

Property appraisal is one of those processes that looks simple from the outside. Call a firm, provide an address, wait for a number. Anyone who has actually commissioned or delivered an appraisal knows better. The quality of a valuation depends on clarity of scope, reliable data, thoughtful selection of methodology, and disciplined communication. When those pieces go missing, timelines slip, fees climb, and trust erodes. The goal here is to help you structure requests so your real estate appraiser can do their best work, whether you need residential or commercial property appraisal, a quick current market value, or a formal report for financing, litigation, or financial reporting.

I have spent years on both sides of the table, producing reports and advising clients on complex mandates, from small infill lots to regional shopping centres. Patterns emerge. Most delays and disputes trace back to a handful of avoidable missteps at the outset. If you work in lending, development, accounting, law, or corporate real estate advisory, a sharper intake process will save you time and headaches. If you are a private owner requesting a property appraisal for the first time, a few simple habits will improve accuracy and keep costs in check.

The scope problem: when “value” isn’t one thing

The earliest mistake is assuming that value is a single, universal number. It isn’t. Different definitions of value can legitimately produce different results for the same property on the same day. If you leave this unspecified, you invite confusion and revision later.

For financing with a schedule one lender, market value as defined by the Appraisal Institute of Canada is typical, as at a specific effective date, and usually on an as-is basis with a stabilization assumption if the property is in lease-up. For a financial statement or tax planning exercise, you might need fair value under IFRS 13, measured with particular attention to highest and best use and market participant assumptions. For expropriation or marital dissolution, statutory definitions and case law can drive the standard of value and what must be included or excluded.

A seasoned real estate appraiser will ask the right questions to pin this down, but the cleanest way is to state the purpose, the intended use, and the intended users in the request. If you need retrospective value for a specific historical date, say so. If the property is subject to a pending rezoning, clarify whether you need current value as if unapproved, or a hypothetical condition reflecting approvals in place. Each scenario carries different research and risk, which affects both fee and timing.

What lenders, courts, and auditors actually require

A second source of friction is mismatched reporting standards. Lenders maintain approved appraiser lists and format requirements. Courts look for transparent reasoning and well-documented comparable evidence. Auditors need consistent valuation techniques across reporting periods and defensible support for key assumptions. If you are in London, Ontario, for example, most major lenders active in the market use similar templates, yet each still has its own specific addenda and reliance language. Asking a real estate appraiser in London, Ontario to retrofit a finished report to a different bank’s template after the fact usually costs extra and creates risk.

If the appraisal will support financing, confirm your lender’s current requirements before instructing the assignment. A short email to your relationship manager can save days. For litigation, share the relevant pleadings, court dates, and any

scope limitations ordered by the court. For audit, provide last period's valuation, the auditor's memos on materiality and model risk, and any changes in control or use. In commercial property appraisal, auditors tend to focus on capitalization rate support, lease-up assumptions, and discount rate selection. Knowing that focus up front helps the appraiser target research and documentation.

The cost of vague property descriptions

An alarming number of requests arrive with nothing more than a civic address. That might be enough for a small residential parcel, but for commercial real estate valuation, a file can lose a week while the team chases down legal descriptions, site plans, and rent rolls.

Provide a clean package at the start. Here's a compact checklist [Real estate consultant](#) you can paste into your instruction email:

- Legal description, PINs, and a site plan or survey if available
- Current rent roll with lease abstracts, expiry schedule, and any side letters
- Recent operating statements, at least 2 years plus trailing 12 months
- Zoning by-law reference, any variances or site plan agreements
- Capital plans and known building issues, such as roof age, environmental reports, or structural concerns

In London and surrounding Middlesex County, municipal GIS portals can confirm zoning and assessed values. If the property straddles multiple parcels, indicate which ones are in scope. For multi-tenant industrial or office, a simple stacking plan clarifies tenant position and gross leasable area. If a property has mezzanine space or specialty build-outs, share dimensions and photos. You do not need polished marketing material, just accurate facts.

Environmental and structural landmines

Many clients hesitate to disclose known environmental or structural issues for fear they will harm value. That instinct is understandable, but omitting material facts creates liability and often triggers costly revisions later. Phase I ESA reports, building condition assessments, and fire code orders shape marketability, borrowing capacity, and going-in cap rates. A real estate appraiser cannot responsibly opine on commercial property appraisal without acknowledging these risks.

If contamination or major deferred maintenance exists, tell the appraiser what you know and what is unknown. State whether remediation is planned, budgeted, or contingent. Market participants price risk differently depending on clarity and timing. An uncertain, potentially large obligation may weigh more heavily on value than a well-scoped, funded remediation plan. The difference shows up in discount rates, lease-up drag, and exit cap rates, but the correct treatment depends on the facts. Even for residential income properties, small fire orders or mold remediation can derail financing unless properly covered.



Effective dates and the trap of time

The effective date of value is not a footnote. It anchors the data set and the state of the market the appraiser will consider. The mistake I see most is a request in February for a value as of last September, only revealed mid-assignment. Retrospective appraisals are common for tax and legal matters. They require a different research workflow. Sales and rent data must match the effective date. Market conditions five months ago might not resemble today, especially in fast-moving segments like small-bay industrial or suburban multifamily.

If you truly need multiple dates, such as a current as-is value and an as-stabilized value one year out, say so on day one. If a hypothetical condition or extraordinary assumption will be needed, set it out clearly. Appraisers can model different scenarios with sensitivity ranges, but scope drives fee and timeline.

The temptation to pre-bake the number

Occasionally a request arrives with a “target value” buried in the notes, and the rest of the instruction hints that the assignment depends on hitting that number. This approach backfires. A credible real estate appraisal will not anchor to a preordained value, and any hint of advocacy risks disqualification by lenders, auditors, or courts. Reputable firms will decline if they perceive pressure. The most effective way to communicate your expectations is to explain the deal context and constraints. If the property must support a loan-to-value of 65 percent at a given interest rate and DSCR, share that math. The appraiser can then focus on the income approach components that drive lender comfort and explain the range where the value is likely to land based on current evidence.

The data-sharing paradox: too much and too little

There are two opposite mistakes here. The first is withholding rent rolls and leases until “later,” which forces the appraiser to make generic assumptions that will almost certainly be refined. The second is dumping a cloud drive with 8 gigabytes of unlabeled documents and expecting the team to parse it quickly. Both slow a file.

Curate your package. Label files with dates and clear names: 2024-12 T12 P&L, 2024 Rent Roll - Unit Level, 2021 BCA, 2023 Roof CapEx, Zoning Bylaw Z-1 - Section for Property. Flag unusual clauses such as termination rights, tenant improvement allowances, or co-tenancy in retail. Identify recent renewals and backfill deals that haven't

commenced rent yet. If a large tenant negotiated pandemic-era abatements or percentage rent, note timing and any sunset provisions. The point is not to bury the appraiser with data, but to supply the facts that actually move net operating income and risk.

Picking the right report type for the decision at hand

Not every need justifies a full narrative report. If your credit policy or auditor allows it, a restricted-use report can support a small internal decision. A desktop opinion of value can help a developer screen sites before making an offer. For mortgage financing with a major lender, a full narrative or a form report with specific addenda is typical. For expropriation or damages, expect a fulsome narrative with detailed comparable grids and an expert witness brief.

Ask for the least complex report that satisfies the intended use, no less and no more. Overbuying a report wastes money. Underbuying invites delays when the decision maker asks for more support. A real estate advisory firm can help align report type to use case and organize a staged approach if your process has multiple gates. In London, Ontario, for instance, many lenders accept streamlined updates for renewals if the underlying property and tenancy remain stable and the prior appraiser can update their own work.

Income approach basics that derail timelines

Commercial property appraisal almost always leans on the income approach, direct capitalization, or discounted cash flow. Two recurring pitfalls create friction.

First, confusion over recoveries, particularly in older mixed-use buildings. If expenses are partially recoverable under net leases for commercial units but gross for apartments above, the appraiser must reconstruct a clean, stabilized net operating income for the commercial area and a gross-to-net treatment for the residential. Provide historical recovery percentages by category if you track them, and the specific lease language on what is recoverable. If tenants pay base year stops, share the base year amounts.

Second, capex and leasing cost assumptions. Appraisers often include allowances for tenant improvements and leasing commissions even in stabilized properties, as prudent market participants would. Owners sometimes object that they do not pay these costs in their local submarket. The proper standard is what a typical buyer would assume. If your asset class in London has moved away from large up-front inducements, document actual recent deals to show the trend. The more local and recent the evidence, the more weight it carries.

Sales comparison and the myth of the perfect comp

Every owner believes their property is unique. Many are right. The art in the sales comparison approach lies in understanding which differences matter to buyers and by how much. Unadjusted price per square foot is a crude starting point. Site coverage, ceiling height, office finish ratio, loading type, parking, and access to arterials can swing value for industrial assets. For retail, tenant mix quality, weighted average lease term, and co-tenancy risk drive spreads. In apartments, suite mix, parking ratios, and utilities responsibility figure heavily.

A common pitfall arises when clients provide off-market sale prices without context. That intel is useful, but it can mislead if terms differ materially from a typical market deal. Was there vendor take-back financing at a favourable rate? Were there environmental indemnities or unusual rent guarantees? Did a purchaser pay a premium for an assembly? Appraisers must comply with confidentiality on certain transactions, yet they also need enough detail to weigh a sale properly. When you share a private comp, offer the key terms so it can be calibrated against arm's-length market deals.

Development and hypothetical conditions

Valuing development land or properties with intensification potential is another minefield. The single most common error is requesting a value "as if rezoned" without an actual planning path. A hypothetical condition can be acceptable if clearly stated and credibly supported, but it cannot stand on wishful thinking. Appraisers will look for a planning rationale, pre-consultation notes with the city, and evidence from comparable approvals. In London, Ontario, the city's policies on intensification corridors, height limits, parking minimums, and bonusing under the Planning Act frame what is plausible.

If your goal is to test land lift from a potential change of use, a staged analysis helps. Ask for current as-is value based on existing permissions. Then model an as-if rezoned scenario using unit count and GFA ranges rather than a single precise

scheme. A sensitivity table can show how value per buildable square foot shifts with density and cost assumptions. This not only reflects real-world risk but also gives you levers for negotiations with landowners and lenders.

Timing pressures and the illusion of speed

Turnaround time is often the tightest constraint. Urgent files happen, especially when financing windows close or purchase agreements approach firm dates. The trap is assuming that shorter time always equals higher fee and lower quality in a straight line. The reality is more nuanced.

When you compress timelines, two things matter most: early access and decision speed. Early site access unlocks physical inspection, photos, and measurement. Decision speed during draft review prevents the report from sitting while stakeholders debate minutiae. A modest rush fee covers overtime, but even money cannot conjure third-party data faster, whether market surveys, environmental updates, or tenant estoppels. If your internal team can align around what matters and provide crisp feedback, a seasoned real estate appraiser can often deliver reliable results on tight clocks. If internal debate is likely and multiple edits are inevitable, be honest about that. Build a day or two of buffer into your closing plan.

Independence and conflicts of interest

Good appraisers protect their independence. Clients sometimes ask the same firm to provide valuation, brokerage, and project management on the same asset. In certain contexts that can work, but for regulated uses like mortgage financing or litigation, you may need a clear separation. If a brokerage arm is actively marketing the property, [real estate investment consultant](#) most lenders will not accept a valuation from the same brand. Similarly, if your real estate advisory firm in London, Ontario is negotiating leases for the asset, an outside appraisal may be prudent for optics and governance. Ask about conflicts at the outset and expect a concise engagement letter that addresses them.

Fee structure and the false economy of the cheapest quote

Price shopping is normal, but a low fee can hide scope gaps. If one quote sits far below the others, compare assumptions. Did the low bid exclude site inspection, market rent analysis, or a DCF scenario that your lender will demand? Does it assume you will supply complete and verified data sets? Does it cap revisions or charge for lender addenda? Transparency matters more than the headline number. A detailed fee letter that lists deliverables, effective date, approaches to value, extraordinary assumptions, and the number of draft turns saves arguments later.

In my experience, for typical income-producing commercial property appraisal in Southern Ontario, fee ranges for full narrative reports cluster within a fairly tight band, driven by complexity, size, and urgency. Specialized assets or contested matters command higher fees because they require deeper research and more time in the chair.

Practical signals of a strong instruction

A good request sets your appraiser up to win. It reads like a focused brief, not a fishing expedition. Here are five markers of a strong instruction that I watch for:

- A clear purpose, intended use, intended users, and effective date, including retrospective if needed
- A concise data package with labeled leases, rent roll, operating statements, and zoning references
- Known issues disclosed plainly, with any third-party reports attached or noted as pending
- The required report type specified, along with any lender, court, or auditor templates
- A realistic timeline that reflects external dependencies, plus a single point of contact for decisions

Notice what is not on the list: a target value, a demand to use or ignore specific comparables, or an insistence on a particular cap rate. Provide facts, not outcomes. Let the evidence lead.

Regional context matters, even within the same province

Markets are local. In London, Ontario, industrial vacancy rates, achievable rents, and land pricing differ from Toronto or Kitchener, and even submarkets within London vary between the airport area, south end, and Argyle. Retail on a strong arterial with grocery-anchored co-tenancy behaves differently than small strip retail tucked behind an older residential pocket. Apartments in near-campus areas carry turnover profiles and rent premiums that call for a different read on stabilized expenses and reserves. When you engage a real estate appraiser London Ontario based, you benefit from data that reflects how deals actually trade here, not assumptions imported wholesale from the GTA.

For corporate portfolios that span multiple cities, align your real estate advisory London Ontario contacts with their counterparts in other regions, but let each local appraiser tailor assumptions to current local evidence. Uniform templates help comparability, but identical discount rates across markets rarely make sense.

Managing draft review without derailing the work

Draft review is where many files lose momentum. Some clients treat it as an opportunity to relitigate scope. Others send diffuse comments from several stakeholders that contradict each other. The best outcomes come from a single, consolidated set of comments focused on factual accuracy. If a lease abstract was misread or a unit count changed, point it out and provide the source. If you have additional comparable sales with better fit, share them with context. Avoid vague directives like “raise the value” or “lower the cap rate.” Ask questions that sharpen the logic: how sensitive is value to this vacancy assumption, what is the evidence for this rent growth rate, what happens if we assume a higher non-recoverable expense ratio.

A tight review loop saves both sides time. One or two rounds should suffice for most files. If stakeholders need more, expect schedule and fees to move.

Updates, re-certifications, and the myth of the easy refresh

A common request arrives a year after a prior appraisal: “Can you just update the value? Nothing has changed.” Sometimes that is true. More often, rents have moved, expenses shifted, interest rates changed, or a tenant rolled. Updates are faster than full new assignments, but they still require market checks and at least a brief site inspection if the prior visit is stale. Lenders in particular are sensitive to aging inspections.

Flag expected update needs early. If you anticipate a renewal option or a refinancing event next year, ask your appraiser to structure the work so an update is straightforward. That might mean retaining key models, comparable sets, and photos in a way that supports quick refresh. It rarely means a two-line letter without analysis.

When to bring in specialized expertise

Certain assets and issues benefit from specialists. Seniors housing, cold storage, self-storage, automotive dealerships, and hotels have operating dynamics that differ from generic industrial or office. For development land with complex servicing or planning risk, a planning consultant’s memo can ground the valuation. For environmental impairments, an engineer’s estimate of remediation costs and timelines will be far more credible than a rough allowance.

If your property sits in one of these niches, ask whether the appraisal firm has relevant experience and whether they plan to consult specialists. In London and Southwestern Ontario, there are capable teams who focus on these segments. A slightly higher fee for the right expertise often pays for itself in credibility with the decision makers you need to persuade.

What a good engagement letter looks like

Do not gloss over the engagement letter. It is the contract that protects both sides and anchors expectations. A solid letter will clearly state the client name and intended users, the purpose and intended use, the property identification, effective date, report type, scope of work, approaches to value to be considered, any hypothetical conditions or extraordinary assumptions, reliance on third-party reports, fee and payment schedule, timing, confidentiality, and dispute resolution. If lender reliance will be needed, the letter should either name the lender up front or set a process for adding reliance later.

If you plan to share the report beyond the intended users, discuss it. Appraisal reports are not public documents. Misuse can create liability for all involved.

A brief tale of two files

Two recent files illustrate the difference smart intake makes.

First, a multi-tenant industrial property near Highway 401 in London. The client sent a sharp instruction: purpose was refinancing with a named lender, intended use for loan underwriting, effective date current as-is, full narrative report, and a two-week target. They attached a clean rent roll, leases for the two recent renewals, three years of operating statements, zoning references, and a recent roof replacement invoice. They flagged a minor environmental note from a 2015 Phase I.

Site access was scheduled the same week. The report landed on time. The lender's reviewer asked two questions about recoveries, which were already addressed in an appendix. No drama, fair fee, smooth closing.

Second, a mixed-use building with retail at grade and apartments above in a busy corridor. The request asked for "market value for financing," no lender named, no effective date, and provided a marketing brochure with inconsistent GLA and suite counts. Leases arrived piecemeal over two weeks, some unsigned, some with handwritten edits. Environmental status unknown. The lender changed midway through, prompting a different template and reliance language. The file blew past three internal deadlines while everyone tried to reconcile facts. The value was not the problem. The process was.

The difference was not the property. It was the clarity of the instruction and the discipline of data.

The quiet payoff of better requests

Well-structured appraisal requests do more than speed up a single file. They build a working rhythm with your valuation partners, move you to preferred status for scheduling, and create a body of evidence you can audit later. For firms that handle a steady volume of assets, especially across London and Southwestern Ontario, this discipline reduces variance across reports and supports better internal decisions. For private owners, it keeps costs predictable and avoids last-minute surprises with lenders or courts.

If you remember nothing else, remember this: state the purpose, the intended use, and the effective date; provide clean, relevant data; disclose material issues; and align the report type with the decision you need to make. A good real estate appraiser can handle the rest. If you need broader help navigating lender standards, auditor expectations, or development scenarios, a capable real estate advisory team can stitch those pieces together so each appraisal request lands with precision.

The industry runs on evidence and judgment. Give your appraiser the former, and you will get more of the latter.