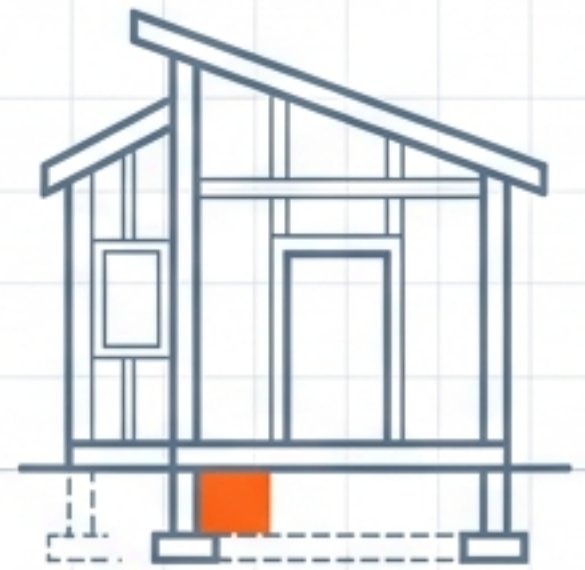


San Francisco ADU Economics 2026

The Unfiltered Costs, Hidden Fees,
and Structural Realities of Building in
the City.

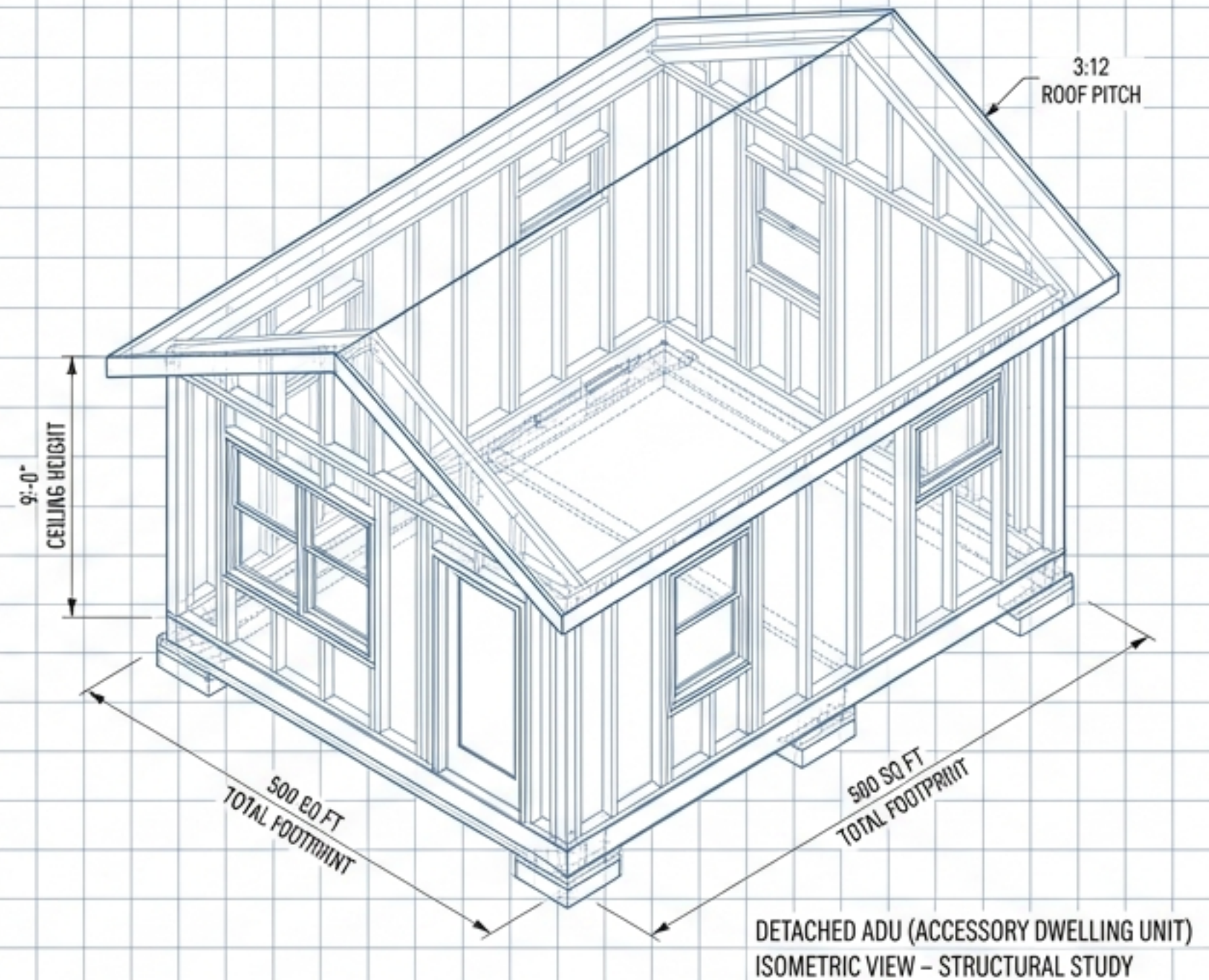


Median Project Cost:

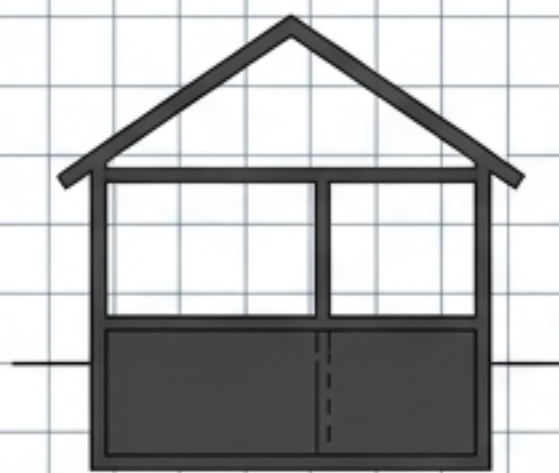
\$445,000

Total Cost Range:
\$250,000 – \$650,000

Standard Timeline:
12 to 18 Months



These figures represent total project cost—from initial schematic design to final certificate of occupancy.



Basic (Garage/Basement Conversion)

Size: 400 – 600 sq. ft.

Cost/sq. ft.: \$500 – \$750

Total Cost: \$250,000 – \$380,000

Notes: Builder-grade finishes; utilizes existing structure.



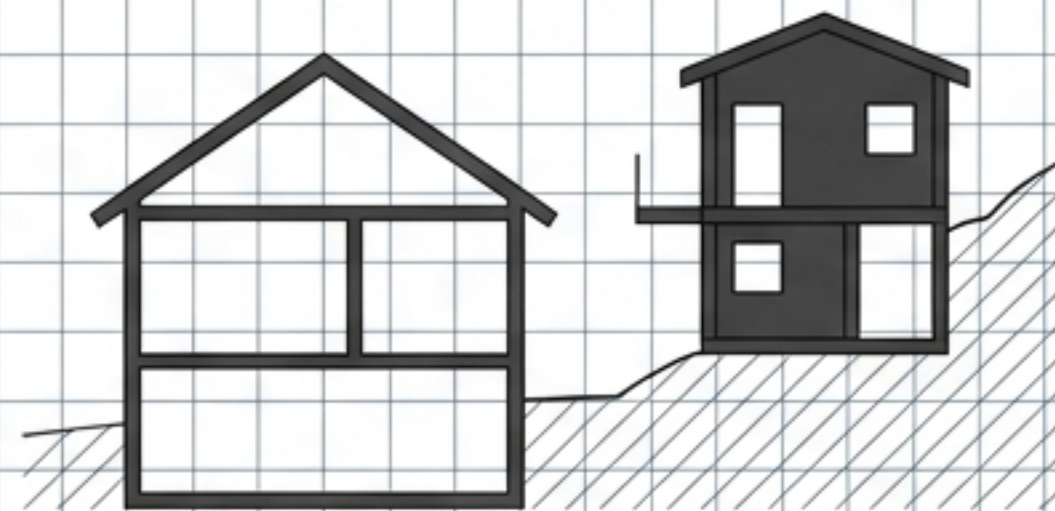
Mid-Range (Detached 1-Bed)

Size: 500 – 750 sq. ft.

Cost/sq. ft.: \$800 – \$1,000

Total Cost: \$415,000 – \$625,000

Notes: The San Francisco median; new foundation required.



Premium (Custom Detached)

Size: 800 – 1,200 sq. ft.

Cost/sq. ft.: \$950 – \$1,200+

Total Cost: \$550,000 – \$850,000+

Notes: Complex hillside lots, custom finishes, two-story.

Roof/Framing
(Labor): 35%

Blueprint/Permit Stamp
(Soft Costs): 15%

Cabinets/Tile
(Fixtures & Finishes): 8%

Pipes/Wires
(Plumbing & Electrical): 12%

Foundation/Lumber
(Materials): 30%

Insight: Homeowners often over-focus on the 8% finishes, while missing the massive gravity of the 15% pre-construction soft costs.

The San Francisco Cost Premium

Labor Rates

Skilled trades (electricians/plumbers) command rates **15% to 25% higher** than other CA metros.

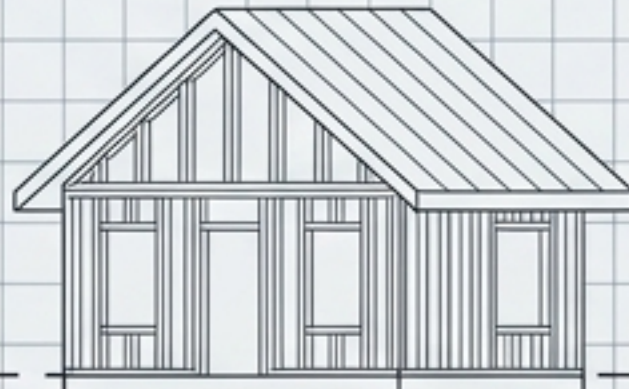
Site Constraints

Zero-lot-line conditions, limited street access for heavy machinery, minimal staging areas, and characteristic hillsides demanding **severe excavation.**

Regulatory Friction

Exceptionally stringent seismic codes and overlapping historic preservation overlays requiring **costly Planning Department design reviews.**

Quoted Construction



SFDBI Plan Review & Permits: \$7k – \$18k

Architectural & Design: \$20k – \$45k

Structural & Seismic Engineering: \$10k – \$25k

SFPUC Capacity Charges (Water/Sewer): \$8k – \$20k+

Geotechnical Report (Soil stability): \$3.5k – \$8k

Topographical Survey: \$3k – \$6k

Fire Sprinkler Design: \$6k – \$15k

Title 24 Energy Report: \$1.5k – \$3.5k

Pre-construction soft costs routinely hit \$60,000 to \$140,000+ before a single shovel hits the dirt.

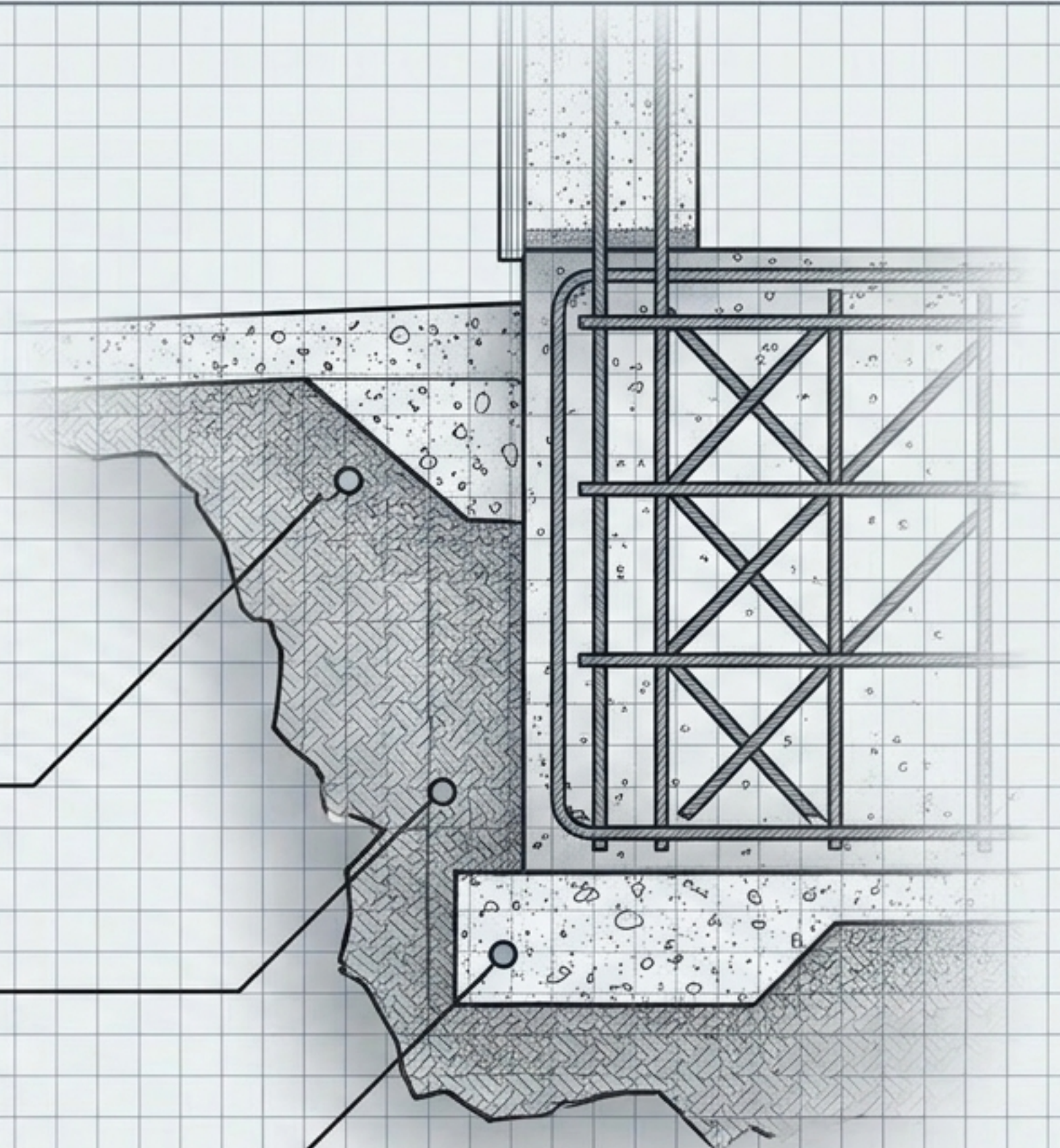
Hazard

Seismic engineering and foundation work accounts for **15% to 20% of total structural costs.**

Standard slab-on-grade foundations are impossible for most lots.

Complex soil profiles often require excavating through dense serpentine rock.

Stringent earthquake safety codes heavily inflate initial engineering and concrete phases.

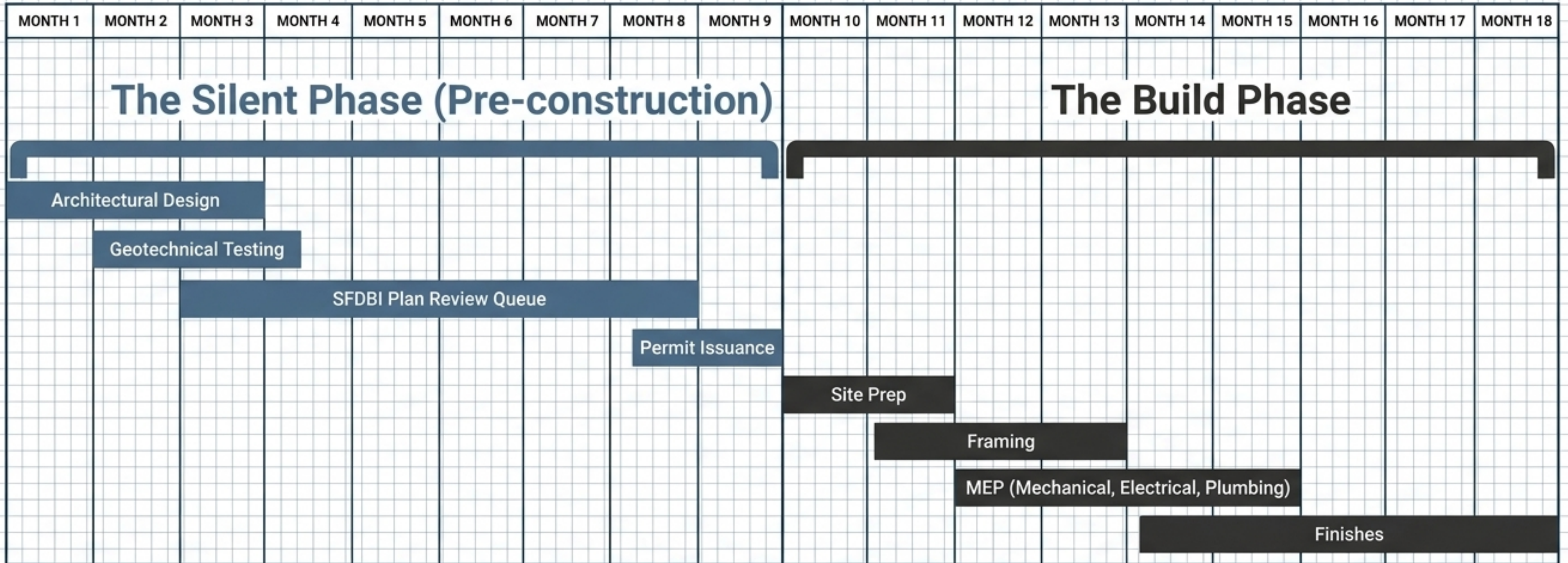


The Case Study Matrix: Site Conditions Dictate Price

Sunset District (Flat Lot Detached)	Bernal Heights (Hillside Conversion)	Richmond District (Attached Garage Conversion)
Cost: \$465,000 520 sq. ft.	Cost: \$515,000 650 sq. ft.	Cost: \$390,000 480 sq. ft.
Driver: Standard slab foundation, but required trenching utilities 100 feet from the main house.	Driver: Massive excavation for ceiling heights, new retaining wall, and complex seismic retrofitting of the existing structure above it.	Driver: Avoided major framing, but required a full property electrical panel upgrade and intensive soundproofing between units.

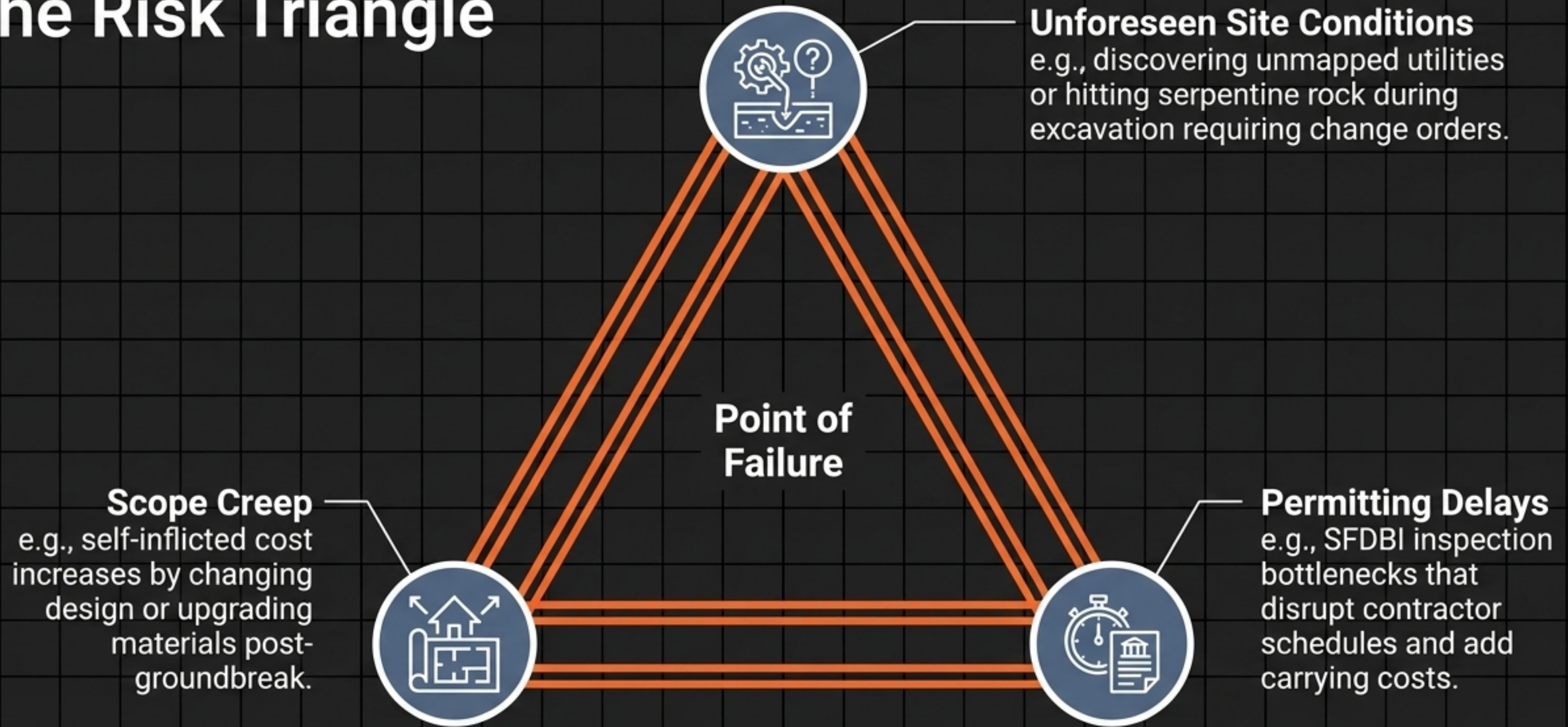
Based on 2026 Renology project data.

PROJECT TIMELINE & PHASING SCHEDULE



The most common point of failure is underestimating the 6 to 9 months required for engineering and city approval before physical labor begins.

Anatomy of an Overrun: The Risk Triangle



The Data:

The NAHB recommends a 10-15% contingency for standard renovations on older homes.

The SF Reality:

For a new ADU build in San Francisco's high-risk environment, a 15-20% hard cash contingency is non-negotiable.

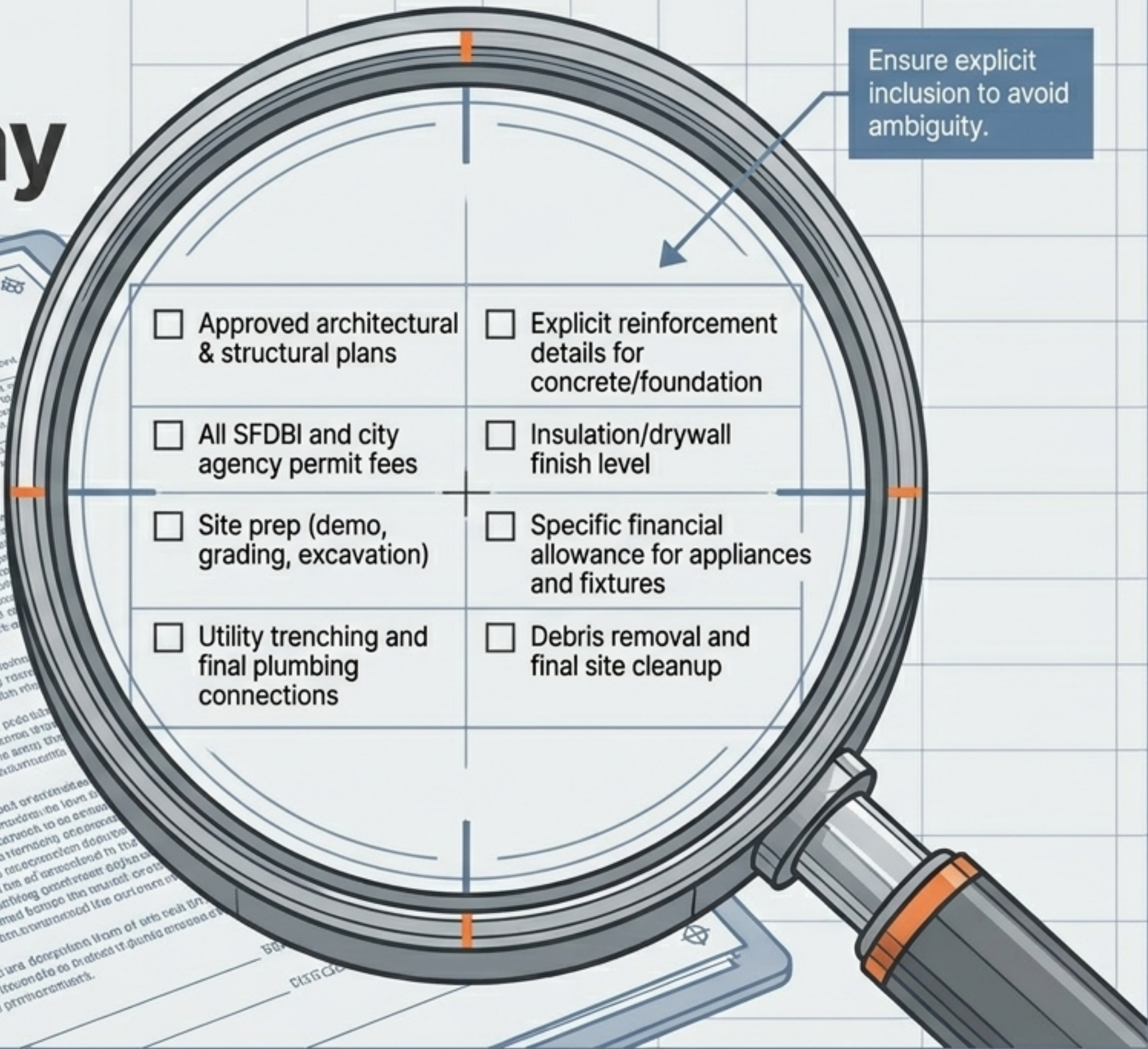


15-20%

The Golden Rule

Locking in all design decisions and material selections before breaking ground is the single most effective defense against self-inflicted budget overruns.

The Fixed-Price Contract Anatomy



Ensure explicit inclusion to avoid ambiguity.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved architectural & structural plans | <input type="checkbox"/> Explicit reinforcement details for concrete/foundation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All SFDBI and city agency permit fees | <input type="checkbox"/> Insulation/drywall finish level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Site prep (demo, grading, excavation) | <input type="checkbox"/> Specific financial allowance for appliances and fixtures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Utility trenching and final plumbing connections | <input type="checkbox"/> Debris removal and final site cleanup |

Success in San Francisco is won or lost before construction starts.

Budgets spiral when homeowners fixate purely on per-square-foot construction costs. Treat the extensive, 6-to-9-month preparatory phase as a distinct, heavily funded cost center. Protect your budget with upfront engineering, comprehensive fixed-price contracts, and a 20% contingency.