



BOULDER & BEAM

OWEN SOUND & GREY-BRUCE

HOMEOWNER RESOURCE — GARAGES, SHOPS & OUTBUILDINGS

The Garage & Outbuilding Planning Guide.

Size it right, get it approved, and build it so it's still dry, solid, and square in thirty years — what to sort out before the first shovel, from a Grey-Bruce builder.

OWEN SOUND ONTARIO GREY & BRUCE COUNTY 5.0★ ON GOOGLE

The cheapest building on the property — or the most annoying one.

A garage or shop looks like a simple build, and that's exactly why so many go wrong. Skip the planning and you get the greatest hits: a slab that heaves, doors that stop sealing, a damp interior that rusts everything you store, mice in the walls — and a building that's two feet too small for what you actually do in it.

The fixes are all decisions, not dollars — and nearly every one of them has to be made **before** construction starts. This guide walks through those decisions in the order they come up on a real project, with the Grey-Bruce specifics (frost, lake-effect snow, rural lots, shoreline rules) baked in.

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Nobody has ever said "I built it too big."

The most common regret we hear isn't about money — it's about size. Vehicles have grown, gear accumulates, and a garage that fits the truck doesn't fit the truck **plus** the workbench, the mower, and the bikes. Plan for what you'll do in it, not just what you'll park in it.

COMMON BUILDS	TYPICAL FOOTPRINT	WORTH KNOWING
Single garage	14' x 24' and up	A bare 12' width fits a car, not a car plus opening doors and storage along a wall.
Double garage	24' x 24' – 28' x 28'	Two doors or one wide door — one wide door is cheaper to buy but shows more when it fails to match the house.
Shop / workshop	28' x 32' and up	Think in ceiling height too: 10'–12' walls open up hoists, lifts, mezzanine storage, and taller doors.
Storage / utility	Sized to the equipment	Measure the tallest, widest thing going inside — with its attachments on — then add margin.

PLACEMENT 01

Work with winter

Where does plowed snow go? Where does the roof shed? A door facing the prevailing wind drifts shut; a roof shedding onto the walkway makes ice. In lake-effect country this decides how much you enjoy the building from December to March.

PLACEMENT 02

Work with water

Put the building where water already wants to leave — or budget grading to make it so. High ground beats low ground every time; a building in a swale fights moisture for its whole life.

PLACEMENT 03

Work with the future

Leave room to extend a bay, add a lean-to, or park a trailer beside it. Locating a building tight to a lot line or the septic bed closes doors you may want open in ten years.

THE DRIVEWAY TEST

Before settling on a location, walk the path a vehicle takes to get in and out — including the turning radius, in snow, with something in tow. A building in the "perfect" spot that needs a five-point turn to enter gets old fast.

Paperwork first. Every time.

In Ontario, most garages and outbuildings need a building permit — as a rule of thumb, only very small detached sheds (under roughly 15 m² / 160 sq ft, with conditions) are exempt, and municipalities differ on the details. Building first and asking later can mean tear-down orders, stalled property sales, and insurance headaches.

CHECK 01

Zoning before design

Your municipality's zoning bylaw sets **setbacks** from property lines and the road, maximum **height**, and maximum **lot coverage** for accessory buildings. Check these before falling in love with a size or location — they're different in every township.

CHECK 02

The overlays rural lots forget

Waterfront and river properties often sit under **conservation authority** jurisdiction with their own permits. On septic properties, the building must keep required clearances from the **tank and bed** — and never gets built over them.

CHECK 03

Drawings & engineering

A permit application needs a site plan and construction drawings. Anything with engineered trusses or unusual spans needs the paperwork to match. Good drawings aren't bureaucracy — they're how the price stays the price.

CHECK 04

Inspections along the way

Expect inspections at key stages — typically footings before pour, framing, and final. A builder who schedules these smoothly is saving you weeks; a build that skips them is a liability you own.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH US

Boulder & Beam handles the drawings, the permit application, and the inspection schedule as part of the project — you're not chasing paperwork between the township office and the truss plant. Bring us the idea; we'll bring the file.

The decision under everything.

Almost every long-term garage complaint — heaving slabs, cracking, doors out of square, water creeping in — traces back to what's under the building. Grey-Bruce frost drives deep, and the foundation has to be designed for it, not hoped past it.

OPTION 01

Slab-on-grade

The workhorse for garages and shops: a reinforced concrete slab, often thickened at the edges, over a properly prepared granular base. Done right — compacted base, drainage, insulation where warranted — it's durable and economical. Done as "pour it on whatever's there," it heaves.

OPTION 02

Frost wall / foundation wall

Footings and walls (poured or block) that bear below frost depth, with a slab inside. The premium option for attached garages, heated buildings, and sloped or problem sites — maximum stability, and it takes finished grades in stride.

OPTION 03

Piers & posts

Right for smaller storage buildings and some pole-frame structures: concrete piers or engineered posts below frost depth. Economical and quick — but not the answer where you want a concrete floor that stays flat under vehicles.

WHERE THE MONEY ACTUALLY GOES

The invisible parts decide the lifespan: **stripping organics, compacted granular base, drainage away from the building, and the right base under the slab.** The two items most often skipped on garage quotes are **waterproofing and thermal** — dampproofing at the slab edge and walls, and under-slab or slab-edge insulation. They're treated as "house stuff," and their absence is exactly why so many garages run damp and cold. When comparing quotes, ask specifically what's under and around the concrete — that's usually where a low bid got low.

- **Ask every bidder:** what's the base prep, what's the slab thickness and reinforcement, where does roof and surface water go — and what's the plan for dampproofing and insulation? If waterproofing and thermal aren't in the quote, they're not in the building.
- **Plan the apron:** the concrete or gravel approach in front of the doors takes the most abuse and the most freeze-thaw — it deserves design, not leftovers.

Built for here, not for the catalogue.

Grey-Bruce weather is the design brief: heavy lake-effect snow loads, wind off the water, and fifty freeze-thaw cycles a winter. The structure and skin choices below all get filtered through that.

STRUCTURE

Stick frame vs. post frame

Stick framing (like a house) suits garages that match the home, insulated builds, and complex rooflines.

Post-frame is best kept to storage buildings, where its big clear spans and economy shine. Both are legitimate — the building's job picks the method, engineered trusses size the snow load either way.

ROOF

Metal earns its keep here

Steel roofing sheds snow, shrugs off wind, and outlasts shingles in this climate — which is why you see it on nearly every rural build we do. Whatever the covering: ventilation and clean flashing details matter more than the brand name.

WALLS

Cladding to match the job

Steel siding for shops and utility buildings; board-and-batten, wood, stone, brick, or house-matched siding where looks matter. If the building sits beside your home, matching rooflines and trim makes it look planned, not parked.

DOORS

The biggest moving part

Buy the door for the use: insulated sectional doors for heated space, windows for daylight, and enough **headroom** for the opener — or a lift, if that's ever the dream. Undersized doors are the #1 "wish we'd known" item; 10' wide and 8' tall accommodates modern trucks far better than the old 8' × 7'.

TIMBER ACCENTS

Exposed timber — porch posts, gable brackets, entry details — is an affordable way to make a practical building look like it belongs on the property. It's also our favourite trick for making a garage lift the value of the whole yard.

Decide before the slab, not after.

Whether the building will ever be heated is the single decision that ripples through everything else — under-slab insulation, air sealing, vapour control, door spec, even electrical service. Retrofitting a cold building into a warm one costs far more than building it warm-ready from day one.

PATH A

Insulated & heated

For year-round shops and any space you'll actually work in. The envelope needs house-grade care: air sealing, insulation continuity, slab-edge and under-slab insulation, and an insulated door that seals. Heat source can come later — the envelope can't.

PATH B

Cold storage, done right

Perfectly legitimate for equipment and seasonal storage — **if it's ventilated**. Unvented cold buildings condense moisture on cold steel, which is how stored gear ends up rusty and mouldy. Ridge and soffit ventilation is cheap insurance.

PATH A+

The smart middle: warm-ready

Build the envelope insulated and sealed, rough in the electrical, skip the heater for now. You get a building that's 10 degrees kinder in January and can become a heated shop the day you want it to — for the cost of a unit heater.

EITHER WAY

Always run the power

Every building ends up wanting lights and outlets within a year — so run a service to every build, no exceptions, while the excavation equipment is already on site. The key is sizing: spec the panel, conduit, and trench for the building's **ultimate** use — welder, compressor, EV charger, future heat — not its day-one use. Conduit is cheap; a second trench through finished landscaping is not.

RULE OF THUMB

If you'll spend more than a few hours a week in the building between November and April, the insulated envelope pays you back every single winter. If it's pure storage, spend the difference on ventilation and size.

Why one 30-year-old garage is fine and another is firewood.

Two buildings, same size, same year, same budget — one is dry and square at thirty, the other sags, leaks, and houses raccoons. The difference is almost never the lumber. It's a short list of details:

- **Grade that falls away.** The finished ground should slope away from the building on every side. Water that pools against a slab edge or wall finds its way in — then freezes.
- **Real overhangs.** Roof overhangs keep rain and roof-shed snow off the siding and the slab edge. Most zero-overhang builds streak, rot, and ice up in practice — but if the clean, no-overhang look is what you're after, it can be done right: standing-seam steel, detailed properly at every edge and transition, carries the water job the overhang would have done.
- **Flashing at every transition.** Roof-to-wall, door and window heads, slab-to-siding. Caulking is a consumable; flashing is a detail. Buildings fail where materials meet.
- **Ventilation, heated or not.** Moisture gets into every building — the question is whether it can leave.
- **Critter discipline.** Mice and squirrels enter at gaps around doors, at soffit intersections, and anywhere cladding meets concrete imperfectly. Tight construction and sealed penetrations beat traps every time.
- **A door threshold that seals.** The gap under a garage door is the building's biggest air leak, snow scoop, and rodent gate. Spec the threshold and the bottom seal like you mean it.
- **Paint-grade ends early.** Cut ends of siding and trim sealed during construction — not after the first winter finds them.

THE PATTERN

Every item on this list is cheap on build day and expensive afterwards. This is what "built properly" means in practice — not premium materials, just **nothing skipped where the building can't be reopened.**

What moves the number, and when to start.

Two identical-looking buildings can be tens of thousands apart. These are the levers — knowing them makes every quote comparable:

LEVER 01

Foundation & site

Slab vs. frost wall, how much grading and granular the site needs, and access for equipment. The dirt work is the least visible line and the most variable.

LEVER 02

Envelope spec

Cold shell vs. insulated and heated is the biggest single swing after size. Doors and windows follow close behind.

LEVER 03

Size & height

Footprint drives everything, but wall height is sneaky-cheap: going from 8' to 10' or 12' walls costs far less per foot of usefulness than adding floor area later.

TIMING IN GREY-BRUCE

Foundations want to be in before deep frost; framing and cladding continue happily all winter. Practically: **book in fall or winter for the earliest start** — waiting for spring puts you in the queue with everyone else who waited for spring.

THE PLANNING CHECKLIST – TEN QUESTIONS BEFORE ANYONE QUOTES

- What will the building do in five years, not just this one?
- What's the biggest thing that must fit through the door?
- Where does plowed snow, roof snow, and rainwater go?
- What do zoning setbacks and lot coverage allow here?
- Any overlays — conservation authority, shoreline, septic clearances?
- Heated, cold, or warm-ready?
- Slab, frost wall, or piers — and what's under the slab?
- What electrical will it need at year five?
- Match the house, or deliberately distinct?
- Who handles drawings, permit, and inspections?

Ready when you are.

Boulder & Beam is a building team based in Owen Sound. We design and build garages, shops, and outbuildings across Grey and Bruce County — slab to roof, one standard — with the same building-science detailing we put into homes. Detached or attached, insulated or cold, matched to the house or deliberately its own thing.

DETACHED & ATTACHED GARAGES

SHOPS & WORKSHOPS

STORAGE & UTILITY BUILDINGS

INSULATED & HEATED BUILDS

TIMBER ACCENTS

METAL ROOFING & SIDING

The next step costs nothing: a site visit and a straight answer on scope, budget, and timing. See recent builds at boulderandbeam.com/services/garages-outbuildings.



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