OTTAWA CONCRETE PROS

Cracks, Scaling & Settling

What flaking, spalling, cracks, heaving and sunken slabs point to, and when repair or replacement is the answer

4 Expert Answers from Concrete Pro IQ

ottawaconcretepros.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

My Barrhaven walkway cracked across the middle; repair or replace?

A single crack across the middle of a walkway can go either way, and a contractor needs to see it in person before that call is made. What matters is the width and depth of the crack, whether the two sections are still level with each other or one has risen or dropped, and whether the slab shows other signs of distress such as scaling or multiple cracks nearby.

If the sections are still flush and the crack is narrow, a repair may be a reasonable option. If one section has heaved or settled relative to the other, or if the slab is scaling or showing additional cracking, replacement is worth considering. The National Research Council's Canadian Building Digest 116 notes that surface scaling is most severe on horizontal surfaces subjected to both freeze-thaw cycling and de-icing salts, and Canadian Building Digest 182 notes that clays, silts and very fine sands support frost heave while coarse-grained soils do not. Those are possibilities to have a contractor look at, not a diagnosis.

On the rules side, a few things apply regardless of which direction you go. The City of Ottawa's Hardscaping Contractor Licence has been required since March 1, 2026 for any business that installs or alters concrete walkways on private property. The Licensing By-law also excludes "minor repairs or minor alterations", which it does not define, so ask the City whether your job counts. The City's March 2026 news release says to ask to see a copy of the licence and to check the City's published list of licensed contractors. The City requires licensed contractors to carry commercial general liability insurance of not less than $2,000,000 and automobile liability of not less than $2,000,000, and to provide a written contract. Ottawa Concrete Pros does not check or verify anyone's licence or insurance; that check is yours to make.

If the walkway crosses into the City right of way, the Access By-law 2026-139 (enacted April 8, 2026) applies. Section 20(3) exempts resurfacing from a permit provided there are no changes to the location or dimensions of the access or the site grading. A residential pedestrian access that meets the width and clearance conditions in section 18 of that by-law can be built without a permit. If the work involves any digging, whoever digs is the excavator under the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012, and a locate request must go through Ontario Dig Authority before any ground is broken.

For a quote, ask the contractor to put in writing: the concrete compressive strength (the 2024 Ontario Building Code sets 32 MPa as the standard for exterior flatwork), the base preparation, what happens to the old material, and whether cold-weather protection is included if the pour falls when the air temperature is below 5 °C. The City's Trail Waste Facility accepts clean concrete without rebar as fill at $144 per tonne above 250 kg, with a $36 minimum, so ask whether disposal is included in the price or quoted separately.

We found no published Ottawa price for crack repair or partial walkway replacement on its own. For a full replacement, plain broom-finish concrete runs about $9 to $15 per square foot, and small jobs often hit a minimum charge of about $5,500, according to Ottawa price pages.

The most useful question to put to a contractor before signing: ask them to show you, in writing, exactly what base work they plan to do and why, given the condition of the ground under the slab.

Q2

Partial replacement of a cracked slab in Stittsville: good idea?

Partial replacement can work, but the result depends heavily on what is causing the cracking and what condition the surrounding slab is in. Before committing to a patch, have a contractor assess whether the cracked section failed because of the base beneath it, frost movement, or something else, and ask how the repair addresses that cause.

The 2024 Ontario Building Code sets 32 MPa as the standard for exterior flatwork; we found no Code statement on whether that standard binds a patio slab built without a permit, but it is the right benchmark to ask for in writing regardless.

A few things the City of Ottawa's rules add to this job. The City's Hardscaping Contractor Licence, in effect since March 1, 2026, covers concrete pads, patios, walkways and steps on private property. The Licensing By-law also excludes "minor repairs or minor alterations", which it does not define, so ask the City whether your job counts. Ask any contractor to show you their City licence and check the City's published list yourself. Ottawa Concrete Pros does not verify anyone's licence or insurance. If the cracked section is near the front of the property and any work touches the right of way, the Access By-law 2026-139 applies: resurfacing an existing access does not require a permit, but altering its location or dimensions does. Whoever breaks ground must submit a locate request through Ontario Dig Authority at least five business days before digging; ask who will submit it.

On the quote itself, ask for these items to be written out separately:

- removal and disposal of the broken section (clean concrete without rebar goes to the City's Trail Waste Facility at $144 per tonne above 250 kg, $36 minimum)
- base inspection and any base work needed under the new section
- the concrete strength (32 MPa for exterior flatwork)
- cold-weather protection if the pour happens when the air temperature is below 5 °C, including how long the slab will be kept at not less than 10 °C

- whether a minimum charge applies, since Ottawa price pages note small jobs often hit a minimum of about $5,500

We found no published price range with enough sources to quote a figure for partial replacement on its own, so get it itemized rather than as a single number.
Ask the contractor to show you, in writing, exactly what base work is included and what it will cost if the base turns out to need more than the quote assumed.

Q3

Is crack sealing worth it on a concrete patio in Westboro?

Whether crack sealing makes sense on a concrete patio depends on what kind of cracks you have and why they formed. We found no published price for crack sealing on its own, so get a written quote and ask whether the scope includes cleaning the crack, the sealing material and any surface work around it.

The condition of the concrete matters before anything else. The National Research Council's Canadian Building Digest 116 notes that scaling is most severe on horizontal surfaces subjected to both freeze-thaw cycling and de-icing salts, and that air entrainment has a remarkable effect on frost resistance. If your patio is already scaling broadly or if cracks are numerous and running in multiple directions, a contractor may recommend resurfacing or partial replacement instead of sealing individual cracks. If a crack runs along the joint where the patio meets the house foundation, have it looked at before sealing anything; foundation walls are a separate trade and that crack may need a different assessment.

On the City side, the City of Ottawa's Hardscaping Contractor Licence has been required since March 1, 2026 for businesses that install or alter hard landscaping features such as concrete patios. The Licensing By-law excludes the sealing or re-sealing only of driveways or parking areas, and "minor repairs or minor alterations", which it does not define; we found no City statement on whether crack sealing a patio counts, so ask the City. The licence costs the contractor $319 for 2026 and requires commercial general liability insurance of not less than $2,000,000 inclusive per occurrence. Ask any contractor to show you their City licence and check the City's published list of licensed hardscaping contractors yourself. The City's March 2026 guidance says a licensed contractor will also provide a written contract and give you a copy of the City's Landscaping Education Guide.

We found no City rule requiring a building permit for crack sealing an existing patio; if you are unsure about your situation, ask the City's Building Code Services.

A few things worth confirming before work starts:

- the scope in writing: which cracks, what preparation, what material
- whether the contractor holds a current City of Ottawa hardscaping licence, and whether they say it applies to this job
- whether locates are needed if any digging is involved, submitted through Ontario Dig Authority
- the Landscaping Education Guide, which a licensed contractor is required to give you

The single most useful thing to have in hand before work begins is a written contract that names the cracks being treated, the preparation method, the sealing material and the total price, so there is no dispute about what was agreed.

Q4

Concrete heaved under my Barrhaven back steps: repair options?

Heaved concrete under back steps is worth getting looked at before deciding whether to repair or replace. The repair path depends on what caused the movement, how much the concrete has shifted, and whether the steps themselves are still structurally sound.

The two broad options are lifting and stabilizing the existing concrete, or removing it and pouring new. Lifting is sometimes called mudjacking or slab lifting. Replacement means breaking out the old concrete, correcting the base, and pouring fresh. We found too few published prices to give a number for either approach on its own, so ask each contractor to itemize lifting versus replacement so you can compare them directly.

What a contractor should look at before recommending either path:

- whether the soil beneath is frost-susceptible (the National Research Council's Canadian Building Digest 182 notes that clays, silts and very fine sands support ice-lens growth, while coarse sands and gravels do not)
- whether the steps have more than 2 risers, because the 2024 Ontario Building Code (section 9.12.2.2) requires that exterior concrete steps with more than 2 risers be founded below the depth of frost penetration in clay soils, at least 1.2 m but not less than the local frost depth
- whether the steps are pulling away from the house foundation or moving underfoot, in which case keep off them until a contractor has assessed them

On permits: the City of Ottawa's Landscaping Education Guide (March 2026) states that stairs providing access to a building may need a building permit. The City's Building Code Services advisory on landscaping structures confirms that a structure providing access to an egress requires a building permit where, among other conditions, there is more than 600 mm (2'-0") difference in elevation between adjacent surfaces. If the repair involves rebuilding the steps rather than simply stabilizing the base, ask the City's Building Code Services whether a permit is required before work starts.

On licensing: since March 1, 2026, any business installing, altering or rebuilding concrete steps or pads on private property in Ottawa must hold a City of Ottawa Hardscaping Contractor Licence. The Licensing By-law also excludes "minor repairs or minor alterations", which it does not define, so ask the City whether your job counts. The licence costs $319 for 2026 and requires the contractor to carry commercial general liability insurance of not less than $2,000,000 and automobile liability insurance of not less than $2,000,000. Ask to see the licence and check the contractor's name against the City's published list yourself. Ottawa Concrete Pros does not verify anyone's licence or insurance.

On locates: if any part of the repair involves digging, the Ontario Underground Infrastructure Notification System Act, 2012 requires a locate request through Ontario Dig Authority before breaking ground. Locates are free. Also ask who will mark any private buried lines to the house.

For the concrete itself, the 2024 Ontario Building Code (section 9.3.1.6) sets a minimum compressive strength of 32 MPa for exterior flatwork. Ask for that number in the written specification, along with the proposed base depth and what cold-weather protection is included if the air could be below 5 °C.

If you want to hear from local contractors, the request form on this page sends your job details to Ottawa concrete contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

The most useful question before you sign: ask each contractor to show you their City of Ottawa Hardscaping Contractor Licence number and explain in writing what they will do to prevent the same heave from happening again.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Concrete Pros. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any concrete project, and request utility locates before anyone digs. Concrete work in Ontario must meet the 2024 Ontario Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24) where it applies. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawaconcretepros.ca** for the latest answers.