

Decoding the Plumbing Items on Your Home Inspection Report

A plain-English guide for real estate agents working the West Michigan lakeshore.

Inspection reports use technical language that can make a \$200 fix sound like a deal-killer — and a \$7,000 problem sound routine. This guide translates the most common plumbing call-outs on lakeshore homes, with ballpark cost ranges and a quick read on how urgent they are for close. Keep it in your desk. When your next inspection comes back with a long list, give us a call. We'll walk through the report with you and tell you what's reasonable to fix before close.

| What the Inspector Wrote | What It Means | Why It Matters for the Deal | Cost Range | Urgency |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| "Galvanized steel water supply lines observed." | The home has steel water pipes coated in zinc. Standard in U.S. homes from roughly 1900 to 1960 with a 40-50 year lifespan, so any galvanized line in a lakeshore home today is past end-of-life. They corrode from the inside out, restricting flow and rust-staining the water. | Buyer will likely push for replacement, especially if pressure is visibly low or the water runs rusty on first draw. Insurance carriers occasionally surcharge for it. Common in any pre-1960 Muskegon, North Muskegon, or Muskegon Heights home. | \$4,500-\$10,000 for a whole-house repipe to PEX, depending on size and access. | Medium-to-high. Buyers rarely walk away, but a credit or repair request is almost guaranteed. |
| "Polybutylene piping (PB) present — recommend evaluation." | Gray, blue, or black plastic supply pipe stamped "PB2110," used 1978-1995. It reacts with chlorine in municipal water, becomes brittle, and fails without warning. No maintenance fix — only replacement. | This is a real one. Insurance carriers increasingly refuse or surcharge coverage on PB-plumbed homes, which can stop a closing dead. Common in Norton Shores, Fruitport, Spring Lake, and Grand Haven Township subdivisions, late '70s through mid-'90s. | \$4,500-\$10,000 for a full repipe to PEX. | High. Get a written quote in the buyer's hands fast so they can make a real decision. |
| "Water heater nearing end of service life / missing expansion tank / no T&P discharge tube." | Standard tank water heaters last 8-12 years in West Michigan; hard water is rough on them — assume the low end. Inspectors also flag a missing thermal expansion tank (required by Michigan code where there's a check valve, PRV, or backflow preventer) and a missing or improperly routed T&P relief discharge tube. | Almost every report has at least one water heater item. The expansion tank in particular is a code violation, not a recommendation, so it usually has to be addressed. | Replacement \$1,600-\$3,500 installed (standard 40/50-gal gas). Tankless \$3,500-\$6,500+. Expansion tank add-on alone \$200-\$450. | Medium. If the unit is under 8 years and only missing the expansion tank, it's a one-hour fix. |
| "Sump pump aged / no battery backup / no high-water alarm." | West Michigan has clay soils, high water tables (especially around Spring Lake, Mona Lake, and Grand Haven Township), and heavy spring runoff. A working primary sump pump is critical; a battery backup is the difference between a wet basement and a flooded one during a power outage. | Buyers in known wet areas will push hard for this. Sellers often present a pump as "working" that's actually 10+ years old and ready to fail. | Primary pump replacement \$500-\$1,200. Battery backup add \$600-\$1,800. Full combo system \$1,500-\$2,500. | Medium. Cheap to address; ugly if it fails after close. |
| "Toilet base loose / evidence of wax ring failure / floor staining at toilet." | Either the wax seal between the toilet and the flange has failed (slow leaks under the toilet), the closet flange itself is broken, or the floor underneath has rotted from a long-standing slow leak. The inspector usually can't tell which without pulling the toilet. | Usually minor, but if there's visible subfloor damage the cost jumps because flooring trades get involved. Buyers will ask for proof of repair. | Wax ring + reset \$200-\$400. Flange repair \$300-\$600. With subfloor repair, add \$300-\$1,000+. | Low to medium. Usually quick to fix unless the subfloor is involved. |
| "Fixture shutoff valves missing / corroded / non-functional." | Michigan code requires a shutoff at every fixture supply (except tubs/showers in 1-2 family homes). Older homes often have no stops at all, or 1970s multi-turn stops that are corroded shut and will snap if you try to close them. | Easy inspector finding. Reads as "deferred maintenance" on the report — not scary individually, but a long list paints a picture. | \$75-\$150 per valve replaced. Whole-house refresh on an older home \$500-\$1,500. | Low. Almost always negotiable as a credit or quick repair. |
| "Main water service line — material unknown / lead suspected / corrosion noted." | The buried supply line from the street to the house. In pre-1960 Muskegon-area homes this could be lead, galvanized steel, or unknown. Michigan's Lead and Copper Rule lowered the lead action level to 12 ppb in 2025 and banned partial replacements — utilities must replace the full | Muskegon is in the middle of an active lead service line replacement program. Confirm with the city water department whether the property is in queue, complete, or unknown. Homeowner-side repairs fall on seller or buyer. We do this work with a trusted excavation company. | Homeowner-side replacement \$2,500-\$7,500+. Utility side typically covered by the city. | Depends entirely on the buyer's lender and insurer. Some require resolution; some don't. |

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| | line if lead is found. | | | |
| "Recommend sewer scope inspection of main drain line." | A camera run from a cleanout down through the main drain to the city sewer or septic — used to verify cast iron, clay, or Orangeburg pipe. Strongly recommended on any pre-1980 home; it's the only way to find bellies, root intrusion, channeling, or collapsed sections before they become the buyer's problem. | If the scope finds a belly or cracked section, the repair cost jumps quickly. Better to find it now and price it than have it surface six months after close. | Sewer scope \$200-\$400. Spot repair if needed \$1,500-\$6,000. Full main replacement (trenchless) \$5,000-\$15,000+. | High if anything is found. Otherwise, peace of mind for both sides. |
| "Hard water staining / iron staining / sulfur odor noted." (Well water) | West Michigan groundwater is some of the hardest in the country, frequently iron-laden, and often carries hydrogen sulfide (the "rotten egg" smell). Hard water destroys water heaters fast, iron stains fixtures and laundry, and sulfur drives buyer complaints. | Rarely a closing blocker on its own, but a buyer-confidence issue that almost always comes up in negotiation. A softener and filter address it. Note: Barrett does not perform well inspection, well pump work, or water quality testing — but we can replace an indoor pressure tank if it's part of the call-out. | Water softener install \$1,500-\$3,500. Iron filter \$1,400-\$3,700. Combined softener + iron + carbon stack \$3,500-\$7,000. | Low. Usually addressed as a buyer-installed upgrade after close. |
| "Active drip at faucet / supply line / valve — recommend repair." | A visible drip somewhere in the system — usually a worn cartridge in a faucet, a failing supply line under a sink, or a slow leak at a valve stem. Inspectors flag everything they see, even drips that are five minutes' work. | Almost always a small fix. The risk is that the report lists six of them and the cumulative repair list looks intimidating to the buyer. A walk-through with a plumber clears it up fast. | Faucet R&R \$200-\$500 plus the fixture. Supply line replacement \$75-\$200. Valve repair \$100-\$250. | Low. Quick punch-list items. |
| "Exterior hose bib damaged / non-frost-free / missing vacuum breaker." | In this freeze-cycle climate, non-frost-free hose bibs split inside the wall every winter and the homeowner doesn't know until spring. Michigan code also requires a vacuum breaker on every bib to prevent backflow into the supply. | Cheap to fix. Comes up almost every winter and spring closing in this market. | Frost-free hose bib R&R \$200-\$450. Vacuum breaker add \$30-\$75 per bib. | Low. Easy punch-list item. |

If your inspection report flags any of these, call us. We'll take a look and tell you what's reasonable to fix before close.

Cost ranges are 2025-2026 West Michigan ballparks. They are conversation starters, not quotes. Every job gets a written estimate before work begins.

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