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The Importance of Post-Design Management: Where Did the Budget Go?

Where did the budget go? This is a familiar question on projects that are not managed well. The actual construction, or Post-Design phase, of a project is where even the most well-designed project can fall flat if the owner is not tracking the project closely. Because managing multiple projects can make it difficult for project owners to give construction the time and attention it needs, a better understanding of Post-Design helps ensure project success.

The Post-Design phase typically involves contract management, construction engineering and observation, dispute resolution, and stormwater permit monitoring. The three key elements of successful Post-Design are **cost control, schedule, and quality**. Often two of the three are satisfied, but all are essential. A well-managed project can meet and exceed all three elements, but it takes knowledge and foresight to plan for issues that could hold up a project or blow the budget.



Cost Control – It is tempting to think that the cheapest way to construct a project is to select the low bidder. Experienced developers know, however, that it pays to do their homework. Asking consultants and other colleagues if they have any history with a contractor's ability to perform work consistent with the bid can pay off. It is also important that all bids be reviewed and compared; bid items that are not consistent with others should be questioned.

Schedule – Contractors should be required to submit a schedule at the pre-construction meeting. The meeting should involve schedule review, definition of milestone dates, and discussion of obstacles that need to be overcome to satisfy the timeline. Weekly progress meetings are recommended, and contractors should consider submitting a "Two Week Look Ahead Schedule" throughout construction. This allows proactive management of potential obstacles and creates a process for documenting delays.

Quality – While some might see a trade-off between schedule and quality, these two elements of Post-Design can reinforce each other if managed properly. With a team of consultants and contractors who understand the importance of following plans and specifications, quality issues can be documented and corrected as they occur. To prevent increased costs and liability from problems that get buried and not addressed, it is recommended that the owner require contractors to submit testing results and daily reports on a weekly basis. When quality issues are addressed promptly, they can have less impact on the schedule than if corrective action is delayed.

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The Post-Design phase can make or break a project. Applying effective Post-Design management will minimize surprises and excessive change orders, helping to ensure the project stays on budget. Ushering the project through its final stages also makes sure it gets built as planned, thereby maximizing the investment in the Pre-Design and Design phases.



For more information, please contact
Jason McCarty, Director of Residential Development
jason.mccarty@westwoodps.com, 952-906-7446, or
Dan Parks, Director of Commercial Development
dan.parks@westwoodps.com, 952-906-7435

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