



Building on the best foundation: Beginning a project on the right foot is crucial

July 25, 2008 - Spotlights

One of the primary rules of construction/development is to build on a good foundation. This statement has many meanings and, in today's environment, is not only a productive truth but a necessity if your project is going to move forward. Starting a project on the right foot is critical for proper permitting, controlled inspections, efficient construction procedures and the avoidance of the ever present "stop work order." The coordination of the project team-owner, architect, engineer, and general contractor/construction manager-is the responsibility of the program manager/owners representative. As this role is so vital to the success of the project, it is advisable to select a program manager that has experience building projects similar in scope and value to that which is proposed. An owners representative that is first familiarizing itself with new building requirements, for example, might present a learning curve that is too costly in the long run.

The process of obtaining a new building permit includes more than just the filing of an approved set of drawings. There are often many additional items required, without which a permit will not be issued. One such item is the issuance and sign-off of the demolition permit. The "demo" permit itself has between 15-20 different requirements. If these are not managed properly, the process could take up to six months to complete. Things such as notification letters and the BEST squad sign off are all required. A proper analysis of the site will determine if shoring will be required and what type. Is sheathing necessary, can overcut be used, or is underpinning required? If underpinning is required you might need a separate permit issued and signed off by the owner of the adjacent property. Without a knowledgeable seasoned program manager/owners representative, an owner might be subject to excessive cost overruns, delays, Dept. of Buildings stop work orders and possible legal problems.

Another issue in getting a new building permit is the small "E" designation. This designation by the Dept. of Buildings indicates an environmental problem (usually contaminated soils) or an acoustic problem (noise levels), etc. Knowing the proper methods to evaluate and measure the level of deficiency, how to correct the deficiency and how to expedite the process are all critical to managing this designation successfully. Certain industrial areas are prone to hazardous soil contamination and might require the placement of barriers and/or underground ventilation systems in order to satisfy the Dept. of Environmental Protection. Underground tanks will also require specialized remediation if discovered on the site. If noise abatement problems exist, there are many ways to build composite wall systems to mitigate noise. In addition, HVAC systems can be designed to meet specified building codes by a properly selected acoustician familiar with requirements of the Dept. of Environmental Protection. When making these types of decisions, an owners representative can be extremely useful in navigating the maze of requirements in order to get a notice to proceed.

With the climate of the current building department environment being what it is, it is critical to

establish a master plan for the project that provides for all aspects of the permitting process. Once issued, a stop work order can take weeks to correct and have re-evaluated for dismissal. The resulting delays carry great penalties not only for violations, but for carrying costs as well. The right program manager/owner's representative can ensure a smooth transition through all phases of project development.

Jeffry Wengroff is the executive vice president of HE2 Project Development LLC, Rockville Centre, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540