

Site Planning: Pay now or later

Dave Murphee, PE

Civil engineer, Accurate EngiSurv, Broomfield

Builders, developers, planners, project managers and construction managers alike should consider the old and often-repeated quotes, “You get what you pay for” and “Pay now or pay later” when shaping the professional design team for a construction project.

All too often, especially in today’s competitive, growing market, it seems that these professions (e.g., architecture, engineering, site planning, land surveying, and others) are not recognized with the distinguished stature that they may have encountered 25 years ago. Today, these services are often looked at as a commodity and competitively bid on, akin to the construction trade industry. Within a competitive selection process based more on price and less on qualifications, a developer and/or project manager takes the risk of being disappointed with the overall results at project’s end.

As is the case with just about any purchase, “You get what you pay for” and “You pay for what you get” apply to site planning as well. It probably goes without saying that most projects have their challenges; however, many difficulties can be avoided with thorough planning and quality design, which account for a small percentage of the overall project cost. So whether you’re building a \$2 million project or a \$200 million project, it would be inadvisable to cut overall project costs by reducing the design budget, since likely it will result in increased construction costs.

Consider the following when developing and planning a project.

■ **Partnership.** Build a strong, unified project team that shares a common desire—to

complete a first-class project, on time and within budget. To cultivate this partnership, establish and maintain good communication channels between all professional team members.

■ **Planning and design budget.** Set reasonable budgets that honor the importance of proper planning and design. To support this thought, consider another cliché: “Pay for it now or pay for it later.” Planning and design is an upfront project cost that if not properly funded at the beginning of the project (*now*) will invite additional cost during construction (*later*).

■ **Project schedule.** Although not always easy, allow as much time as possible within the project schedule for entitlement, planning and design development. Extra effort put forth during the preliminary planning and conceptual design stages of the project likely will pay great dividends. In addition, when a project requires an aggressive or unrealistic schedule, the professionals’ ability to provide a quality, complete set of construction documents may be diminished because the project team always is “playing catch-up.”

As many professionals can attest, success of a land development project is dependent largely on good planning. As they say, “Plan for the worst and expect the best.” Too often, project planning is overlooked, under-budgeted, misguided, and/or without proper action. In closing, one last memorable quote from Harvey Makay, “Failures don’t plan to fail; they fail to plan.”

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