Contractor Vetting Checklist

Twenty minutes of checking before you sign saves months of pain after. Use this for any California contractor, residential or commercial.

1. LICENSE AND INSURANCE

- [ ] Look up the license number at **cslb.ca.gov** (Check a License). Confirm it is **active** and the business name matches the bid and contract.
- [ ] Confirm the license class fits the job (B = general building; C-classes are specialty trades such as C-10 electrical, C-36 plumbing).
- [ ] Workers' compensation is on file with CSLB, or the contractor is officially exempt (no employees). If they have a crew and claim exempt, walk away.
- [ ] Contractor's bond is on file with CSLB. Check the complaint and disciplinary history on the same page.
- [ ] Get a certificate of insurance (general liability) sent directly from their broker. On commercial work, ask to be named additional insured.
- [ ] In California, work of $1,000 or more in labor and materials, or any job that needs a permit, requires a licensed contractor.

2. THE BID

- [ ] Get two or three bids on the **same written scope**, so you are comparing like with like.
- [ ] Look for clear inclusions, exclusions and allowances. Vague allowances are where change orders come from.
- [ ] Ask who pulls permits and who pays for them, plus any plan-check, inspection and utility fees.
- [ ] Ask for a schedule with milestones, not just a start date.
- [ ] A bid far below the others usually means missing scope. Ask what they left out.

3. THE CONTRACT

- [ ] Everything in writing: scope, price, payment schedule, start and completion dates, change-order process.
- [ ] Home improvement: the down payment is capped at **10% of the contract price or $1,000, whichever is less**, and progress payments should not get ahead of work completed.
- [ ] Home improvement sold in your home: you have a right to cancel (3 business days; 5 for owners 65 and older). The contract should say so.
- [ ] Collect conditional lien releases from the contractor, subs and suppliers with each payment, and unconditional releases once it clears.
- [ ] Know who your day-to-day contact is and how site issues get reported.

4. REFERENCES

- [ ] Call two recent clients with similar work. Ask: on budget? on schedule? would you hire them again?
- [ ] Drive by or ask to see a current job site. A clean, organized site says a lot.

Want a second set of eyes? LPD Builders walks commercial spaces and buildings across the nine Bay Area counties. Request a site walk at **lpd-builders.com/contact** or call (415) 299-5369.

General information for Bay Area property owners, not legal, engineering or financial advice. Rules change; confirm with your city building department, the CSLB and your own advisors before you act.
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