

Reasonable Expectations of Architect services in the Construction process

The primary complaint Builders have about architects is incomplete documents. This coupled with Owner requested design changes and misdirection and miscommunication between parties including the Design Professional can cause undue tension in the construction process.

At best, the Architect and Builder shall work as a team in realizing an Owners dream

Contract drawings do not depict every detail of every component of a construction project. Some aspects of the work are fleshed out in drawing details. Other details, however, are left unaddressed in the contract. The contractor is required to propose this detailing through the submittal of shop drawings, usually prepared by subcontractors and fabricators.

In residential construction, these details are often worked out in the field or in a collaborative process by involving the architect in the construction phase of design services.

There is much interpretation in translating a set of 2 dimensional plans to 3 dimensions and often clients cannot visualize the end result which further complicates the interpretation of plans. There is not always a right or wrong way to interpret plans but more often, a number of solutions to resolve a design conflict and determine where intent meets practice.

The reason architects do not deliver a complete set of documents and specs often stems from an Owner pushing for construction before drawings are complete. The other reason is many residential clients see no value in paying for a complete set.

In commercial construction, coordination of all the building systems is critical and a full set of construction details is required to obtain a building permit. Residential requirements are less stringent, some clients do not understand why they are needed if they are not required.

So it is common for an architect to produce a good set of design development drawings with critical details and some spec information for a fee of 6%- 8% of construction cost whereas a complete set of twice as many drawings and large scale details may demand a fee of 12-16% of construction cost. Architects add value to a design project by bringing an expertise of design concepts including scale, proportion, harmony, rhythm and beauty whereas a builder traditionally brings a skills set that includes an approach to means and methods, how to get the job done efficiently and economically .

Too often as money is spent in construction, less value is seen in the design professionals role and more respect is given to the party controlling the budget but this often results in changes that deviate from the architects design that could have been managed more seamlessly had the Design Professional been involved in the decision making.

In traditional construction, a general contractor directs and coordinates the work of the subcontractors. This is important when plans are not highly detailed especially for trades including finish carpentry, mechanical, plumbing and electrical work.

A GC or construction manager is charged with the sequencing, scheduling and interpretation of the drawings to field conditions. There shall be reasonable expectations of the design professional for both the owner and the contractor, documents may well contain conflicts and may be imperfect, unknown building or site conditions may also impact design decisions so for these reasons, it is highly beneficial for all parties involved in the construction process to work as a team

The fees paid to a design professional are small in relation to the risks incurred and the actual value of the construction incurred by the Owner, A design vision can be years in the making and longer in construction. The best outcome for an owner is an enjoyable building process that involves the Architect from the beginning till end and makes all parties equally proud of the end result.