for homeowners and small builders.

Higher SEPA thresholds (5 SF / 16 MF units) that streamline environmental review for small projects, reducing delays and soft costs.

Short-Term Rental regulations effective July 1, 2026 - multifamily STRs are generally prohibited outside designated UGAs to preserve long-term housing stock.

### Centralia & Chehalis

Both cities continue to position themselves as growth anchors along the I-5 corridor. Centralia's ongoing Port redevelopment and downtown infill efforts are opening more opportunities for commercial-residential mixed use. Candidates and city leaders have publicly supported streamlined permitting, lower fees, and greater transparency in partnership with the Port of Centralia - efforts that could

accelerate both residential and light-industrial investment.

Chehalis remains focused on infrastructure readiness for future housing starts and the integration of new stormwater and utility requirements under state code updates.

### Winlock, Napavine, Toledo & Pe Ell

In south and east county jurisdictions, growth remains modest but steady.

Winlock continues to benefit from rail-adjacent industrial expansion, with local subdivisions moving forward under updated concurrency rules.

Napavine is reviewing zoning adjustments to encourage workforce housing near its commercial corridor.

Toledo and Pe Ell are evaluating smaller-lot standards and ADU allowances to align with county policy, which could make development of duplexes or cottage-style homes more feasible.

### Industry Outlook

The combination of streamlined SEPA, ADU flexibility, and small-town UGA designations is expected to lower per-unit costs and modestly increase attainable-housing production through 2026. Rural densities, however, remain conservative under the RDD-5 / RDD-10 / RDD-20 frameworks so most near-term opportunity lies within designated UGAs.

The Olympia Master Builders encourage local jurisdictions to continue prioritizing predictable permit timelines, infrastructure coordination, and fee transparency to sustain housing affordability across Lewis County.

For further information and questions, please contact our Olympia Master Builders Government Affairs Director, Jessie Simmons, at (360)754-0912 ext. 102 [orga@omb.org](mailto:orga@omb.org).

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