OTTAWA STONEWORK

Stone & Brick Veneer

Natural stone, manufactured stone and brick veneer: the Building Code's 70 mm units, 25 mm minimum air space, ties, weep holes and flashing

4 Expert Answers from Masonry IQ

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Q1

Natural versus manufactured stone veneer for an Ottawa house front?

Natural stone veneer is the more expensive of the two in published Ontario contractor pricing, 2025–26: natural stone at about $35 to $75 per sq ft installed and manufactured stone veneer at about $18 to $36 per sq ft installed; your quote will differ based on the wall, the stone and the job conditions.

What the Building Code says about veneer

Under O. Reg. 163/24 s. 9.20.6.4, solid masonry veneer units are not less than 70 mm thick, with not less than a 25 mm air space behind the veneer over a wood-frame wall. Veneer less than 90 mm thick requires unraked joints. Corrosion-resistant metal ties, not less than 0.76 mm thick and 22 mm wide, connect the veneer to the structure; the Code sets three maximum spacings: 400 mm vertical by 800 mm horizontal, 500 mm by 600 mm, or 600 mm by 400 mm. Throughwall flashing directs any moisture in the air space to the exterior, and weep holes are spaced not more than 800 mm apart at the base of the cavity.

For slab and panel facings of natural or artificial stone, s. 9.20.6.6 requires conformance with Subsection 4.3.2. If the stone being considered is thin-cut or panel format rather than a solid unit, ask the mason and the City how that system is assessed and attached.

What to weigh when choosing

Beyond the price gap, ask what matching material will be available if a section ever needs repair. A mason at the wall can tell you which system suits your substrate, what the air space and tie layout will look like, and whether the existing structure needs any preparation before veneer goes on.

A fair written quote for either material should include the area of wall, the stone type and source, air space and tie layout, flashing and weep-hole details, mortar colour and joint profile, scaffolding if the wall is above the first storey, and removal and disposal of any existing cladding.

If the property is designated or in a heritage conservation district, approval for re-cladding the front may be needed before work starts; ask the City's heritage staff before committing to either material.

Q2

Can thin brick be added to a house front in Barrhaven?

Thin brick can be added to a house front in Barrhaven, but how the system is assessed under the Ontario Building Code depends on what "thin brick" means in your case.

The Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24, s.9.20.6.4) says masonry veneer units shall be not less than 70 mm thick. Thin brick is thinner than that. Section 9.20.6.6 covers slab and panel facings of natural or artificial stone and directs those to a Part 4 structural design under s.4.3.2. Thin brick is a different product, and we found no Building Code clause that places it squarely in either category. Ask the City of Ottawa how the system you are considering is assessed before work begins.

A few things shape what the job involves and what a quote should cover. An air space behind masonry veneer is required by the Code (s.9.20.6.4: not less than 25 mm over wood frame), and flashing and weep holes are required at the base of the cavity so moisture that collects in the air space can drain out (s.9.20.13.3, s.9.20.13.8). Corrosion-resistant ties are required at maximum spacings of 400 mm by 800 mm, 500 mm by 600 mm, or 600 mm by 400 mm (s.9.20.9.5). Whether a thin brick system can meet those requirements the same way full-depth veneer does is a question for the mason and possibly an engineer.

A written quote for this work should spell out the product and its thickness, how it attaches to the wall (mechanical ties, adhesive, a proprietary panel system), what happens at windows and doors, how flashing and drainage are handled, mortar type and joint profile, and cleanup and disposal.

There are too few published prices for thin brick systems to quote a range; ask each contractor for a line-item breakdown so quotes are easy to compare.

Because the Code classification for thin brick is not straightforward, the right first call is to the City's building permit staff, who can tell you whether the system you have in mind needs a permit and how it is reviewed.

Q3

Is it a problem that my weep holes are blocked in Kanata?

Blocked weep holes are worth addressing. They sit at the base of the air space behind your brick veneer, and their job under the Ontario Building Code (9.20.13.8.(1)) is to let moisture that collects in that cavity drain to the outside.

The Code requires weep holes spaced not more than 800 mm apart at the bottom of cavities and veneer air spaces, including above lintels. When they are blocked, water that finds its way behind the veneer has nowhere to go. A National Research Council building digest (CBD-30) notes that frost damage depends on the degree of saturation with water, among other factors, and that below a certain degree of saturation no damage occurs.

A few things a mason will look at on your wall:

- what is blocking the holes (mortar droppings, insect nests, debris, or a previous repair that filled them in)
- whether the flashing beneath the weep holes is intact and directing water outward
- whether any brick near the base shows staining, spalling or mortar deterioration that points to water sitting behind the veneer

On sealers: a National Research Council building digest (CBD-30) notes that with a vapour-permeable but water-repellent membrane on the outer face, salts can be deposited behind the surface layer and the resulting force of crystallization can cause the skin to spall. Ask the mason before applying anything to the wall face.
Ask the mason to check the surrounding mortar joints and flashing at the same time, since the Code's flashing (9.20.13.6) and weep holes (9.20.13.8) work together to direct water out of the air space. Get the scope of work, the mortar type and colour match, and any warranty in writing before work starts.

The most useful question to put to the mason before you agree to anything: what condition is the flashing behind those weep holes in, and will the quote include inspecting and reporting on it?

Q4

How big an air space goes behind brick veneer in Ontario?

The Ontario Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24, s. 9.20.6.4) sets 25 mm as the minimum air space behind masonry veneer over a wood-frame wall. We found no maximum in the Code.

That minimum is a floor, not a target. The actual gap on a given project depends on the thickness of the veneer unit, the wall assembly, the flashing and weep-hole layout, and how the ties are installed. The Code (s. 9.20.9.5) requires corrosion-resistant straps not less than 0.76 mm thick and 22 mm wide, at maximum spacings of 400 mm vertical by 800 mm horizontal, 500 mm vertical by 600 mm horizontal, or 600 mm vertical by 400 mm horizontal. Throughwall flashing is required so that any moisture collecting in the air space is directed to the exterior (s. 9.20.13.3), and weep holes are required at the bottom of the cavity, spaced not more than 800 mm apart (s. 9.20.13.8.(1)).

Veneer units themselves must be not less than 70 mm thick (s. 9.20.6.4). For slab or panel facings of natural or artificial stone, the Code points to Subsection 4.3.2, which is a design provision; if you are looking at thin or panel stone rather than full-unit brick, ask the City how that system is assessed.

On a repair or re-cladding job, the mason will need to confirm what is behind the existing veneer before specifying the new assembly. If the work involves rebuilding a section or altering an opening, that may be construction under the Building Code Act; the City can say whether a permit is needed.

If you are getting quotes, ask each contractor to note the air-space dimension, tie spacing, flashing termination points and weep-hole spacing in writing, along with where the veneer units come from and how joints will be finished.

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.