

Hello and Happy Spring! The weather is improving, the grass is green, and the trees are in full bloom. For many of us this means it's project time! Of course, being an architect, I will tell you a good design and a solid set of drawings will get you off to a good start.

But, what about hiring a contractor? Many of my clients ask who they should pick; the highest bidder, the lowest bidder, their next door neighbor? Here is my best advice and a process to follow:

**Finding good builders:** It is worth the time and effort to find a good builder. So, do you homework.

- △ Ask your architect, neighbors, co-workers, and friends for recommendations. You may also call the Builders Association or go to their website.
- △ Go and see the builders' work to assess quality and ask their past clients about everything from their timeliness and billing to their personality.
- △ Choose 2-3 builders to give you an estimate/bid on your project.

**The bidding process:** Builders bid projects in different ways. Here are two popular methods that you may see.

- △ Time & Materials or Cost-plus. This kind of estimate is more open ended and is usually used on renovations and additions. A builder will give you an estimate which includes the cost of materials and the expected labor cost. However, the estimate is not a set number because of the unknowns in renovation. Basically, you will be charged for the cost of material and an hourly labor cost.
- △ Set Bid. This type of bid is a hard number which will include everything from construction administration fees, overhead and profit, allowances, materials, and labor. This type of bid is used for new construction projects when conditions are known.
- △ There are many combinations of these two options and builders use many different methods to come up with their estimates. The important thing is that you get your estimates in writing.

**Selecting a builder:** After meeting with the builders and receiving their bids, it's decision time. Rapport is an important aspect in making your decision. My advice is to pick the builder you feel you can trust, work with successfully, and has a solid bid. After selecting a builder it is critical to get a written contract and to make sure the builder is insured. The construction process can be stressful and time consuming but, a good builder will make the process enjoyable and rewarding for everyone involved.