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Managing Your Construction Project

By Bart Mendel, Stonemark Construction Management

Before your Association embarks on a major project, consider shifting perspective from the construction itself to the groundwork. Project management is a process of defined and critical steps: Planning, Pre-Construction, and Construction. Construction is the third phase of this process, vastly more expensive than the first two. However it is the first two phases that establish the eventual cost. Properly planned projects reduce expensive change orders and cost overruns, limit liability, and will help to ensure the success of your project.

Planning & Investigation. The greatest effects on a project come in the early planning stages. What are the existing conditions that will affect the work? What exactly is the scope of work to be performed? Existing conditions need to be investigated and fully understood prior to performing any renovation project. Review carefully how your buildings are constructed. Water infiltration is frequently the result of multiple sources; fixing only the most obvious one may doom your project to failure. Building systems are tightly inter-related and there may be multiple breakdowns that obscure a proper diagnosis. For example, quality re-roofing projects involve everything at the roof level, not just the roofing trade itself. Whose responsibility is the flashing, repairs to siding or stucco at the roof to wall juncture, gutters and roof drainage, any mechanical systems or other equipment on the roof, chimney and skylight repairs?

During this planning phase, do not abuse free bidding from contractors. Because very few contractors currently carry the appropriate insurance to work for Associations, you want to be careful not to overuse the limited pool of those who do. Each time a contractor looks at a project his bid will tend to be higher. It is better to retain an independent expert to prepare your budget. Go out to bid only once, when you have the funding in place and intend to start work immediately.

Associations are wise to acknowledge that planning for large construction projects is beyond the usual expertise and contractual obligations of property managers. Retain an expert early to manage the critical planning stage properly.

Pre-Construction. Once you have charted your course, create the proper documents for bidding to execute the required scope of work. Bidding documents are necessary to ensure quality control of the eventual construction and also to receive apples-to-apples bids from contractors. Your expert will convert the scope of work into comprehensive bid documents, which may include drawings, technical specifications on each trade and details of how the work of different

trades interface. You may need a licensed architect, engineer or waterproofing specialist to prepare proper design documents.

Bid documents should include General Conditions and Requirements. These may include site-related conditions that may need to be considered in the bidding, such as whether or not buildings will be occupied, safety considerations, temporary access requirements and responsibility for resident communications. Include payment terms, insurance requirements and the form of contract. Consult with your attorney regarding construction contracts. Once you put together all of these documents into a bid package, you are finally ready to invite contractors to bid. Your expert should review all bids carefully to ensure that contractors have not missed anything- one common reason for mid-project cost overruns.

Construction. If you have diligently and properly executed the planning and pre-construction phases, construction will be smooth and uneventful. Be sure to transition into construction with a pre-construction meeting with all contractors and your construction expert. Include the Property Manager in this meeting to identify how communication will flow with homeowners. Your construction expert must be on-site to oversee quality control, ensure contractors perform per specifications, and approve payment requests.

Successful execution of a major project requires expertise beyond that of most Boards and property managers. To ensure a successful project, make sure you retain an expert to ensure quality control, watch the budget, and protect your Association's liability.

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