



During Fall 2008 we interviewed Michael McGovern of LAN Associates, Engineering, Planning, Architecture, Surveying, Incorporated leading their Goshen, NY office. We've worked with Mike and his team on a number of projects, and this write-up summarizes what we discussed.

## **Trends**

In general, LAN believes that owners are better informed and this makes them open to new ideas and technologies. For example, there is a clear increase in environmental consciousness, which is helped by the need to conserve energy and reduce costs. It is LAN's view that "clients are not necessarily averse to spending more if there is a return in a few years." LAN's experience is that you need to be prepared for a 1 ½ % to 2 ½% premium up front to get the environmental and energy savings over conventional construction methods. It really depends on the perspective of the client and how much life-cycle operating costs are reflected in their decision criteria. LAN sees a difference between the attitude of long term owners and those who are spec developers.

There are opportunities to incorporate new and better materials and technology into environmentally friendly construction. There is good acceptance of low flow toilets and waterless urinals, for example, because they require less maintenance and are good for the environment. But, there is certain wariness about whether other technologies like photo voltaic, wind and geothermal generate an adequate return at this point. Developers have a harder time to justify these types of investments if they are not retaining the facilities to realize the long term savings.

LEED is helping architects, developers, owners and contractors to keep up with new technology. It's not necessary for a facility to be LEED certified to benefit from the idea it reflects.

## **Selecting General Contractor**

LAN sees its role as architect to help clients/owners make their selection. LAN usually works with contractors already known to the firm, and advises owners to take into account how many relevant projects they have done. LAN uses factors like the length of being in business as a proxy. LAN believes that a firms' reputation 'precedes them', but still does a thorough examination of their actual track record.

Helping clients check out references is "one of the most important steps." It's LAN's practice to review past projects, and then obtain the references from projects of similar scope and size. As part of the reference checking, LAN asks a series of tough questions, including

1. Did the contractor have adequate and well qualified management?
2. Was the contractor receptive and open to changes?
3. Did the contractor make timely submittals of documentation?
4. Was the contractor cooperative by nature?
5. Do the right people show up at job meetings?
6. What was the quality of their sub contractors and their relationship with the subs?
7. Did the contractor visit the site before the bid and what kind of questions do they ask?
8. Did the contractor speak to the owner to get direct perspective?

*"The finest structures we build are relationships"*



# architect interviews

## Keys to Successful Projects

Here are some important points on LAN's checklist for a successful launch and great progress throughout:

1. High level of owner involvement, including timely decisions
2. Good subs and relationship with subs
3. A cohesive set of plans that fully represent the owner's desire
4. Seeds of success are planted during the bidding process
5. Great communication among the parties – from the start
  - a. “Mandated preconstruction meeting.”
  - b. The kick off meeting sets the tone
  - c. We go back to drawings and paperwork.
  - d. At the outset, LAN clearly lays out what happens if there are change orders or unanticipated latent issues
    - “LAN reviews protocols for submitting change orders.”
6. Project meetings to assure open and clear communication and timely resolutions
  - a. Twice weekly at start and then at least weekly to make sure there is clear communications
  - b. Specific status
  - c. Timely resolution
  - d. A forward look a couple of weeks out is important to let everyone be proactive.
    - LAN's experience with TMB is that they are professional and cooperative, and come to job meetings to work out issues.

LAN believes that the owner has several important roles. One is, of course, prompt payment. It is important that an owner understands that some type of latent issues may crop up and the impacts have to be dealt with. A contingency in the budget is in part set aside for this purpose. Because you don't know what might happen, this is one of the reasons why it's so crucial to have a proactive manager for the contractor. By proactive, LAN means:

1. Looks ahead several weeks
2. Has a clear and workable correction plan
3. Keeps both the owner architect in the loop
4. Lets the owner know about issues in timely way

LAN's experience is that a typical project may use 2-3% of the contingency, and what's left over creates an opportunity to make some higher-end finishing choices.

LAN's philosophy is to be flexible and open to alternative ideas, systems and materials when they're offered up by the GC.

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T.M. BRENNAN CONTRACTORS, INC.



# architect interviews

Restoration, renovation or remodeling projects can be harder because you just don't know everything about how the existing building was built. These kinds of projects also require dealing with the ongoing use of the building, which is hard on both owner and contractor. It bears reminding everyone before the project starts.



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