

## Selecting a Church Architect

Selecting the right architect is probably the single most important decision for a successful church building project. The correct architect will understand your budget and needs, design a building that fits your needs and budget and help bring the project to reality. The wrong architect will help you spend thousands of dollars on plans that will never be built.

There are several Steps to a good selection process:

1. Determine Your Budget
2. Develop a Rough Project Outline
3. Develop Potential Candidate List
4. Write a Request for Proposal (RFP) and Contact Each Candidate
5. Review Proposals and Choose Finalists to Interview
6. Interview, Choose, and Sign Contract

(Note: It is assumed that you have already organized a qualified building committee and have policies and procedures in place for them to follow.)

### **Determine Your Budget**

The first and most important step is developing your budget. Without knowing how much you can afford almost all of your efforts and money spent on an architect will be wasted. Contacting a reputable church lender with a qualified consulting team is the best way to do this. They will assist you in determining what you can afford.

Cash on hand and money that you designate from your general operating funds are the least expensive sources of funds, but usually the smallest amount of money available too. Money that is raised through a professionally led capital stewardship campaign is the next least expensive source of cash. Sometimes there is property to sell. The last source of funds is what you can borrow. This is also the most expensive source, so every effort needs to be made to keep this amount as low as possible and to pay it off as soon as possible.

The total of all these sources is your maximum budget. Because there are many unknowns and uncontrollable things that will arise, in addition to the fact that it takes significant time to actually get to the project (usually at least a year or two) you must reduce this amount by 20-25% to be assured that you will be able to complete the project in the end.

### **Develop a Rough Project Outline**

What do you need? What do you want? Dream a little, have your leadership team dream with you. Recognize that all of this will need to fit within your budget, so prioritize your list, as some things may need to be postponed to a later phase. Don't be too concerned about the specifics now. After you hire your architect these things will be brought into place as you focus on your top priorities. Also recognize that your needs should always supersede your wants.

### **Develop a Potential Candidate List**

As you are dreaming and developing a rough project outline also start building a candidate list. Talk to other churches that have just completed projects. Visit churches and make a list of your likes and dislikes. Talk to the senior pastor, staff members, custodians, etc as you visit the churches. They give great insight into “We wish we would have done this differently.” Your list should probably have 5-10 potential candidates.

### **Write a Request for Proposal (RFP) and Contact Each Candidate**

This is a critical step and it is intended to pre-qualify the candidates. Your RFP should clearly state your budget, (not your maximum but the amount that is 20-25 % lower than your maximum), your basic desires for the project (rough outline), and specific questions to be answered about the process, the cost, and what is and isn't included. You should ask for the costs to be itemized by phases (ie: master plan, design development, schematics, construction documents, etc.). Your RFP should give a deadline for a response. The more detailed you are in your RFP the better your responses will be. Send the RFP to all of your candidates.

### **Review Proposals and Choose Finalists to Interview**

Once you receive all of your responses/proposals, be sure to note if they responded to your specific requests and questions. Also note the timeliness of their response. If they did not respond to your specific requests and questions or missed your deadline that should be a major red flag. Review any other information, brochures they may have sent, and check their references. It would be a good idea to contact all the churches they list in their brochures and ask those churches for additional references. After doing this you will probably be able to reduce your list of potential candidates to about 3 that deserve an interview with your building committee team.

### **Interview, Choose and Sign Contract**

Assuming they meet all of your other qualifications, preferential consideration should be given to those located in your general region. They understand construction, codes, etc. in your area. Ask them to tell you about the projects shown in their brochures. Give particular attention to those that are “sketches” not photos. That could be significant in your decision. Remember architects get paid for drawing pictures, not constructing the buildings. You want an architect who will design something you can afford to actually build. Many of the “sketches” shown in an architect's brochures may never be built because the church couldn't afford it. You need an architect who knows your budget and will not exceed your budget with his grandiose designs. This cannot be emphasized enough. You also want to question the architect about his willingness to involve the contractor early in the design process. The earlier the better as the contractor gives great input into the cost as well as what can and cannot be done.

Quite often your final choice has risen to the top during the interviewing process. If not, you'll need to choose. Once chosen be sure you sign a contract. They will probably offer a standard AIA contract, but read it and make sure it fits your specific needs. If not, make sure it is revised so that it does fit your needs.

Now you are ready to start the architectural planning for your project!

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