You will probably never see the layer that sits between the roof deck and the shingles, but it does a lot of work. It is the backup plan when wind-driven rain gets past the shingles, and it protects the deck during installation. The two main choices are traditional felt paper and modern synthetic underlayment.

What Underlayment Does

Underlayment is a secondary water barrier. It sheds water that sneaks under shingles during nor'easters, helps keep the deck dry if the roof is exposed during a project, and provides a smoother surface for the shingles. On Long Island, where storms can blow rain sideways, that second line of defense earns its keep.

Felt Paper

Felt, also called tar paper, is a paper-like base saturated with asphalt. It has been used for generations, and plenty of Huntington Capes and Colonials still have it under older roofs.

Strengths

- Familiar to every roofer
- Lower material cost
- Accepted by shingle manufacturers when properly installed

Drawbacks

- Can absorb moisture, wrinkle, and buckle if left exposed
- Tears more easily, especially in wind
- Heavier and harder to handle in large rolls
- Not designed for long exposure before shingles go on
- Can be slippery when wet

Synthetic Underlayment

Synthetic underlayment is made from woven or spun polymers. It is lighter, stronger, and generally built to resist tearing and moisture.

Strengths

- Resists tearing and wind better than felt
- Does not absorb water or wrinkle the way felt can
- Lighter rolls cover more area per roll
- Often rated for longer exposure if shingles are delayed
- Many products have a slip-resistant surface

Drawbacks

- Higher material cost
- Quality varies widely between brands
- Some products are more slippery than others, especially when dusty or damp

- Different products need specific fastening patterns

Side-by-Side Comparison

roofing contractor Huntington NY Factor Felt Paper Synthetic Relative material cost Lower Higher Tear resistance Fair Good to very good Water absorption Can absorb Resists Exposure tolerance Short Often longer, check product Weight and handling Heavier Lighter Wrinkling Common if damp Rare

These are general, typical characteristics. Always check the manufacturer's data for the exact product being installed.

Why It Matters on the North Shore

Long Island weather is changeable. A roof can be torn off on a sunny morning and see rain by evening, and a delayed project can leave the deck exposed for days. Synthetic underlayment typically handles that better than felt. Homes under mature tree canopy in Dix Hills or Greenlawn, where damp surfaces dry slowly, also benefit from an underlayment that does not soak up moisture. Near the harbors in Northport and Cold Spring Harbor, salt and humidity are additional reasons to choose durable materials.

Special Areas: Ice and Water Membrane

Neither felt nor basic synthetic replaces self-adhering ice and water membrane in the places that count most:

- Along the eaves, where ice dams back water up under the shingles
- In valleys, where water concentrates
- Around chimneys, skylights, and wall intersections
- Around vent pipes and other penetrations

A good contractor combines a field underlayment with membrane in these vulnerable zones. Ask where it will be installed, and get it in writing.

Compatibility With Your Shingles

Some manufacturers specify underlayment types for warranty coverage, and the specifics can differ across products. Ask your contractor to confirm that the underlayment chosen satisfies the shingle manufacturer's requirements. This matters most if you are installing premium shingles or a special material such as slate or cedar.

Common Mistakes

1. Leaving felt exposed for days before shingles go on
2. Using too few fasteners, so the underlayment flaps in wind
3. Skipping membrane at eaves and valleys
4. Installing over damaged deck boards
5. Choosing the cheapest synthetic with no brand information

Permits and Local Offices

A roof replacement typically requires a permit. In unincorporated hamlets such as Huntington Station, Greenlawn, and Dix Hills, contact the Town of Huntington Building Department. In incorporated villages such as Lloyd Harbor, Huntington Bay, Northport, and Asharoken, the village has its own building department. Confirm with the right office before starting. Suffolk County also requires home improvement contractors to hold a Suffolk County Consumer Affairs license, so ask to see it.

Making the Call

The price difference between felt and synthetic is usually a small share of a full replacement, while the added protection can be meaningful. Talking with a trusted provider of **Long Island Exterior Co.** about which underlayment goes where, and why, helps you avoid vague line items such as "underlayment included." Ask for the product name and type, and check that it appears in the contract.

Final Thought

Felt still has a place, but for most Huntington homes synthetic underlayment is the smarter upgrade, especially when paired with ice and water membrane at the edges and valleys. It is one of the least visible and most cost-effective decisions in the whole project.

About the Author

Lena R. is a home improvement writer with experience in residential roofing installation and estimating. She writes straightforward guides that help homeowners understand what goes into a roof, layer by layer.