

PROPERTY SUPPORT GUIDELINES #4

TITLE: HOW TO SELECT AND HIRE AN ARCHITECT

The congregation is the steward of the buildings it needs for its ministries. This stewardship is a necessary part of its overall ministry. The Book of Order G-10.0102o defines this session responsibility: To provide for the management of the property of the church, including determination of the appropriate use of church buildings and facilities, and to obtain property and liability insurance coverage to protect the facilities, programs, and officers, including member of the session, staff, board of trustees, and deacons.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is briefly to review the steps suggested in the hiring of an architect or space planner. This process is fundamentally different from hiring a contractor who performs specifically described work. The principal difference is that the architect is expected to become intimately familiar with the needs of the church, a close collaborator of the committee of the church assigned to work with him on whatever the project ends up bring and to develop a comprehensive approach to the space and operational needs of the church, in whole or in part.

The architect is licensed by the state to certify that he/she has passed educational and training requirements aimed at his/her technical understanding and competence of the various components of buildings and is charged by the state for compliance with Building and Zoning codes established to meet public health and safety and planning criteria. The architect is expected to provide professional independent judgment in the sole interest of the owner free of prior commitment to any building system or product and receives no compensation from any supplier or contractor.

The traditional functions (services) offered by the architect normally include: space program development (new or remodeled space), schematic design (layout and shaping), definitive design (additional detail and primary building systems for structure, environmental control, and et al.), construction documents (for use in bidding and construction), and construction observation. An architect can also work as a member of a design – build team including a pre-qualified/pre-selected contractor and other consultants as needed.

Most architects work with independent consultants for structural and other building systems (heating, air-conditioning, electrical, plumbing). A church may have special needs requiring the architect also to procure and coordinate the services of specialty consultants in areas such as space acoustics, sound systems, special lighting systems, telecommunications and security.

For these reason, there is no substitute for getting referrals from previous clients, preferably churches or not-for-profit institutions, and based on these for taking the time to interview and to get to know the persons with whom the church will be working and hearing from them their reactions to your explanations of the church's needs. A successful selection process can begin whatever you plan to do on a positive footing and with the hope of ultimately meeting your goals, even if these goals change in the process.

The architect (and consulting engineers as required) must be currently licensed by the State of NY and its insurance carrier should be able to provide certification of commercial and professional liability insurance.

HIRING THE ARCHITECT

Simply summarized, the steps in finding and hiring an architect (or other special consultant such as security, telephone are:

- 1) Obtain from the appropriate church governing body authorization to seek a candidate firm to recommend as architect.
- 2) Seek recommendations from other churches and not-for-profits.
- 3) Invite a few candidate architects to submit a letter of interest in working with you on your project along with documentation about their firm.
- 4) Based on the letters, invite three or four firms for an initial interview, discuss with them what they understand your project to be, how they would propose to work on the project, what services they normally would provide, who would be their responsible individuals, how they would propose to be compensated. Obtain from them names of previous clients you can talk to.
- 5) If necessary, re-interview one or two firms, possibly visit their offices (recommended), and narrow the list to one firm to recommend to the appropriate governing board.
- 6) Based on approval by the appropriate governing board, often after meeting with the recommended architect, proceed with the owner-architect agreement. This initial contract may be on a feasibility phase during which the scope of the project, the available resources and the schedule will be coordinated. After this, a second contract can stipulate the details of the services needed through the end of project.

The benefits of a successful owner-architect relationship can be many among them 1) a clear understanding of what the church's goals imply about its building needs, 2) an efficient utilization of existing and proposed additional space, 3) a well-coordinated and contemporary building that can meet in addition public goals including energy savings, accessibility and compliance with local and state regulations 4) an attractive and well-accepted facility that augments the evangelical goals of the congregation.

Engineers:

As mentioned above, professional consulting engineers specializing in soils and foundations, structural, heating and air-conditioning (HVAC), plumbing and electrical systems are routinely employed as part of the architectural team and their services subsumed under the agreement between the owner and architect or hired as independent consultants. Comments above regarding architect's licensing, responsibilities, professional independence, insurance and stages of work apply as well to the professional engineer.

Special consultants:

For many projects, special functions or systems require the services of special consultants. Common examples are the spatial acoustics of gathering spaces (acousticians), sound systems, special lighting systems, and security and telecommunications systems.