OTTAWA STONEWORK

Stone Wall Repair

Natural stone house walls above grade: limestone, sandstone and fieldstone, loose or bulging stones, and repointing stone

5 Expert Answers from Masonry IQ

ottawastonework.com/construction-brain

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Q1

Repairing an old limestone house wall in Ottawa's Lowertown?

Repairing the natural stone walls of a limestone house has too few published prices to quote a range, so ask each mason for a written quote that breaks out the scope in detail.

What drives the cost and the approach is the condition of the stone itself and the mortar joints. A mason at the wall can tell you which stones need to be reset or replaced, which joints need to be raked out and repointed, and whether any section raises a structural question that needs to go to the City first.

Mortar choice matters here. For historic walls in its district, the Centretown and Minto Park Heritage Conservation District plan states that lime-based mortar should be used when repointing historic brick and masonry, because cement mortar prevents moisture from escaping through the mortar and causes damage. It also says that using a mason experienced in lime-based mortar is encouraged. If your property is designated or sits within a heritage conservation district, check whether your district's plan has its own guidelines, or ask the City's heritage staff. Either way, ask the mason what mortar they propose and why.

A fair written quote for this job should cover:

- which stones are to be repaired, reset or replaced, and where matching limestone comes from
- the full extent of repointing, with mortar type, colour match and joint profile specified
- how joints will be cut out and how silica dust will be controlled on site
- scaffolding or lift costs if upper courses are involved
- removal and disposal of debris
- who is responsible for asking the City about permits if any section of wall is being rebuilt or structurally altered

One thing worth pinning down before you sign: ask the mason to describe, in writing, exactly how they will match the replacement stone and mortar to what is already on the wall.

Q2

Lime mortar for repointing a stone house in rural Ottawa?

Lime mortar is a reasonable choice for repointing a natural stone house, and for historic walls the Centretown Heritage Conservation District plan notes 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." That guidance applies within its district.

The Ontario Building Code (9.20.3.1.(1)) requires mortar to conform to CSA A179, and 9.20.3.1.(3) says lime used in mortar shall be hydrated. The Code sets mortar types by location: for exterior above-grade non-loadbearing walls, Type N or S; for loadbearing walls, Type S. The Code has no rule requiring lime mortar, requiring mortar softer than the stone, or requiring that new mortar match old mortar. Those expectations come from masonry practice and, where applicable, heritage district plans.

A few things are worth sorting out before work starts:

- Whether the property is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits in a heritage conservation district. If it is, alterations that affect heritage attributes can require council's written consent or a heritage permit, depending on the designation by-law or district plan. The City can confirm whether the property is designated.
- What the existing mortar is. A mason can assess the joint profile, colour and approximate composition so the new mortar can be matched in appearance. The Centretown plan says "care should be taken to match the colour and joint profile of the mortar."
- How joints are cut out. Mortar removal from stone joints involves grinding or chiselling, which generates silica dust. Ask how the crew will control dust -- wet cutting, dust extraction and respirators are the methods to ask about.
- What the written quote covers: the area of wall, the mortar type specified by name, colour matching, joint profile, and cleanup and disposal.

Start with the mason: ask them to look at the existing joints, name the mortar type they propose and explain how they arrived at it. That conversation will tell you whether you need to go further with the City or a heritage specialist.

Q3

Why is mortar falling out of my stone house in Manotick?

Mortar falls out of stone walls for a few reasons, and a mason looking at your wall is the only one who can say which applies to yours. The NRC building digest CBD-123 notes that a "crows-foot pattern on the surface of a mortar joint indicates freezing," and that "shelling of the mortar surface and general crumbling or powdering of mortar are evidence of advanced deterioration due to freezing."

What a mason will look at includes the condition of the remaining joints, whether the stone itself shows any damage, where on the wall the loss is concentrated, and whether there are signs of moisture getting behind the wall. The answers shape both the repair method and the mortar choice. The Centretown Heritage Conservation District plan notes 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." That plan applies in Centretown; if your property is designated or in another heritage conservation district, check its own plan or designation by-law before work starts.

For the repair itself, published Ontario contractor pricing for 2025-26 puts repointing at about $10 to $30 per sq ft of wall, with the middle of the published ranges at about $15 to $25. Heritage lime-mortar repointing runs about $15 to $45 per sq ft. Your quote will differ depending on how much wall is affected, whether scaffolding is needed for upper sections, the mortar type and colour match required, and how the old joints are removed.

When cutting or grinding out deteriorated joints, silica dust is a regulated workplace hazard. Ask the crew how they will control dust on site, such as wet cutting, dust extraction or respirators.

Ask for the mortar specification in writing as part of the quote.

Q4

Stone wall repair on an old Ottawa farmhouse, what's involved?

Stone wall repair on an old farmhouse is hands-on diagnostic work before it is anything else. A mason needs to look at the wall in person to understand what is moving, what is saturated, and what the stone itself is doing, before any repair scope can be set.

What the assessment covers

The condition of the mortar joints is the first thing. A mason will probe joints, look at the joint profile and depth, and check whether the stone faces are sound or flaking. The Centretown and Minto Park Heritage Conservation District plan notes 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." That plan applies in its district; elsewhere, ask the mason what the original mortar was and what they propose.

The stone itself matters too. The Ontario Building Code (9.20.2.5.(1)) states that "stone shall be sound and durable." Spalled, delaminating or cracked stones may need to be replaced or pinned; a mason will tell you which stones can be repointed around and which need to come out. A section that has shifted out of plane is a different conversation; ask whether it needs more than repair.

Moisture is the other piece. A mason can look at staining, efflorescence and the pattern of deterioration, but they will tell you what they see, not promise a cause.

What a written quote should cover

Ask for the scope to spell out: the area of wall being repointed or repaired, whether any stones are being replaced and where matching stone comes from, the mortar type and how it was matched to the original, how joints are cut out and how silica dust will be controlled on site, scaffolding or lift requirements for upper sections, and cleanup and disposal. There are too few published prices for stone wall repair to quote a reliable range, so get at least two itemised quotes and compare them line by line. If any section of the wall is bulging, leaning or loadbearing in a way that affects the structure, that repair may be construction under the Building Code Act and could need a permit; the right person to ask first is the City's building permit staff, at buildingpermits@ottawa.ca.

Start with the mason on site: they can tell you what is a straightforward repointing job, what needs stone replacement, and what warrants a second opinion from an engineer before anyone picks up a chisel.

Q5

Loose stones in my Greely house wall: can they be reset?

Loose stones in a house wall can be reset in some cases; whether that is the right repair depends on what is behind them and why they moved.

A mason will want to look at each stone closely before committing to a reset. The stone itself needs to be sound and durable; a stone that has delaminated or cracked through may need replacing rather than resetting. The mortar bed and the backing behind the stone matter too: if the cavity has filled with debris, if flashing or weep holes have failed and moisture has been sitting there, or if the ties holding veneer to the frame have corroded or pulled loose, resetting the face stone alone does not address what caused the movement. The Ontario Building Code (9.20.2.5.(1)) says "Stone shall be sound and durable"; a mason inspecting the wall can tell you whether the stones that came loose meet that standard.

On cost, there are too few published prices to quote a range for stone wall repair of this kind. Ask each mason for a written quote that covers the number of stones to be reset or replaced, the condition of the mortar bed and ties behind them, how joints will be cut out and dust controlled on site, the mortar type and how it will be matched to the existing wall, and cleanup and disposal.

A few things worth putting in writing before work starts: ask where replacement stone will come from if any pieces cannot be reused, and ask how the crew will control silica dust during mortar removal, since that work involves a regulated workplace hazard. Ask what the quote includes for disposal of old material.

If your Greely property is individually designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or sits within a heritage conservation district, the rules change before any work begins: check your district's heritage conservation district plan or your designation by-law first, and if you are unsure what applies, the City's heritage planning staff can tell you what applies.

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.