

Better to move, or stay put?

Ladner interior designer Sarah Gallop reviews the economics of renovating your existing residence or opting for a new house

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Many people struggle with the decision to renovate their existing home or look for a brand new one that meets their needs. It's not an easy decision to make and certainly requires a lot of careful consideration.

The first thing to have is a good understanding of the motivation for the change. If a change of scenery is what is needed, or that next door neighbour is a nuisance, then the idea of starting fresh in a new home may be very appealing.

For some the allure of a brand new home is hard to ignore. However, many homeowners at this cross road have lived in their homes for quite some time, and as life circumstance changes

they struggle with finding a solution that will solve their problems.

Many love the neighbourhood, the neighbours, and the friends made. Sometimes it's a short commute to work, proximity to kids schools or activities that make it difficult to consider moving.

If all of these considerations promote a positive response then the preferred solution would certainly be to stay in



The kitchen in this Ladner home was in need of a facelift. Light, bright materials were used to make the space feel more open. *Contributed photo*



the current home.

Depending on when the home was originally purchased the market value may have decreased which can make it financially difficult to sell and purchase something new. Investing in the property you have may allow the home to work for you longer while the market potentially rebounds.

With the stock market uncertainty in past years many homeowners are putting their hard earned dollars into their largest investment—their homes.

There are many advantages to staying put and renovating an existing home. Often, older homes have larger property surrounding them, which is generally not the case for newer developments. Houses can always be changed or added

to, but large mature properties can't be duplicated.

The character of older homes in established neighbourhoods is another thing that is difficult to reproduce in newly built homes.

The ability to customize the spaces to your specific tastes and needs is very appealing in a renovation. While it's possible to find a newly built home that meets many of your requirements, unless you are involved in the planning stages, chances are it doesn't meet all of them.

When renovating your existing home you have influence on the types of materials and finishes that are used, what the spaces are used for, as well as the possibility of specialization and cus-

tomization in areas for specific purposes based on your family's priorities.

Another advantage to renovating is the possibility to disperse the cost over time. In addition to financing, you have the option to spread out the renovation into phases and completing them as your budget allows.

It's possible to take advantage of government incentives for your renovation project as well, which can be substantial if you plan accordingly. Be sure to look into what the current offers are and which would be applicable to the work you are considering. There are often rebates on items that improve your home's efficiency—windows, added insulation, heating systems. And while these may be one of the lower return on investment items (typically around 50 to 60 per cent of the value spent, depending on the upgrade) the incentives make them much more worthwhile.

If you are looking for renovations as a way of increasing the value of your home in addition to improving the function for your family, focus on kitchens and bathrooms. These areas are the most important to most families as well as buyers and have a return on investment anywhere from 70 to 120 per cent for kitchens and 65 to 120 per cent for bathrooms (even higher if it's a bathroom addition, upwards of 80 to 130 per cent).

The range accounts for the decisions made, and the most important consid-

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eration there is to keep the renovation cost and style in line with the architecture of the house and the character of the neighbourhood.

Other areas often looked at when renovating are improvements made to the exterior of the home for curb appeal.

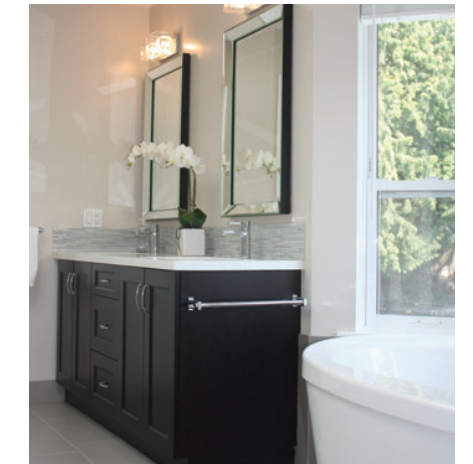
The potential return on investment here is around 50 to 90 per cent, again, depending on the upgrade.

Extensive landscaping is something to be done for self enjoyment purposes only. Although the beauty may be

appreciated by potential buyers it's not something that is paid more for. Some would view it as a negative given the additional maintenance. Same theory applies to pools. They are seen as “unlikely to add value” in the industry.

Whether you are looking to update your home to improve its function and appearance for your own family, or if you are hoping to add value to your largest investment, renovations can be the answer. It's important to understand the motivation for the change to make wise decisions for a great outcome.

Sarah Gallop is the Principal Designer at Ladner based Interior Design firm SGDI. A gallery of her work can be seen at www.sarahgallop.com



This Tsawwassen bathroom needed an update. The position of the vanity worked with the new layout, but the materials and fixtures were updated. *Contributed photo*

as Seen in the *south delta leader*