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HOW TO SELECT A PLANNER FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

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With the rise in suburban shopping facilities, many established business communities are faced with economic troubles, intensified by congestion and physical obsolescence. To help solve these problems, private enterprise is turning to the professional planner with increasing frequency.

Competent planning provides the benefits of technical proficiency, depth of experience, and an objective third party evaluation of the problem situation. Also, high standards established by a good planner stimulate and maintain the community respect and interest needed in so important a project as the planning of the business district.

Briefly, the professional planner can be expected to:

- A) Expertly analyze the needs of the commercial community
- B) Supplement available community data with his own experience to add depth to a forward planning study
- C) Assist to create a physical, economic, and social framework within which desirable growth patterns can proceed
- D) Guide public and private expenditures along an efficient, profitable, and acceptable path

The prospective client should understand that our increasingly complex society has created many specialized planning areas such as industrial, commercial, governmental, recreational, transportation, and economic, to name only a few. For our immediate purposes, we will limit our

considerations to the field of commercial planning. However, other areas of activity often strongly influence the preparation of commercial plans, and must be properly integrated into any long-range program for a business community.

The redesign of an urban business district requires proper economic consideration of the trade area, the tax structure, and the return on investments in land and improvement; public and private transportation problems are integrally related to business problems; even industrial planning affects commercial study programs, particularly when establishing proper land use for fringe districts, which may presently be industrial in nature.

Before selection of a planning consultant can take place, a pool of planning talent must be located. Three sources are generally used:

- A) Personal references - From business associates, local officials, or others in contact with professional planners
- B) Publications - From articles and reference to specific people, firms, or projects
- C) Professional societies - From local or national ^{offices} ~~headquarters~~ ~~of the appropriate groups~~

Those organizations which may be able to furnish an appropriate list of planners includes:

American Institute of Architects
American Institute of Landscape Architects
American Institute of Planners
American Society of Planning Officials
National Society of Professional Engineers
Local engineering societies

As a word of caution, the method of locating a planner may encompass such a broad range of people and organizations that its use may entail much difficulty in both early and final selection.

Although each kind of planning requires application of special techniques, the principles do not vary greatly at the basic level. The most important quality of the professional planner is that he be able to perceive those elements for which he must plan and recognize their characteristics and problems. Of course, it is necessary that other qualifications accompany the ability to grasp and solve the problems. ~~In general terms,~~ We can summarize the factors to be examined in a planner under four broad headings:

- I. Approach and philosophy
- II. Experience
- III. Formal education
- IV. Executive and inspirational abilities

Let us examine each as it would apply to the selection of a planner for the business community:

I. Approach and Philosophy

A governing principle here is that a planner for the business community should be creative - not adaptive. It has been the indiscriminate application of adaptive planning that has brought many of our business districts to their present sad plight.

For example, existing traffic volumes may indicate a parking deck is appropriate at a certain location. The property is acquired, bonds issued, and the deck built. The minute the parking facility is in business, the traffic picture changes. Although the deck might accommodate all cars formerly thought to be bound for the area in which it was located, the resulting congestion may ~~have~~ ^{now} caused serious additional problems in the surrounding street system and prevent use of the deck's full capacity.

By adapting to one element of the problem, other problems have been intensified.

A creative approach would have dictated that the planner determine what ultimate vehicular and pedestrian traffic pattern would be most desirable and then to locate the deck so that its use would assist to generate or create this desirable flow of traffic.

The planner who thinks in adaptive terms may fail to arouse the confidence and inspiration that are needed in an important project. ~~Of course,~~ ^{Yet} the element of creativeness must not snuff out what we like to call the practical approach. Your planning

advisor should be able to answer for his ideas and be intelligent enough to achieve proper balance between ~~his~~ theories, and what common sense and experience tell him is appropriate. Remember, the truly great business projects are flights of fancy, securely anchored to a proper foundation.

In your planner's approach and philosophy, look for ideas that are creative, but practical - sound, but inspirational. There is no easy way to determine the existence of these qualities. They must be carefully judged by personal observation, discussion, reference and past results.

II. Experience

Business community planning demands experience with problems unique to the commercial field. The design of regional shopping centers has furnished strong direction to replanning of existing business communities. Successful suburban developments have *also* utilized many ideas which can be transplanted to the older business communities. ~~Successful suburban developments have utilized many ideas which can be transplanted to the older business community.~~ Look for these types of experience in your planner's record.

An understanding of the relation between people, commercial buildings, and vehicles on a large scale is essential to the success of a business planning program. A business community project involves not just single buildings ~~and~~ lots, but *and individual* many acres of land and *→* a multitude of structures. Anyone planning for such a complex situation should have been exposed to projects of similar scale and difficulty.

III. Education

Although formal education must equip the planner for the work, it is one of the least reliable indications to his ability. Consideration of the educational record should primarily assist the client to evaluate the areas of technical awareness which have been stimulated in the planner.

The professional planner may have a degree in architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, economics, planning, liberal arts, or even business administration. Knowledge of these contribute significantly to a successful planning effort. But, since it is impossible to have majored in all, use the educational criteria sparingly.

IV. Executive and Inspirational Abilities

Sadly enough, many planners who have a good approach, wide experience and excellent education lack the ability to properly direct the work and motivate the community to accept the resulting plan. Remember, that the planner you hire will have to bear the burden of overcoming the do-nothing inertia so prevalent in our deteriorating business districts. He must perceive the problems, formulate the approach, create the solution, and sell the plan to the business community.

Of course, you, as the client, are responsible for as much support as you can give, but the planning process will also be an education for you and your group. It is only when the

qualities the planner builds into his work are completely known and understood by you that you can assist him to motivate the people involved in implementation of his plan. Thus, your planner must have the executive and inspirational qualities to carry the work and maintain strong interest throughout the active planning effort.

These qualities, like those of approach and philosophy, are best evaluated by personal conferences and reference to past work.

Fees for planning of a business community cannot be established in the same manner as are other professional fees. The reason is that the basis for planning charges vary enormously from community to community.

A fee is ~~established~~ that amount of money required to accomplish a specific result. To know what this result should be and the amount of work required to achieve it, involves a clear and careful definition of the work scope. The planner himself is best equipped to establish this work scope and, if he is well qualified, will contract only for what work is needed.

Occasionally, two planners will propose different fees. However, these will invariably be based upon a different scope of work and each should be examined for content. It ~~will have to~~ ^{must} be the client's responsibility in such a case to decide what is needed and determine what degree of trust he ~~places~~ ^{shall place} in the judgment of the planners under consideration.

The best possible method of selecting a planner is to determine who you want by personal interviews and an analysis of qualifications. You should then sit down with your choice and discuss the scope of work proposed, the end results desired, the amount of money available, and what fees are appropriate.
~~he must charge for his fee~~

Occasionally
~~Sometimes~~ a planning program can begin on a relatively modest basis and, *it gains* as support ~~is granted~~, develop into a full-blown project. *Other times* ~~Sometimes~~

adequate funds are available immediately, and a total planning effort can be carried through without interruption. Whenever possible, it is best to establish a definite work scope as soon as possible, and enable your planner to set up a fixed fee *for the entire project.*

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Always remember that you ~~get~~ exactly what you pay for, and it is far better to expend a little more money and a little stronger effort whenever the chance of success is at stake. An investment in good planning is the cheapest insurance policy available.