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JAX BEACHES HOT MARKET

With very little available land left for development, developers in the retail, office, multifamily, condominium and hotel sectors are buying existing properties in the Beaches submarket and redeveloping them for new and improved use. Page 20.



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Multifamily construction loop should include contractors

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Constructive Communication

In today's tight economic times, there is a growing emphasis on streamlining costs and completing projects quicker than ever. This challenge is certainly felt in the multifamily arena, where demand is high, yet budget and time constraints are real — making project coordination more essential than ever before. As such, many owners have seen the benefit of involving the contractor as a member of the design team early in the project, ensuring maximum collaboration and a value-enhanced final product.

Building success into the design process

According to Charles Kimsey, vice president of general contractor Kellogg & Kimsey Inc. in Sarasota, a common flaw in the design and construction process is failure to include the general contractor or construction manager during design. While this has certainly been standard operating procedure for multifamily and other commercial projects for decades, this isolation approach does not maximize the potential for creating value in the project.

"Too often, the last person brought into the building process is the contractor," said Kimsey. "Early collaboration between the owner, architect, engineer and contractor on multifamily projects has been shown to be a win-win solution for all involved."

In the past, most projects involved an architect conceptualizing and designing the project — together with their MEP consultant and structural engineers — before the project went out for bid. However, this scenario leaves no opportunity for the contractor to provide any input and value. Contrast this with a collaborative approach in which the owner, architect, engineer and contractor begin their relationship during the conceptual design phase. In essence, the contractor is given the opportunity to provide input in terms of constructability, availability of labor and materials, cost and feasibility during the design phase.

For example, the conceptual design of a multi-story building may include the use of precast hollow core slabs for the structure. However, through further investiga-

tion by the contractor of span requirements, column locations within the floor plan and other issues regarding constructability and cost, the decision is made by the designer and the owner to change the structure to a post-tension system. This example clearly validates that the contractor can provide value to the process, as well as input on alternative products and systems in terms of cost, functionality, life expectancy and a host of other factors. This allows effective decisions to be made by the owner and design team prior to the completion of the contract documents.

Yet another benefit to the project is the ability for the contractor to "test" the cost of the project during design while there is still a cost-effective forum for making changes. Even during the earliest of design concepts, the contractor can help establish a realistic project budget through its database of comparable projects and knowledge of regional material and labor costs, as well as input from subcontractors.

The contractor also can be instrumental in helping with the creation of the project specifications and plan details. As decisions are made by the design team and the owner based upon cost and quality control information provided by the contractor, a list of product and materials specifications can be formulated that represents the owner's budget and quality constraints.

Providing a general contractor or construction manager with the opportunity to select subcontractors early in the process also adds a level of quality control to a multifamily construction project, since subcontractors can be chosen based on financial stability, talent, resources and skills instead of merely a low price. It goes without saying that considering only the bottom line can create tremendous problems and decrease the value of the project.

According to Kimsey, owners are all too often faced with post-bid sticker shock. Instead of breaking ground as scheduled, the owner and design/construction team is left with the costly task of redesigning the building to bring costs in line with the budget. This "value engineering" often results in a forced reduction in aesthetics and changes the original architectural concept.

MULTIFAMILY HOUSING



The Boca Vista Condominiums in Boca Grande, currently under construction, are situated on the waterfront of Charlotte Harbor. The five buildings boast 20 units each. Kellogg & Kimsey of Sarasota is serving as the construction manager and general contractor for the project.

Kimsey added that if value engineering occurs, the architect has to alter plans, which obviously increases the project cost and schedule. Post-bid, value engineering often occurs too late in the project to provide any real value to the owner, while early collaboration allows the team to identify any potential issues in the pre-design phase and thoroughly test the budget before the construction process.

Alleviating legal problems, ambiguity

Beyond savings in time and money, collaboration has been shown to have benefits in terms of legal issues. Today's litigious environment is certainly prevalent in the multifamily market and has caused many changes within the construction industry.

One step to alleviating litigious claims is to anticipate problems during the design process — yet another reason for early collaboration by all team members. Such an effort allows for the early involvement of the contractor on key issues that are causing legal concerns for multifamily executives today, such as integrity of the building envelope, waterproof-

ing, exterior skins, windows, doors and balconies.

"An owner is too often left to wonder why the design and construction team didn't see a maintenance or water problem coming," Kimsey said. "However, close scrutiny of these details during design can alleviate problems and strengthen the design in the earliest of concepts, creating a cost savings for the owner, and even more important, happy tenants."

For example, Kimsey points out that selection of a waterproofing membrane detailed with proper flashings, slopes and threshold design can create a system which will prove invaluable in the prevention of the age-old problem of water intrusion through balconies and elevated lanais in multi-story buildings.

Collaboration also benefits design pros

Although once thought by many to inhibit an architect's creative process, early collaboration has actually been shown to be a benefit to the architectural community as well.

Beyond decreasing litigation claims, the early collaborative approach highlights details that typi-

cally cause ambiguity in the construction drawings. This involvement by all team members creates a forum for more thorough documents, which translates into a cost savings for the architect, contractor and owner.

Further, including the contractor in the design process has been shown to reduce the number of requests for information (RFIs) between the architect and contractor, which can be timely and expensive. By having a say in the project early on, the contractor will be able to better interpret the architect's intent and pose questions during the design phase instead of during the expensive and time-sensitive construction process.

"Not only do multiple RFIs slow down the construction process," said Kimsey, "but they are time consuming and consequently costly for the architect. Further, a quality set of construction documents aids in the final bidding by subcontractors, because the additional detail allows them to price the project more accurately without any contingencies. The end result is a decreased price of subcontracted work resulting in a lower project cost for the owner."