Sweet Apple
HOME MANAGEMENT

Repair or replace?

How to read an HVAC quote before you sign it. A one-page guide for homeowners in north Fulton and East Cobb.

> A technician in your basement saying "this system is seventeen years old" is not a diagnosis. It's the start of a sales conversation. Here's how to tell the difference.

Three questions to ask before anyone leaves

- **"What exactly failed?"** You want a part name — capacitor, contactor, blower motor, igniter, a leak at a specific joint. "It's old" and "it's worn out" are not answers.
- **"Can I see it?"** A bad capacitor is bulged. A failed motor is seized or burned. A good technician is happy to show you.
- **"What does the repair alone cost?"** Get that number in writing before any talk of replacement. If the answer is "we don't recommend repairing," ask the question again.

What common repairs cost around here

Typical ranges in north metro Atlanta, late 2026, parts and labor. Yours will vary; a quote far outside these deserves a second opinion.

REPAIR	TYPICAL RANGE	NOTES
Capacitor	$150–$350	The most common summer failure. A 20-minute job.
Contactor	$150–$300	Often replaced with the capacitor.
Blower motor	$450–$1,200	Variable-speed (ECM) motors are the high end.
Condenser fan motor	$400–$800	The fan on top of the outside unit.
Igniter or flame sensor	$150–$350	Furnace won't light, or lights and shuts off.
Refrigerant leak, found and fixed	$500–$1,500+	Insist on finding the leak. A yearly "top-off" is a leak nobody fixed.
Compressor	$1,800–$3,000	On a system over 12 years old, this is where replacement starts to make sense.

Seasonal tune-up	$90–$180	Twice a year is reasonable. Four times is a membership, not maintenance.
Full system replacement	$8,000–$16,000	Depends on size, efficiency and ductwork. Three quotes, always.

Two rules of thumb

- **Repair cost × age of system.** If it's under about $5,000, repair. A $640 motor on a 17-year-old system is $10,880 — borderline, but a working system with a new motor usually buys three or four more years. A $2,500 compressor on the same system is $42,500 — replace.
- **Under 12 years old and the repair is less than a third of replacement:** repair, nearly always.

Red flags

- Pressure to decide today, or a "price good until tonight."
- A replacement quote with no written diagnosis of what failed.
- "We can't get parts for this anymore" — ask for the part number and check it yourself.
- Financing offered before the problem has been explained.
- A refrigerant top-off every spring.

If it really is time to replace

- Get three quotes. Each should state tonnage, SEER2 rating, brand and model numbers, warranty terms, and that the installer will pull the permit.
- Ask whether the ductwork was inspected. A new system on leaking ducts is a new system that underperforms.
- Georgia requires a licensed Conditioned Air contractor. Check the license at sos.ga.gov before you sign.
- Anything over $1,500: a second opinion is worth the service call. Give the second company the model and serial numbers and the first company's diagnosis.

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We don't sell or install HVAC equipment and take nothing from any contractor. This is what we'd tell our own family.