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How to create owner advantages through early involvement of the architect and contractor

Recently we interviewed five of the architects with whom we've had the privilege of working on multiple projects to solicit their insights on what makes for successful construction projects from an owner's perspective. Today I want to share with you two of the key points they raised.

1. You really should start the site planning process with the architect rather than an engineer, in order to preserve some important longer term flexibility and value.

2. You need to be careful with value engineering because it may create unintended consequences.

Architects are trained to begin the design journey by finding out the owner's plans and wishes, and then think ahead. Before you commit to a property, an architect will help you consider site preparation and construction costs, and also think about how to preserve future options. Here are a few examples our archi-



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itects gave us as to why this is important to an owner:

- They will help you take soft costs like buffer zones and zoning issues into account before you commit to a piece of property.

- Situating a building is a lot more than planning for drainage. You may endure costs and delays of permit changes if an architect joins your team later. Or even worse, you may find that the property won't support your

full vision without radical changes in layout. For example:

like this:

- Traditionally, the architect creates a design, and

usually favor working with a trusted contractor to do the value engineering before the

When you undertake value engineering your goal is to improve the cost profile of a project without affecting its functional performance.

- You may need to put parking under the building to preserve land for future expansions.

- An architect may orient the building differently if you want to add solar panels later.

- Your architect can also take curb appeal into account in early layouts and, depending on the nature of your project, this may impact long term value.

In general, when you undertake value engineering your goal is to improve the cost profile of a project without affecting its functional performance. The interesting point of view of several of the architects is that value engineering can have unintended consequences. The logic goes

then the owner hires a construction manager to 'beat up' the contractor to cut costs. (We know this process intimately.)

- Some feel that this process may actually add costs over the long run if it ignores the long term performance of the building and the quality of life issues. Here's an example of how short term cost cutting can have long term negative impacts:

- Some diffusers are removed from the \$50,000 HVAC system to save money.

- Over the long run, deterioration in air quality affects employee health.

- Over the long run energy use is actually higher as well.

In contrast, architects ac-

design is hardened and trade offs can be made with greater flexibility and thought to the long term impacts. We've worked on some projects in this manner and have seen owners benefit from both lower cost and better building performance over its life cycle. The process works best when there is genuine openness to the practical, hands-on field tested expertise of a contractor.

So, owners can be well served by involving the architect and contractor early in the cycle while there is flexibility to reflect fresh insights.

Ted Brennan is vice president of T. M. Brennan Contractors, Inc. in Hamburg, NJ. ■