VANCOUVER HVAC PRO

Furnaces

Gas and electric furnace replacement, repair versus replace, efficiency ratings, venting, and whether a furnace or a heat pump makes more sense

3 Expert Answers from HVAC IQ

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Q1

Furnace or heat pump, which is cheaper to run in the Lower Mainland?

For most Lower Mainland homes, a modern inverter heat pump costs less to run than a gas furnace, often by a meaningful margin, though the gap depends on your home's size, insulation and the current price of electricity versus natural gas.

Why Heat Pumps Win on Running Costs Here

The physics works in our favour. A heat pump moves heat rather than burning fuel to create it, delivering roughly 2 to 3 units of heat energy for every unit of electricity consumed (a coefficient of performance of 2 to 3, or higher on mild days). Metro Vancouver's climate sits between about 0°C and 10°C for most of the heating season, which is exactly where inverter heat pumps are most efficient. A gas furnace, even a high-efficiency condensing model at 96%, converts fuel to heat at a fixed ratio and cannot beat that.

The financial comparison comes down to energy prices. Electricity from BC Hydro is billed per kWh and natural gas from FortisBC per gigajoule, so compare your own recent bills rather than published averages. At current rates, the effective cost of heat from a well-sized heat pump is typically lower than from a gas furnace for most of the heating season. The carbon tax on natural gas, which has risen steadily, widens that gap further. On the coldest nights, below about -5°C, heat pump efficiency drops and a backup element or gas furnace kicks in, which narrows the advantage briefly, but those nights are rare in Richmond, Delta or Vancouver proper and somewhat more common on the North Shore or in the eastern Fraser Valley.

The one situation where gas still wins on running cost is a home with a very old, undersized electrical panel that would need a $3,500 to $6,000 service upgrade before a heat pump can be installed. That upfront cost changes the payback calculation significantly.

For homes currently heated by electric baseboards, the running-cost case for a heat pump is even stronger. A ductless mini-split replacing baseboards typically uses far less electricity for the same heat, and BC Hydro offers a rebate of up to $4,000 for replacing all-electric heat with a qualifying heat pump installed through their Home Performance Contractor Network.

If you heat with gas today and are not income-qualified, there is currently no general CleanBC fuel-switching rebate available in Metro Vancouver, so the decision rests on the running-cost difference and your own timeline for payback on the installation cost ($10,000 to $22,000 for a ducted system, $4,500 to $8,000 for a single-zone ductless). A dual-fuel setup, pairing a heat pump with your existing gas furnace as backup, costs $8,000 to $14,000 and lets you run on electricity most of the season while keeping gas for the coldest days.

Before getting quotes, have a contractor do a proper heat loss calculation rather than sizing off the old furnace. Ask whether permits are included in the price, confirm refrigerant certification for heat pump work, and for any gas connection or disconnection, verify the contractor holds a Technical Safety BC gas contractor licence.

Putting real numbers to your own house takes one site visit, and Vancouver HVAC Pro can line up a no-obligation quote.

Q2

How often should a furnace be serviced in the damp BC climate?

Annual servicing is the right interval for a gas furnace in Metro Vancouver, and the wet climate here makes that schedule more important than in drier parts of Canada. Technical Safety BC recommends yearly maintenance for all home heating appliances, and the months of damp, near-freezing weather the Lower Mainland sees from October through March give that recommendation real weight.

Why the BC Climate Raises the Stakes

Condensing furnaces (the high-efficiency models with plastic venting that most homes have had installed since the 1990s) produce acidic condensate as part of normal operation. In a damp climate, the condensate drain and trap can clog with algae, mineral deposits or debris faster than in a dry region, and a blocked drain will shut the furnace down on the coldest night of the year. A technician clears and tests that drain every visit. The same wet air accelerates corrosion on heat exchangers, burners and flue connections, and a cracked heat exchanger is a carbon monoxide risk. **The City of Vancouver Fire By-law requires a CO alarm inside each bedroom or within 5 metres of each bedroom door in any home with a fuel-burning appliance**, so test those alarms every month and replace them per the manufacturer's schedule, not just at the annual service.

Beyond the condensate and corrosion issues, Metro Vancouver furnaces also deal with wildfire smoke events in summer that load up filters faster than expected. Check the filter every one to two months during smoke season and replace it when it looks grey, regardless of where you are in the service cycle. A clogged filter forces the blower to work harder, raises temperatures at the heat exchanger and shortens equipment life. Changing the filter yourself is the one maintenance task that is genuinely straightforward and safe for any homeowner.

Timing the annual visit matters. Book in August or September, before the first cold snap. Contractors are far busier once October arrives and furnaces start failing on the first genuinely cold nights. A pre-season slot also means any parts on order arrive before you need the heat.

A thorough annual service for a gas furnace in Metro Vancouver typically runs $150 to $300 and should include cleaning the burners, inspecting the heat exchanger for cracks, testing the igniter and flame sensor, checking the flue and venting connections, testing the pressure switches and limit switches, clearing and testing the condensate system, measuring the gas pressure and combustion, and confirming the CO alarm is present and working. The technician doing the work must be employed by a gas contractor licensed with Technical Safety BC; confirm that licence before booking.

For an older furnace approaching 20 years, ask the technician for an honest assessment of the heat exchanger condition and efficiency. A cracked exchanger is not repairable and is grounds for replacement. Repair bills above roughly $700 to $900 on an aging unit rarely make financial sense compared to a new high-efficiency model.

Ask for a written service report after every visit, listing what was inspected, what was cleaned, any measurements taken (gas pressure, combustion readings) and any concerns flagged. That paper trail is useful for warranty claims, home sales and insurance purposes. Vancouver HVAC Pro can match you with local HVAC contractors who offer annual maintenance plans, at no cost to you.

Q3

Before selling my Richmond townhouse, is a new furnace worth it?

A furnace replacement before a sale rarely pays back dollar-for-dollar, but the right answer depends on how old the current unit is and what condition it is in. In Metro Vancouver's 2025-2026 market, a high-efficiency gas furnace replacement in a Richmond townhouse typically runs $5,500 to $11,000 installed, permits included.

Is It Worth Replacing Before You List?

The honest answer is: probably not, unless the furnace is visibly failing or a home inspector is likely to flag it. Buyers and their inspectors notice age and condition, but they rarely pay a premium equal to the full replacement cost. What they do respond to is a furnace that is clearly near end-of-life, because it gives them a negotiating point or a reason to walk away. A unit that is 20-plus years old, has a cracked heat exchanger, or has had repeated repairs in the last two seasons is a liability. A unit that is 12-15 years old and running cleanly is usually fine to leave.

A few things that shift the calculation for a Richmond townhouse specifically. First, townhouse strata rules may already restrict what work you can do without council approval, so confirm with your strata before committing to anything. Second, Richmond is in BC Hydro territory, and the BC Hydro Home Renovation Rebate for a heat pump only applies when you are replacing all-electric heat, so if the townhouse has a gas furnace now, that rebate is not available to you or the buyer. For a household that heats with gas and is not income-qualified, there is currently no

general CleanBC fuel-switching rebate in Metro Vancouver either, so do not factor a rebate into the math unless you have confirmed eligibility.

If the furnace is genuinely at end-of-life, replacing it before listing can remove a negotiating chip from a buyer's hand and let you market the home with a new system. In that case, a mid-range 96% AFUE condensing furnace is the practical choice: efficient enough to satisfy a buyer, not so expensive that you overspend on a home you are leaving.

On the permit side: in Richmond, the gas permit for the furnace replacement is issued by the City of Richmond, not Technical Safety BC. The electrical permit for any new circuit work comes from Technical Safety BC. A licensed gas contractor will pull both; make sure permits are included in the quote and that the work is inspected and closed before you list, because a buyer's lawyer or inspector may ask.

What a fair quote should include: a heat loss calculation to confirm sizing (do not let a contractor simply match the old unit's capacity), the exact model and efficiency rating, all gas and electrical permit fees, removal and disposal of the old unit, and a labour warranty of at least one year. Ask the contractor for their Technical Safety BC gas contractor licence number and confirm WorkSafeBC coverage before signing anything.

If the furnace is mid-life and running, a $150-$250 tune-up and a fresh filter will do more for your sale than a full replacement. If it is genuinely failing, replacing it is the cleaner move than leaving it for a buyer to negotiate against you.

The core decision comes down to one question: would a home inspector flag this furnace as a material defect? If yes, replacing it before listing is likely worth it; if you would like a quote to weigh the cost, Vancouver HVAC Pro can connect you with a local Richmond HVAC contractor at no charge.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Vancouver HVAC Pro. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local permit authority (your municipality or Technical Safety BC) before starting any heating, cooling or gas project. Information is current as of November 8, 2026 and may change. Visit **vancouverhvacpro.com** for the latest answers.