OTTAWA STONEWORK

Brick & Stone Steps

Brick, stone and flagstone entrance steps: loose or heaved units, rebuilding, permits for steps at an entrance, and zoning setbacks

4 Expert Answers from Masonry IQ

ottawastonework.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. My Nepean brick steps are pulling away from the house, why?
2. Should I replace brick steps with stone steps in Orleans?
3. Adding a stone landing at my Stittsville front door?
4. Rebuilding entrance steps in Kanata: permit needed?

Q1

My Nepean brick steps are pulling away from the house, why?

A mason at the wall can tell you what is causing the separation; there are several possible explanations and the right one depends on what is actually happening below and around the steps.

What a mason will look at includes how the steps are supported below frost, whether the footing has moved, how the steps connect to the house foundation, the condition of the mortar joints, and whether water has been getting in and freezing in the joint between the steps and the wall.

On permits, entrance steps can require a City of Ottawa building permit where a structure provides access to the building or where there is more than 600 mm difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces. The Building Code (9.8.9.2.(3)) also requires that foundations for exterior steps be placed at a depth below ground that meets Section 9.12; ask the mason how the steps are currently supported below frost and whether the repair or rebuild touches the footing. For the permit question, ask the City directly (buildingpermits@ottawa.ca). Separately, steps and walkways are named features under the City's hardscaping contractor licence; ask the contractor whether this job requires that licence, and ask the City whether a repair of this size counts as a minor repair, which the by-law excludes. We found no definition of minor repair in the by-law.

A written quote for this job should cover the scope of work (repair versus partial or full rebuild), how the steps are supported below grade, mortar type and joint profile, how dust will be controlled if joints are cut or ground, matching brick or stone, cleanup and disposal, and who is responsible for confirming permit requirements with the City.

If the property is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, work affecting the steps may need heritage approval before anything else proceeds. Check your designation by-law or your district's heritage conservation district plan first, then ask the City's heritage staff to confirm what consent is needed before work begins.

Q2

Should I replace brick steps with stone steps in Orleans?

Brick or stone, replacing steps has too few published prices to quote a range, so the comparison starts with getting two or three written quotes for each option.

A mason looking at them will want to know how many risers there are, whether the current base is sound, and whether the steps provide access to the building's main entrance. That last point matters because the City of

Ottawa's advisory on landscaping materials notes that steps providing access to a building, or where there is more than 600 mm difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces, can trigger a building permit. The Building Code also requires that foundations for exterior steps go to a depth that accounts for frost; ask any mason you meet how the base will be supported below grade. These are questions to put to the City as well, before work starts.

On the City hardscaping licence: steps are a named feature under the City's hardscaping contractor licence by-law. Ask each contractor whether the job requires that licence, and ask the City whether a repair of your scale counts as a minor repair, which the by-law excludes. We found no definition of minor repair in the by-law.

A written quote for steps, in either material, should spell out: the number of risers and treads being replaced or rebuilt, what happens to the existing base, where the replacement material comes from and how it is matched to the house, how mortar joints will be cut or removed and how dust will be controlled on site, cleanup and disposal of old material, and who is responsible for asking the City about permits.

If the property is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, any alteration to the steps may need heritage approval before work begins; confirm that with the City before choosing a material.

The most useful next step is to have two masons come out and look at the existing steps in person, so each quote is based on what is actually there rather than a description.

Q3

Adding a stone landing at my Stittsville front door?

A stone landing at a front door sits at the intersection of masonry work, landscaping and building access, so a few rules are worth knowing before you get quotes.

On permits: the City of Ottawa's advisory on landscaping materials providing access to a building says a permit is triggered where a structure provides access to the building or where there is more than 600 mm difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces. A landing at a front door provides access to the building, so ask the City whether this one needs a permit before work starts. Building Code 9.8.9.2.(3) also requires that foundations for exterior steps go to a depth that meets the frost requirements in Section 9.12; ask the mason how the landing will be supported below grade.

On the hardscaping licence: steps and walkways are named features under the City's hardscaping contractor licence (By-law 2002-189, Schedule 36, By-law 2025-415). The by-law excludes "minor repairs or minor alterations," but we found no definition of that phrase, and a new landing is not a repair. Ask the contractor whether

this job requires the City hardscaping licence, and check the City's published list of licence holders.

For the stone itself, the Building Code (9.20.2.5.(1)) says stone shall be sound and durable. Natural stone for a landing is a landscape material under the City's advisory; if the structure ends up over 1 m in height, a Part 4 design is required. Zoning By-law 2026-50 s.204 lets steps and landings at or below the first floor project into a front yard to a minimum setback of 0.6 m from the lot line, but some applications must also satisfy Zoning By-law 2008-250, with the more restrictive applying; confirm with the City.

There are too few published prices for a stone landing to quote a range. Ask each contractor for a written quote that covers the area and thickness of stone, how the base is prepared and to what depth, the jointing or mortar material, removal and disposal of any existing landing, and who is responsible for confirming permit requirements with the City.

If the property is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, work affecting heritage attributes requires approval before it begins; check your designation by-law or district plan, and ask the City's heritage planning staff what applies.

Q4

Rebuilding entrance steps in Kanata: permit needed?

Entrance steps in Kanata can trigger a building permit, and the short answer is: ask the City before work starts.

The City of Ottawa's advisory on landscaping materials providing access to a building sets out two situations where a permit is required: where the structure provides access to the building or serves a required egress, and where there is more than 600 mm difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces. Entrance steps provide access to the building, which is the first condition. A structure greater than 1 m in height also requires a Part 4 design.

There is also a question about how the steps sit below grade. The Building Code (9.8.9.2.(3)) says the depth below ground level for foundations for exterior steps must conform to the requirements in Section 9.12. Ask the mason how the base is supported below frost and whether that detail is part of the scope.

On the hardscaping licence: the City's hardscaping contractor licence covers businesses installing or altering steps on private property. The by-law lists four exclusions, one of which is performing minor repairs or minor alterations, but we found no definition of what counts as minor. For a full rebuild, ask the contractor whether the job requires the City hardscaping licence, and check the City's published list of hardscaping licence holders to confirm.

A few things worth having in writing before work begins: the scope of demolition and what happens to the old material, how the base is prepared and to what depth, the stone or brick specified and where it comes from, whether a permit application is included in the price or is extra, and how disposal is handled.

If the property is individually designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits in a heritage conservation district, check with the City before any work touches the exterior.

Before you commit to a contractor, ask them directly: will you pull the permit, and what does your quote include if the City requires a structural design?

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Stonework. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any fence project. Fences in Ottawa must meet the City's Fence By-law, and a free locate is required before digging any post hole. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawastonework.com** for the latest answers.