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How to Avoid the Pitfalls of Design and Construction

Investing in a project from concept to construction in the Bahamas is a journey that is filled with excitement, financial obligations, and sometimes trepidation. This in and of itself is sufficient to tax our emotional energy. What should not also be part and parcel are pitfalls in the planning, design, and construction phases of realizing the investment dream from paper to reality.

Dealing with design and construction firms, or individuals in the Architecture/Engineering/Construction (A/E/C) industry does not have to be a traumatic experience. However, it requires diligent planning, and a relentless pursuit and demand for value and excellence for hard earned dollars. Additionally, it requires basic research, and moreover, a departure from the business as usual mantra that has proven to be detrimental to countless consumers. Most of those individuals echo a very familiar tone while exhibiting the emotional scars indelibly etched into their psyche as a result of less than adequate execution.

The good news is that negative situations do not have to occur. The A/E/C phase should and could be a very exciting period for an investor. This is the time that should be fraught with eager anticipation of a project coming to life. All that is required for an investor to realize this positive experience is to relegate to the ash heap of history the local status quo of how an A/E/C professional is approached and selected.

So that the effectiveness of a project is maximized in the planning phase, and resources and expenditures are leveraged to a premium, retain and consult with a reputable A/E firm with planning expertise or a project planner. Although this phase may appear superfluous, it is a critical aspect from a cost saving perspective, and, it sets the tone for the smooth flow of the entire project. This is an aspect of project development that should not be overlooked. Also, consistent with the selection of any A/E/C firm or individual professional, it is most critical that research and development of a list of licensed, reputable, and credible names be assembled. That reference list could be derived by word of mouth from trusted and credible individuals, or from making contact with the various A/E/C organizations.

The Professional Architectural Board (PAB) should be contacted

for a listing of Registered Licensed Professional Architects and Architectural Technicians within The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. It is also important to know and understand the difference in the scope of works that can be undertaken by a Licensed Architect versus a Licensed Architectural Technician; the PAB should be able to articulate and provide a description of this difference.

The next professional body to contact is The Bahamas Institute of Professional Engineers (BIPE) and/or The Bahamas Society of Engineers (BSE). Both organizations have a listing of qualified registered licensed engineers who are registered with that respective body, internationally, or a combination of both.

Rounding out the "big three" professional organizations to contact is The Bahamian Contractors Association (BCA). It is essential to request a listing of credible and professional licensed contractors with a proven track record from this organization.

After contacting all of the mentioned organizations and preparing a list, making a sound credible decision of whom to retain as the Architect, Engineer, and Contractor of record is imminent. The next step in this process is to contact the various A/E/C firms on the list and set a meeting with the firm's management. This personal meeting is important because it should give an intuitive feel for that particular firm. Further, it is necessary and a right as a prospective client to request a client reference list. It would also be savvy to ask for the names of clients for which past works did not proceed as planned. This provides another perspective when contacting the references and also allows for some degree of insight into how forthcoming the A/E/C firm is willing to be. This goes a long way in establishing a relationship with the A/E/C firm of choice.

After contacting the various firms and checking their references and past experience, a solid foundation for a successful project would have been constructed. However, the important thing to keep in mind is that no projects are without an occasional hitch. As such, it is very essential that after selecting the A/E/C firm of choice insistence on having the firm draft a contract document should be communicated. That contract should contain what is to

be done, how it is to be done, and what is the time limit for the works to be completed. If not comfortable with the verbiage of the contract, have an attorney peruse it so that notes of any queries can be made and addressed accordingly. The contract should not be signed until you are confident and pleased about the contents therein. This phase is very critical because it goes against the old paradigm of how business is done in the Bahamas. Gone should be the days when business is conducted with a handshake and a smile, in particular the projects that encompass substantial emotional and financial investments (of course substantial is a relative term). Any A/E/C Firm or individual apprehensive about signing a contract, or that does not bring the matter to the forefront should be suspect. Professionals in the A/E/C industry are obligated to have written contracts for any projects undertaken. It is meant to protect the client and the A/E/C firm of record.

Retaining a professional estimator/ quantity surveyor and a professional manager is also advisable. While some Architectural and Engineering Firms provide this specialized service, others do not. Insofar as budget constraints goes, the estimator/quantity surveyor should provide a comprehensive costing of the works to be undertaken which provides the investor with the control to monitor finances in a meaningful way.

Finally, as the sage saying goes in the A/E/C Industry, the final product is only as good as it is constructed. To that extent, ensuring complete quality control so that one gets what he/she is paying for is achieved by good professional project management and/or inspection. This is always monies well invested.

That quality mindset ties in with an important point of reference which is the indisputable fact that you get what you pay for. Too often as projects are undertaken charlatans or less than credible firms/individuals are hired at a reduced rate. In doing so the rules of commerce are violated. It is never possible to pay much less and expect to receive great value, it simply will not happen. If experiences are to be less than traumatic and emotionally draining, the project should be approached the right way. This means careful planning, research, and the retaining of credible professionals at negotiated rates. There is nothing magical about this formula for success.

While nothing is a guarantee besides of course taxes and death, applying the concepts mentioned significantly reduces the potential to lose control of a project and your investment.

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