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PROFESSIONAL HOUSE DOCTOR SINCE MARCH 1976
PROFESSIONAL HOME INSPECTOR SINCE MARCH 1986

WHAT IS INVESTIGATIVE CONTRACTING?

Definition of Investigative:

Adjective:

- 1 Of or relating to: *investigative methods*.
- 2 Characterized by or engaged in investigation; specializing in uncovering and reporting hidden information.

Often in Home Inspection reports the home inspector will state that farther investigation is required for a specific item or items. Typically, this is due to the component that would like to be observed is hidden from view by weather conditions (snow, ice, etc.), finish materials such as walls or floors and sometimes because of stored furniture or other personal belongings / property.

Case Study:

In the function, or lack thereof, of housing components it is often necessary to take apart one or more components to be able to observe what is causing an issue. Example: The grade is sloping toward a portion of the house structure or foundation and appears to be higher against the house siding and structure than the top of the foundation; i.e. the earth is covering the concrete and is actually up on the masonry or siding of the above grade wall. Visible and physical evidence may be indicating a problem: vertical wood siding is rotting and wicking moisture by capillary action up into the wood and the patio door is hard to slide open or shut. One can also see that the sliding door threshold and header detail are bowed downward. The basement ceiling under this side of the structure is finished with drywall and there is no staining.

What action is required to fully determine what is going on?

- remove the attached deck which rests directly on grade (wood and earth contact)
- dig the high grade (earth) down and slope it away from the structural foundation sill plate and rim joist
- cutout a strip of drywall in the basement ceiling

This would be the first step in "Investigative Contracting" in order to observe and determine the full extent of the damage that has taken place to-date. The next step involves correcting the problem which can become complicated and very costly, depending on how much damage has already occurred.

The next step in “Investigative Contracting” is to prepare a scope of work that will replace the damaged structural members and will correct the issues that lead up to this happening in the first place.

Sample Scope of Work (for a project such as this):

- cutout a strip of drywall from the basement ceiling approximately 24” wide running parallel with the foundation wall that supports the sill plate and floor (main floor) joists
- construct a temporary supporting wall using 2 x 4 spruce lumber
- from the exterior:
 - o scrape (excavate) back the earth to provide a sub-grade slope away from the house foundation
 - o carefully cutout and remove the rotting rim joist and sill plate
 - o replace the damaged members with pressure treated lumber
 - ensure that the new sill plate is adequately secured to the concrete foundation wall > this may now have to be done using metal gusset plates on the exterior from wood down onto the concrete foundation wall
 - we won’t be able to use the original anchor bolts placed in concrete during construction
 - o cover the now exposed new lumber and securement components with “blue skin” or similar self adhesive waterproofing membrane
- this process should correctly level out or align the patio door threshold and possibly the bowing header now that the full support is back in place
 - o however if it doesn’t there may be the need for farther investigative contacting which may require replacing the subfloor directly under the door or taking apart the wall above the door to deal with the sagging header
- now or in the future provide a water shedding membrane to direct surface drainage runoff from rain, melting snow, etc. away from the house foundation and above grade wall
- backfill the surrounding 4 to 6 feet around this portion of the house structure with $\frac{3}{4}$ drainage stone to provide a positive water runoff
- on the interior remove the temporary wall structure and reinstate the drywall ceiling

As you can see from the above description, in order to correctly provide a long term solution the job often requires investigation as part of the contracting process. Until things are taken apart and investigated it is impossible to put a definite dollar value to the project.

At Patron Services Inc. we often have to approach projects in this manner. We specialize in correcting deficiencies mostly involving the building envelope and other components of the house. Deficiencies may be caused by poor practices at the time of original construction, poor quality renovations (contractor or do-it-yourself projects) but very often is due to the wrong materials and/or methods be selected by inexperienced and uninformed people. People can be architects, engineers, new home contractors, renovation contractors, trades people and homeowners.

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