

ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES AVAILABLE

Architects do many things. What services do you need? Do you need help with early design concepts? Do you just need help getting permits?

Let's list the main services architects perform.

Site Analysis. What are the pertinent features of the site? Can it work for what you need? What are the governmental restrictions and requirements if you build there? Where will you put the building, the parking and driveway for the best layout? For raw land being developed there are typically setbacks and restrictions as to what you can build where. Then if you need to locate a septic system, well head, water tank and fire hydrant it gets even more complicated. Then we have the architect's favorites about designing for the view, solar exposure and winds.

Feasibility Studies. Does it make sense to buy this property or rent this space? Can I build what I want on it? What are the limits if any on what I can build? Is it zoned properly or are there restrictions? If I build what other things are required? If you need a certain amount of parking you'll need to know what you can fit and where, how the driveway and turn around access might work, and how much building you can fit. If site improvements are needed or governmental processes involved that take time, money and effort for project approval, will these costs and delays work within your budget and schedule?

Programming. In this process the architect helps the user define the requirements and goals of the project. Without a firm set of requirements and goals the whole project can be on the wrong track. So the architect should be getting from you or helping you develop an extensive list of everything on your wish list. What functions? What room sizes? What relationships between functions and rooms? What style, look and feel do you want? What materials or equipment do you want? Spend some extra time in this because it effects what you are asking for and it is then telling the professionals to deliver for this for you. You should not make assumptions but be as specific as possible. Even if it's just a wish list item, the architect may be able to include it at little or no cost if they know it's a goal. It is common for the architect to then come back and give you design options and compromise options. There will be tradeoffs in the design process, but this step in the process sets the direction you'll be heading towards for the rest of the project.

Development Options. Rough plans or sketches of what might be built, sizes, relationships to setbacks and zoning restrictions.

Budgeting. Estimating and budgeting may come into play. We should say it typically needs to be addressed in every phase. Before you buy land or sign the lease, as you look at each preliminary option, as you get to each phase of design have you gone over budget? Does it make sense to continue or should things be modified due to the budget?

Project/Owner's Documents. The owner of the property is usually responsible for providing certain documents relating to the project including surveys and investigative engineering. Did the owner get all the right paperwork? Engineering reports? You don't want to get too far into a project and find there is a hidden defect that may derail the project. What insurance should be in place?

Project Planning. What is the overall schedule for the project? Who will deal with which issues and be responsible for what parts of the project? Do you need other consultants? Is there an overall project concept, budget and schedule? If not, you really can't expect to stay on track to meet a target that you never set.

Schematic Design Phase. Once the project is ready to start into the design work, the architect needs to take the program and provide design options. This phase will develop a preliminary and general design direction, style and layout.

Design Development Phase. Once you have a basic idea of what you're going to design and have that rough plan layout, all the details of what types of materials, more refined design drawings are developed. The architect will develop some specifications of materials and processes that will be used. By the end of this phase you should pretty much know what the project will generally look like, have a specific list of all the features and components that must be designed, and have preliminary designs for all the main features.

Interior Design. This may be included with the architecture or separate. It may be simple or elaborate. It may just give bare walls, or it may include furniture, furnishings, window treatments and help with moving and setting up your new place.

Renderings and Models. These may be requested but due to the time and effort involved need to be budgeted into the project.

Consultants. Will your architect supply any of the associated engineering or will you have to hire outside consultants? Who will be responsible for coordinating their work into the final project and all the associated drawings and engineering?

A list of consultants might include: Surveyor, Soils and Geological Engineer, Civil Engineer, Landscape Architect, Structural Engineer, Mechanical (air conditioning), Electrical and Plumbing Engineers, Fire Life safety and Fire sprinklers, Acoustic, Green Building Consultant, Health Department (water, septic, etc.), and if there are other specialty items due to the project or governmental restrictions there may be more specialists involved. There may need to be interface with utility providers for meters and services. Some of these will depend on your project type, some the building department requirements, and some based on the contractor you'll use.

Construction Documents Phase. In this phase the architect does the detailed construction working drawings. These must integrate and coordinate with all other consultant's work. Either within the drawing set or separate must be the specifications for the materials and processes involved in the construction. The goal is to end up with a package that will allow you to get all required permit, get accurate and detailed cost quotes, and to build the project. If any of these end processes require further detail or elaboration of the drawings and specifications those should be addressed.

Construction Negotiation. If not worked out early in the project by negotiation, a contractor must be selected. A typical bid situation requires the development of a "Bid Package" of drawings, specifications, and instructions on how the contractors are to prepare their bids and what must be included in the bids. An architect will typically handle all questions and requests for information to clarify contractor questions. Someone needs to coordinate job site walks. Then the bids must be received, reviewed and compared. The architect often helps the client make a final decision. Then a contract for the construction must be developed or if provided by the contractor this should be reviewed for terms, inclusions, allowances, and exclusions. If bonds are appropriate these must be specified.

Governmental Review and Permitting. What governmental agencies must approve the project? Who will handle the reviews and approvals? This can vary from simple to very complicated with more than five agencies involved. Sometimes with conflicting requirements.

Construction Observation. Typically someone monitors the construction. Unless the client is particularly experienced this is typically the architect. This can be intensive and detailed with periodic inspections, or it can be less frequent depending on the experience of the client and the relationship with the contractor. Who will review and approve the contractor's requests for payment? There are typically construction completion inspections, sign offs and a certificate of completion to be done.

Post Construction Services. This can be building start up, maintenance, warranty, and commissioning. Depending on the project there may be other approvals for use, or help with other uses and other occupancy approvals to be obtained.

Believe it or not this is the short list. Some items you will not need for your project. Most items have been simplified and there are many other processes that do come up depending on the project.

So when you hire an architect it's a good idea to know what you need. You need to agree on what services will be provided, how much time, effort, meetings and changes will be allowed?

A good architect will review your needs, set up a schedule of services that fit your requirements, and then review this with you to see if you want this modified.

You can ask for a fixed fee, a fee based on a percentage of the costs of the project, hourly, or a combination of any or all of these.

The best way to be satisfied with an architect is for you to know what architects are supposed to do and for you and the architect to communicate well with each other.

Development of a design and construction project can be fairly complicated. Make sure you are clear and can define what you are asking for so that you get what you need. Unless you have a fair amount of experience with a similar type of construction project, you are well advised to hire people to help you. In the overall scheme of things architecture, planning and design are usually a small fraction of the total project costs. This is a very small investment in protecting a very large investment.

It used to be that a full service architect would charge 15% of a construction project's anticipated costs for a standard full service project. That got you some early pre-design, general design and drawings, a fairly comprehensive but not high end interior design package, some limited engineering, construction negotiation, and construction observation. A developer's set of drawings might be down around 5% and exclude everything but the basic drawings. Things for your project may be more complicated. Many building departments are now requiring more engineering which means more upfront costs versus letting your contractor do "design build" for these other building systems.

So we recommend you go through the attached check list, and then review services with your architect to get a package set up specific to your needs. While you don't want to pay for unneeded services, you are well advised to make sure a professional is helping you with the choices, options, engineering, and design feature selection.