



2022 Women in Construction: Antonia Walker, Body Lawson Associates Architects and Planners

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Name: Antonia Walker

Title: Project Manager

Company Name: Body Lawson Associates Architects and Planners

Starting out in the architecture/construction business, who empowered you?

My first job was in the employ of the on-site architect and construction administrator working on the south side of Ellis Island, at the former hospital facility for immigrants which was not yet open to the public at that time. I was learning a ton about historic preservation and restoration, but more importantly my work shadowing the architect provided an amazing opportunity to learn about the architecture and construction process from attending construction meetings with the contractor, trades, and labor crews. The architect took a lot of time to show me how the process works, how all the different aspects of the job come together, which helped me to develop a keen sense of the amount of teamwork and collaboration required, and the levels of expertise coming from each member of the project team.

What was your greatest professional achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months?

For the past two years I have been working on the La Peninsula project in Bronx, NY, on the former site of the Spofford Juvenile Detention Facility—it's the largest and most complex project in my portfolio to date. My focus on the project is construction administration, and there is construction ongoing currently for one component of this multi-phase development: A 14-story mixed-use building with 183 affordable housing units and retail and community-use spaces on the lower levels. It's a really exciting project. There is also another light industrial building being finalized in the current phase and three more buildings currently in the design phase. Each component brings new challenges that require considerations of city agency requirements, and collaborating to organize and synchronize the various phases of development and construction for each part of the site.

Why should women consider a career in architecture/construction?

Often people's associations with the construction field are oriented around the physical labor component, so it's important to remember that it's actually a really broad field. The construction industry depends on a wide range of talents, technical expertise, and management skills to produce high-quality built environments, so there is a huge range of opportunities for men and women alike. I'd also recommend the building industry for women who want to feel invested in the communities in which they live and work. It's the ideal field for you if you're looking for a way to make a contribution to something greater than yourself. Women should have a voice in how the environments they inhabit are built, and working within the building industry can promote that sense of ownership and active contribution to a better world.

Who within your own firm has helped you succeed within the construction industry?

There has been more than one person along the way, but our founder and principal Victor Body-Lawson has played an essential role. He is always there to work with me on sorting through technical information and offering insights on the procedural aspects of construction, right from the beginning of each construction phase when we're creating and organizing documents, planning out the construction schedule, and collaborating within the organizational structure. I'm also indebted to one former principal of the firm whose focus was on the technical aspects of architecture, who spent a lot of time helping me understand what goes into translating documents into the practical activity of the construction phase itself.

What advice would you offer to other women getting into the construction industry?

Women who are interested in a career in the building industry should know that right now is a better time than ever to become involved. Even though the industry's reputation of being a male-dominated field persists, for the most part everyone I've encountered has been very welcoming and supportive. And as I mentioned earlier, there are lots of different areas to become involved with, requiring various levels and types of expertise. For someone new to the field the number of different areas can seem daunting, but be aware that you don't have to know everything right away. The field is about communication and problem-solving, so there are a lot of ways to bring contributions to the table. Get out there with your resume and ask the questions that matter to you, and you'll find a foothold before long.

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