OTTAWA STONEWORK

Hiring & Quotes

Choosing a mason in Ottawa: what Ontario's non-compulsory trade status means, the City hardscaping licence, WSIB clearance questions, what a written masonry quote should include, and comparing quotes

5 Expert Answers from Masonry IQ

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Q1

Does my Ottawa mason need the hardscaping licence for new steps?

Steps are named in the City of Ottawa's hardscaping licensing by-law, so the licence question is real and worth asking directly. Whether your contractor needs it depends on how the City reads the scope of your job.

The hardscaping licence (By-law 2002-189, Schedule 36, as amended by By-law 2025-415) covers businesses installing or altering hard landscaping features on private property, and steps are among the named features. The by-law does exclude "minor repairs or minor alterations" under By-law 2026-222, but we found no definition of what counts as minor. New steps are not the same as a small repair, so that exclusion may not apply, but the City decides, not us.

A few things to sort out before you hire:

- Ask the contractor directly whether they hold the City hardscaping licence. For 2026 it costs $319 and expires October 31; the City's licence page lists its insurance and other requirements. You can also check the City's published list of hardscaping licence holders.
- Ask the City whether your specific job, new steps rather than a patch repair, falls under the licence requirement or the minor-repair exclusion.
- On permits: entrance steps can trigger a building permit where the structure provides access to the building or where there is more than 600 mm difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces. Ask the City whether your steps need one before work starts.
- The Building Code (9.8.9.2.(3)) sets foundation depth requirements for exterior steps; ask the contractor how the steps will be supported below frost.
- If the property is designated or in a heritage conservation district, heritage approval may also be required before any work begins.

For the written quote, ask that it spells out the materials, how the base is prepared and supported, mortar type, cleanup and disposal, and who is responsible for confirming permit and licence requirements with the City.
The most useful question to put to any contractor before signing: can you show me your City hardscaping licence and confirm in writing who will pull any required permits?

To move things forward, have two masons come to the site and look at the existing steps and grade before you compare quotes.

Q2

What questions should I ask an Ottawa mason before repointing?

Here are the questions worth covering before you sign for repointing.

About the work itself

- How do you cut out the old mortar, and how will you control the dust on site? (Mortar removal generates silica dust, a regulated workplace hazard; ask about wet cutting, dust extraction and respirators.)
- What mortar type and mix are you planning, and how will you match the colour and joint profile of the existing joints?
- How deep will you rake the joints before repointing?
- Will any bricks need replacing, and if so, where will matching brick come from?
- What joint profile will you finish with, and how does that match what is there now?

About the quote

- What area of wall does this price cover, and is scaffolding or a lift included or quoted separately?
- Is removal and disposal of old mortar included?
- Is there a minimum charge if the job is smaller than expected?
- What does the written warranty cover, and for how long?

About the contractor

- What repointing work have you done in Ottawa, and can I see examples or speak with a past client?
- Who will be on site doing the work, and are they experienced with this type of masonry?
- Will you carry commercial general liability insurance for this job, and can I see a current certificate?

A couple of practical points

The Building Code (9.20.14.1) says mortar and masonry shall be kept at or above 5°C during installation and for not less than 48 h after, so if the job runs into cold weather, ask how that will be managed. Get the full agreement in writing before work starts; under the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, a written direct agreement over $50 gives you 10 days to cancel after you receive it, and if the agreement includes an estimate, the contractor cannot charge more than 10 per cent above it.

One line to check in a repointing quote: ask whether scaffolding is a firm figure or an allowance, and get it as a firm figure before you sign.

Q3

Finding an Ottawa mason who repoints with lime mortar?

To find a mason who works with lime mortar, say upfront, in your request, that you want lime-based mortar and ask each respondent to describe their experience with it specifically.

When you speak with a mason, a few things are worth asking directly:

- What lime-mortar mixes have they used, and on what kind of jobs?
- Can they show past work or references from lime-mortar repointing?
- How do they match mortar colour and joint profile to the existing wall?
- How do they cut out the old joints, and how will they control silica dust on site?
- What does the written quote specify about mortar type, colour match and joint profile?

On the mortar itself: the Ontario Building Code (9.20.3.1) requires mortar to conform to CSA A179 and that lime used in mortar be hydrated. The Code sets no rule requiring lime mortar, matching old mortar, or using a mortar softer than the brick. The push toward lime-rich mortar for historic walls comes from heritage district plans. The Centretown and Minto Park plan, for example, states that "lime-based mortar should be used when repointing historic brick and masonry as cement mortar prevents moisture from escaping through the mortar and causes brick damage," and that "using a mason experienced in lime-based mortar is encouraged." The Wilbrod/Laurier and Daly Avenue plans make the same point about matching the original in composition.
Because Brick and Stone Mason (401A) is a non-compulsory trade in Ontario, you cannot look a mason up on the Skilled Trades Ontario public register. Ask instead about their training, how many lime-mortar jobs they have done, and whether they have worked on older Ottawa brick. Get the mortar specification, joint profile and colour match written into the quote before any work starts.

When you send a request, mention that lime mortar is a requirement; masons listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory reply by email if they take on that work.

If the house is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, the starting point is your district's heritage conservation district plan or your designation by-law, then a direct message to the City's heritage staff to confirm what approvals the work needs before a mason is booked.

Q4

Do masons in Ottawa need any licence?

Masonry in Ontario is a non-compulsory trade, so a mason is not required to hold a certificate to work. We found no Ontario licence for masonry contractors either.

The one licence that can come into play is the City of Ottawa's hardscaping contractor licence, which covers businesses installing or altering hard landscaping features on private property. Steps, walkways and patios are named features under that by-law. House walls, veneer and repointing are not named. The by-law also excludes minor repairs or minor alterations, though we found no definition of what counts as minor. So whether a given job needs the City hardscaping licence depends on what the work is: for steps or a garden wall, ask the contractor whether the job falls under it, and check the City's published list of hardscaping licence holders to confirm. For 2026, the licence costs $319 and expires each October 31; the City's licence page lists its insurance and other requirements.

Because Brick and Stone Mason (401A) and Restoration Mason (244H) are both non-compulsory trades under Ontario's Skilled Trades Ontario framework, a mason's name will not appear on the Skilled Trades Ontario public register. You cannot look someone up there to confirm their credentials. What you can do is ask directly about their training, years of experience, and the kinds of jobs they have completed, and ask to see examples of past work.

On WSIB, a business in construction is required to have coverage, with some exceptions. As an owner-occupier hiring a mason for your own home, you are not required to obtain a WSIB clearance certificate, though you may still ask for one. A clearance is valid for up to 90 calendar days. If the property is a rental, that exemption does not apply.

In practical terms, the questions worth asking any mason before hiring are about their experience with the specific type of work, whether they carry liability insurance, and whether they have WSIB coverage. Get the answers in writing.

If the house is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, check the relevant designation by-law or district plan before any work begins, then reach out to the City's heritage staff to confirm what approvals are needed.

Q5

Is there a limit on an Ottawa mason's deposit?

We found no deposit cap in Ontario law for masonry work. The Consumer Protection Act, 2002 does set a ceiling on the total charge: if the agreement includes an estimate, the contractor cannot charge more than 10 per cent above it.

The Act also requires that any direct agreement over $50 be put in writing and delivered to you, and that you have 10 days after receiving that written copy to cancel without reason. That cooling-off period is worth knowing before you hand over any money.

A few things are worth sorting out before work starts:

- Ask what the deposit covers and when the balance is due. Get both in writing.
- The Construction Act requires each payer to hold back 10 per cent of the value of work as it is supplied. Ask a lawyer about when it is safe to release that amount on a larger job.
- Ask for any warranty in writing, including what it covers and for how long.
- Brick and Stone Mason (401A) is a non-compulsory trade in Ontario, so you cannot look a mason up on the public register. Ask about their training and experience with the specific work you need done.
- We found no Ontario licence for masonry contractors. Ask the mason whether they carry commercial general liability insurance and ask to see the certificate.
- Under WSIB's expanded compulsory coverage, businesses in construction must have coverage, with some exceptions. As an owner-occupier hiring a mason for your own home, you are not required to obtain a WSIB clearance certificate, but you may still ask for one. It is valid for up to 90 calendar days. The exemption does not apply to a rental property.

Before work starts, ask the mason for a written contract showing the full scope and price, and request a WSIB clearance certificate if you want confirmation of their coverage status.

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.