

# Selecting an Architect

Tuvia Poliskin A.I.A.

The time has come. Whether you are a commercial property owner, business owner or homeowner, you're ready to begin the process of having your project designed, and you need to hire an architect.

## WHERE DO YOU FIND AN ARCHITECT?

The best way to find an architect that will suit your needs, is by seeking out potential candidates whose work possesses the qualities that you wish your project to contain. Make inquiries through family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and if you see a house or building you admire, either knock on the door and ask the owner 'who was the architect' or contact the city to find out who was the architect of record.

The majority of architect commissions come via referrals. Through a referral, there is a built-in level of connectivity between you and the architect. You may also want to check with other reliable sources such as the local American Institute of Architects (AIA) office or local design magazines. Once you compile a short list of architecture firms, you can begin your due diligence by evaluating them. But how do you decide which architect is the right one to *bring your dream into reality*.

## HOW DO YOU EVALUATE AN ARCHITECT?

After years of listening to and serving clients who have faced a similar decision, I have generated a list of possible factors to consider when evaluating an architect.

*Think of these factors as water filling up a glass. If the glass is full you have an excellent architect. The question is; how thirsty are you?*

Do not be tempted to decide on your architect based on fee alone. The possible savings here is minimal in relation to the larger costs of the project. A really good architect can design more for the dollar in construction cost with foresight, knowledge and skill.

## FACTORS:

- **Needs:** does the architect listen to and clearly understand your needs, desires and objectives?
- **Vision:** is the architect in synch with your vision, aesthetic and taste?
- **Limitations:** does the architect acknowledge and embrace the project parameters such as; budget, time and restrictions?
- **Possibilities:** does the architect expand your thinking of what is possible and obtainable within the limitations?
- **Knowledge:** does the architect have experience with your project type along with the planning and building requirements and processes? If not, does their past work demonstrate their capability to be successful?
- **Value:** does the architect understand what is important to you and add value through creativity, intelligence, skill, foresight and flexibility?
- **Alignment:** does the architect have your best interest in mind while serving the good of the project?
- **Process:** does the architect have a clear efficient design process that is inclusive of your participation?
- **Resources:** does the architect have the infrastructure to manage and execute your project successfully?
- **Management:** is the architect well organized and able to adhere to a project schedule outlining the design process with critical milestones?

- **Communication:** is the architect articulate in verbal and written form as well as easily accessible and responsive in a timely manner?
- **Skills:** does the architect possess the graphic skills necessary to illustrate the design sufficiently for you to imagine inhabiting and then the technical skills for others to execute?
- **Personable:** does the architect have a trustworthy and respectable disposition and will be able to work well with you and others to achieve a successful project?
- **Referrals:** what did past clients have to say about the architect? (*See list of questions*)
- **Fee:** is the architect's fee reasonable and competitive for the specified service and will deliver 'what they said they will' and more?
- Was the architect able to clearly articulate the reasons for each design decision with their associated pros and cons?
- Did the architect solicit your input?
- Did the architect incorporate your input into the final design?
- Did the architect give you enough lead-time to make decisions?
- Was the architect easy to reach and communicate with?
- Did the architect work well with the contractor and others?
- Did the design meet the projected construction budget?

#### REFERRALS: QUESTIONS TO ASK

*Note: You should ask architect(s) for contact information for their last three clients. The architect will provide referrals, but they might not be the most recent.*

- Would you hire the architect again?
- How did you learn about the architect?
- What was your architect's scope of work?
- Did the architect understand the municipal requirements and processes?
- What was your experience working with the architect?
- Did the architect resolve your needs, desires and objectives?
- Did the quality of the design meet or exceed your expectations?
- Did the design process progress according to the original schedule?
- Did the architect show you design options?
- Were there additional architectural fees? If so, what were they for?
- Was the architect clear about what might be considered "additional services" in the contract?
- Was their invoicing clear, consistent, up-to-date and according to contract?
- Have there been any significant issues with the design since its completion?
- Is there anything you would change about how the architect conducts their practice?
- Would you be able to visit the project to experience the architect's design?

#### WHY SELECT A SPECIFIC ARCHITECT?

In the end, how do you determine if the architect is a good fit? You must feel confident that your architect has your best interest in mind, is in alignment with your needs, desires and objectives and most importantly, that you can **trust** their **vision, skill** and **judgment**. Keep in mind, your architect acts as a conduit for your dream and is there in service to you, the project and your community.