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SUGGESTIONS ON HOME MODERNIZING.

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Reconditioning, Remodeling and Modernizing.

DIVISION OF BUILDING AND HOUSING

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PRACTICAL MODERNIZING OF HOMES BENEFITS THE FAMILY  
AND INCREASES PROPERTY VALUES

Remodeling and modernizing are problems for every home owner who is concerned with increasing the worth and desirability of his property as well as with its safety, healthfulness, comfort and conveniences.

In many instances, home owners are justified in making extensive improvements especially when material and labor costs are low. In this way family needs are met and the value of the property is increased. If conditions in the community warrant large expenditures, the home owner may be justified in borrowing money in order to remodel or modernize his property, especially if the borrowing can be arranged on a safe and attractive basis.

It is evident from extensive studies that a great many homes could be materially improved at small expense. In some cases this can be done either by the owner himself or members of his family, in which case the only actual expense would be for materials.

The lack of certain commonly used services such as gas, electricity, or water has been very noticeable in many homes and is far behind what might be normally expected. Thus, a survey described in the May 1931 issue of The National Geographic Magazine showed that among nearly a quarter of a million of relatively prosperous farm homes in Illinois only 22 percent were equipped with electricity or gas, and only 57 percent had kitchen sinks with water piped to them. In contrast to this condition in 86 percent



of these same homes the families owned automobiles and 12 percent of them also owned an additional truck. Educational work is necessary in order to demonstrate the convenience and value of the commonly used services.

The occasion often arises where a house which is structurally sound may need only repainting in order to restore its standing in the community. There are also times when a substantially built old house becomes surrounded with new houses of a modern type. In this case carefully planned improvements of perhaps moderate cost will restore it to the equivalent values of other properties. Often the main value of a house is its architectural distinction and improvements which are skillfully planned will profitably distinguish it from all others.

Since each home must be looked upon as an individual problem, home owners are urged to make a survey of various conditions in the community before deciding on definite plans of improvement. This survey should cover such questions as the following:

Are the plans I have made justifiable for the house and the community? Is the community one in which it is best for us to continue to live? Has it a good health department? Are schools and churches adequate? Does the neighborhood provide convenient marketing facilities? Are water, telephone, light, and gas service facilities already established? Are land values subject to fluctuation over a period of years and what are the future possibilities? Is the property subject to stringent restrictions? Are adequate



recreational facilities provided, such as parks, playgrounds, amusements, etc? All of these features are important to consider before definite expenditures are decided upon.

It is also important in many cases to take into consideration all factors pertaining to family welfare. Comfortable and convenient space should be provided for social entertainment as well as privacy for those members of the family who desire it. Possibilities of building additional rooms, as the family increases, should be considered. This, of course, would be largely determined by the length of time the older children remain at home. However, <sup>a</sup> /too radical plan of remodeling the house to meet the needs of a given family may render the property less saleable and thereby cause a loss on the investment.

It should also be remembered that large investments in remodeling and modernizing of homes may not always be wise. For instance, a house which has been allowed to run down for a long time may be beyond the point of economical repair. It may also be of such construction or design that its remodeling is not only uneconomic, but architecturally undesirable or structurally impracticable. Consideration should be given to surrounding topography and possibilities of future changes in development, zoning regulations, commercial structures, industrial housing, etc., which would tend to have an effect on property values.

#### FINANCING.

Many home owners are able to engage in modernization without special financing. The investment will be more profitable if the



improvements can be done when material costs are low, cash discounts obtained, and skilled workmen are available. If advantages can be taken of this condition the investment may be considered a safe and constructive one. The reliable home owner can establish a basis of credit which enables him to do any extensive work involving the purchase of materials, accessory equipment etc. on a deferred payment plan.

In some cases direct loans can be obtained from funds provided specifically for home improvements by banks, building and loan associations, and others. In some cases personal notes of long duration may be justified and are acceptable by material companies and others. These are discounted at the banks and both the company furnishing the material and the home owner supplying the work are thereby benefited. The creating of a small mortgage or increasing an existing mortgage in order to make property improvements is entirely practicable and justifiable. In some states, loans may be made by large builders or some mail order houses through their own or other acceptance channels, which are secured by a mortgage or personal notes.

In view of all the various facilities offered in financing improvements, there are precautions which should be taken so that indebtedness, to make major alterations, should not be incurred, unless the technical and expert advice, and the appraisal, justifies the investment and increases resale value of the property.

It is suggested that before undertaking any large increase in total and current indebtedness each family should organize its income and expenditures on a strict budget basis to make sure that



large home alterations will not be an undue burden.

#### GENERAL CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

In considering which features of the house should be improved to meet some standard of comfort, careful attention should be given only to those which will allow "permissible expenditure." It is, therefore, important to inspect those items included in the interior of the house, the exterior, and the house equipment in order to determine from which improvement the most benefit will be obtained. The following general construction details may assist in determining parts of the house in need of attention.

#### INTERIOR OF HOUSE

- (a) Basements should be well ventilated and have dry foundation walls and floors. Where there are no basements, a well ventilated clear area between ground and first floor, with the floor properly insulated, is essential.
- (b) Fire hazards must be reduced to a minimum and walls and roof be weathertight, and sufficiently insulated for comfort in summer or winter.
- (c) Ample number of doors and windows to permit adequate sunlight and ventilation. These should fit closely but work easily.
- (d) All rooms should be conveniently arranged in order that all available space is well utilized.



- (e) Floors, walls, woodwork, and ceilings should be refinished at regular intervals to keep them in good condition.

#### EXTERIOR OF HOUSE

- (a) The exterior walls should be of durable materials and kept attractive as well as in good repair.
- (b) Materials selected for roofs, gutters and downspouts according to life of service, are the most economical.
- (c) Chimneys should be substantially built and designed for proper draft.
- (d) Tight fitting screens of non-corrosive material add considerable comfort and convenience to a house.
- (e) Landscaping should harmonize with the type of house, and all walks, driveways and lawns should be built to permit good drainage and easy access to the house entrance without interfering with ample lawn and yard space.

#### HOUSE EQUIPMENT

- (a) For comfort and convenience an efficient heating system should be provided, preferably one which makes hot water for domestic uses readily available when required.
- (b) For health and comfort, an adequate sanitary plumbing



system is a necessity.

(c) A safely constructed electric wiring system which provides sufficient outlets to permit well-distributed light and conveniently located appliances has a direct influence on family activities.

(d) The importance of as many labor saving devices as the family income will permit should be considered from the welfare angle.



## HOME INSPECTION LIST

The following check list is intended as a reference guide for home owners:

### Basement

1. Is the basement entrance in need of attention?
2. Does the stairway need new treads and risers or a hand rail?
3. Can the stairway be painted to prevent stumbling in the dark?
4. Is the ceiling clearance sufficient?
5. Do the foundation walls require repairing or decorating?
6. Is the ceiling insulated?
7. Do the walls or floor require waterproofing?
8. Is the basement floor in need of repair?
9. Should drain tile be installed?
10. Are the window sash in good condition?
11. Are window locks satisfactory?
12. Is the hot water heater meeting requirements?
13. Can a hot water coil be provided in the heating system?
14. Is a floor drain needed?
15. Are the laundry tubs satisfactory?
16. Is the fuel storage room satisfactory?
17. Can a coal chute be provided?
18. Would a clean-out door be desirable?
19. Is the natural lighting sufficient?
20. Should new electric light fixtures be installed?
21. Are more convenience outlets desired?
22. Are water pipe shut-off valves included in the system?
23. Would a recreation room be desirable?
24. Should fruit storage space be provided?
25. Should a basement toilet be installed?

### Exterior Walls

1. Does the brickwork require cleaning or repairs?
2. Does the stucco work require repairs or refinishing?
3. Does the stonework need attention?
4. Is the siding weathertight and sound?

### Heating

1. Is the boiler satisfactory?
2. Is the furnace meeting requirements?
3. Should heater covering be provided?
4. Is pipe covering needed?
5. Is the fire protection above the heater satisfactory?
6. Does the smoke pipe require attention?
- 6a. Would a gas water heater prove convenient?



7. Are the radiators providing satisfactory service?
8. Do the valves function properly?
9. Is the oil burner in need of attention?
10. Should thermostats be provided?
11. Would an automatic feed system be desirable.

#### Electric Wiring

1. Is the system (such BX cable -- conduit -- open, etc.) safe and meeting family needs?
2. Should a special power line be provided?
3. Would safety switch boxes be desirable?

#### Plumbing

1. Are the water pipes meeting requirements?
2. Are shut-off valves needed?
3. Are the cleanout facilities satisfactory?
4. Is a new bath tub required?
5. Should an additional lavatory be provided?
6. Could a new shower be installed?
7. Is a new sink needed?
8. Are the toilets satisfactory?
9. Is a new hot water tank required?
10. Is a vent pipe needed?
11. Is pipe covering required?

#### Kitchen

1. Could a more convenient arrangement be made?
2. Are the windows satisfactory?
3. Is the light and ventilation good?
4. Is a new sink needed?
5. Are the drain boards satisfactory?
6. Is the table space ample?
7. Would a power dishwasher be desirable?
8. Could the range be more conveniently placed?
9. Could the refrigerator be more conveniently placed?
10. Is a new kitchen cabinet needed?
11. Is a gas stove vent pipe needed?
12. Are additional convenience outlets required?
13. Should new light fixtures be provided?
14. Is the kitchen floor in need of attention?
15. Should new cupboards be provided?
16. Can the miscellaneous storage space be more conveniently utilized?
17. Would the installation of a breakfast nook be desirable?
18. Would a built-in broom closet be helpful?



19. Should a built-in ironing board be provided?
20. Could a built-in table be provided?
21. Is the installation of a ventilating fan desirable?
22. Would a dumb waiter be helpful?
23. Should an incinerator be installed?
24. Are the faucets satisfactory?
25. Would an oven regulator be helpful?
26. Should a package or milk receiver be included?
27. Is the cooking range satisfactory?
28. Does the entrance to the dining room require attention?
29. Is the back porch in need of repair?
30. Is the wainscot attractive?
31. Should the ceiling be redecorated?

#### Dining Room

1. Does the dining room meet the family needs?
2. Is the trim attractive?
3. Do the shades need replacement?
4. Should the walls be redecorated?
5. Is the ceiling treatment attractive?
6. Is the entrance to the living room convenient?
7. Are the windows weathertight?
8. Is the view and exposure satisfactory?
9. Is the buffet conveniently placed?
10. Would a rearrangement permit more convenient wall space for the china cabinet?
11. Could built-in cabinets be installed?
12. Are new ceiling lights needed?
13. Are new convenience outlets desirable?
14. Should side lights be installed?
15. Does the location of registers or radiators harmonize with the room arrangement?
16. Is the floor finish in need of renewal?
17. Is the location in relation to the kitchen desirable?
18. Would it be advantageous to have a new fireplace?
19. Would the installation of swinging doors be desirable?

#### Living Room

1. Is the location desirable?
2. Does the size of the room meet requirements?
3. Is the wall treatment attractive?
4. Should the ceiling be redecorated?
5. Is the ceiling height sufficient?
6. Would the installation of a new fireplace be practicable?
7. Is the entry to the hall convenient?
8. Do the windows require attention?
9. Are the doorways satisfactory?



10. Does the room permit proper wall space for the piano?
11. Is the davenport conveniently placed?
12. Would a rearrangement of other furniture add to the room's appearance?
13. Does the floor finish require renewal?
14. Should new convenience outlets be installed?
15. Are the wall fixtures meeting requirements?
16. Would new ceiling lights be desirable?
17. Is the location of radiators or registers desirable?
18. Are the light switches satisfactory?
19. Should new book cases be installed?
20. Is the view and exposure desirable?
21. Would the addition of an enclosed porch be practicable?

#### Halls and Stairs

1. Is the front door in need of attention?
2. Is the front vestibule satisfactory?
3. Does the hall need redecorating?
4. Are additional coat closets needed?
5. Does the size of the stairway permit free passage of furniture?
6. Could stairs be installed from the landing to the kitchen?
7. Are the stair treads and risers of proper size?
8. Do the stairs need refinishing?
9. Are the landings in need of attention?
10. Is the upper hall satisfactory?
11. Is the headroom on the stairway sufficient?

#### Closets

1. Would the installation of cedar lined closets be practicable?
2. Should a new dress closet be installed?
3. Should new shelves be added?
4. Are additional hangers, hooks, and fixtures needed?
5. Should new lights be installed?
6. Would special built-in features, such as space for shoes and hats, be desirable?
7. Could a clothes chute be installed?
8. Would extra linen closets be desirable?

#### Bedrooms

1. Is the room size sufficient?
2. Is the ceiling height ample?
3. Do the walls need redecorating?
4. Is the ceiling treatment attractive?
5. Is the exposure desirable?



6. Do the windows permit sufficient ventilation?
7. Does the wall space permit placing twin beds?
8. Is the wall space for the double bed convenient?
9. Is the dresser conveniently placed?
10. Does the wall space permit conveniently locating the chiffonier?
11. Does the wall space permit a dressing table?
12. Is the location of radiators or registers desirable?
13. Are new convenience outlets required?
14. Would the installation of mirror doors be desirable?
15. Are the light fixtures satisfactory?
16. Could an additional dressing room be installed?
17. Is the closet space sufficient?
18. Does the floor finish require renewal?
19. Would additional individual closets be practicable?

#### Bathroom

1. Is the bathroom conveniently located?
2. Do the walls need redecorating?
3. Is the ceiling treatment attractive?
4. Should the floors be refinished?
5. Is the room size sufficient?
6. Is the outside window included?
7. Are new clothes hooks needed?
8. Would new metal alloy fixtures be desirable?
9. Should additional built-in drawers be installed?
10. Are new convenience outlets needed?
11. Is an extra medicine cabinet desirable?
12. Is an extra mirror needed?
13. Could new shaving lights be installed?
14. Would the installation of a new silent toilet be desirable?
15. Would a new shower be advisable?
16. Should a built-in tub be installed?
17. Are new towel racks needed?
18. Is the glass in the window opaque?
19. Would an extra door be desirable?
20. Would new built-in fixtures be desirable?
21. Is the tile height on the walls satisfactory?
22. Would a set of scales be desirable?
23. Should new recessed soap holders be installed?
24. Would a tub hand support be desirable?

#### Attic

1. Are the stairs in need of attention?
2. Does the flooring require finishing?
3. Is the chimney satisfactory?
4. Is the ventilation sufficient?
5. Are the windows in need of attention?

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INDEX

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6. Are additional heating facilities required?
7. Are new lights needed?
8. Would a playroom for the children be desirable?
9. Should an extra bedroom be partitioned off?
10. Are the storage facilities satisfactory?
11. Would the installation of heat insulation be practicable?

#### Roof Exterior

1. Is the roofing material in need of attention?
2. Is the slope of the roof satisfactory?
3. Is the flashing around the chimneys in need of repair?
4. Is the height of the chimney above the peak of the roof sufficient?
5. Are the gutters and down spouts in need of reconditioning?
6. Should any down spouts be connected to the sewer line?

#### Miscellaneous Equipment

1. Is new radio wiring antenna needed?
2. Would new wall beds be desirable?
3. Would a concealed radiation system be practicable?
4. Would new laundry driers be helpful?
5. Would ornamental humidifiers increase the family comfort?
6. Is the installation of air conditioning equipment feasible?
7. Is a water-softening system needed?
8. Would a basement workbench be desirable?
9. Should new radiant gas heaters be provided for any rooms?
10. Would special door and window hardware be desirable?
11. Would a solarium with health glass be desirable?
12. Should electric logs be installed?
13. Are intercommunicating telephones needed?
14. Would burglar or fire alarms be desirable?
15. Would an illuminated house number be helpful?
16. Are new silent sash pulleys needed?
17. Would a door bell transformer be helpful?
18. Are new screens needed?
19. Should extra awnings be provided?
20. Would outside hose connections be desirable?
21. Would new shutters add to the appearance of the house?
22. Should lightning arrestors be provided?

#### Built-in Garage

1. Is the size sufficient to meet requirements?
2. Is the floor level satisfactory?
3. Is the drainage properly handled?
4. Is better fire protection needed?
5. Is the entrance satisfactory?



### Detached Garage

1. Is the size sufficient?
2. Is the entrance conveniently placed?
3. Is the floor in need of attention?
4. Is the door construction satisfactory?
5. Is the roof in need of renewal?
6. Are the windows satisfactory?
7. Are new lights needed?
8. Are the water facilities satisfactory?
9. Would a workbench be helpful?
10. Is extra storage space needed?

### General

1. Should new fences be provided?
2. Are the walks in need of attention?
3. Do the front steps require reconditioning?
4. Is the porch roof weathertight?
5. Is the porch floor in need of refinishing?
6. Are new screens needed?
7. Is the driveway in need of attention?
8. Are new clothes poles needed?
9. Should playground space be provided?
10. Would new flower boxes be desirable?
11. Should trellis work be installed?
12. Would garden seats be helpful?
13. Should a drying yard be provided?
14. Is new planting desirable?



BRIEF REFERENCE LIST OF  
PUBLICATIONS ON HOME BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE

Letter Circular 237, "List of Published Material Relating to Home Building and Maintenance," may be secured from the Division of Building and Housing, Bureau of Standards.

Care and Repair of the House, by V. B. Phelan of the Division of Building and Housing, may be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. for the price of 20¢. This publication tells how to keep the house and its equipment in the most useful condition and should be especially helpful to those home owners who like to make minor repairs themselves.

Bibliography on Building and Housing, Prepared by Civic Development Department, United States Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D. C.

The Better Homes Manual, Edited by Blanche Halbert, Better Homes in America, 1653 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C.





