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Full-Service Consulting Firms Simplify Development Process

By Joshua George and Jonathan Raab
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Last year, a television commercial glorified the role of the wingman – that person who acts as an advocate for another (or, as in the commercial, suffers through a date with his buddy’s girlfriend’s friend). In the world of real estate development, the wingman is the person or firm that assists a developer through the design and municipal approval process. This role, though not particularly glamorous, generally dictates not only the timeliness of the approval and the profitability of the project but also the identity of the project being created. Through careful selection of their wingman, developers can ensure that their product gets to market more quickly, is profitable, and stands apart from their competitors.

Today, there are a bevy of firms that provide land planning, engineering, and architectural services. However, few design firms that specialize in real estate development offer all of these services under one roof. Consider that any given project may require land planners, site engineers, and hydraulic engineers; geotechnical engineers, environmental engineers, and construction inspectors; and architects, mechanical engineers, and structural engineers. Consequently, developers have the option of acting as their own general contractor or seeking a full-service design firm. Even when a project proceeds smoothly, how many developers look forward to oversight of multiple companies, maintaining coordination between these firms, and processing the reams of paperwork generated by each firm? If, heaven forbid, the project goes awry, this maze of individuals quickly turns from a team to a tempest. Does a real estate developer really have time to deal with an individual firm for each of these disciplines?

Development requirements and municipal review processes vary significantly from place to place. While there are significant differences between Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey, there are subtle but significant differences between the various Townships and Boroughs that make up Central Pennsylvania. Due to the nature of the business, many developers are forced to move their searches for development projects from county to county and state to state as market trends dictate. Now imagine the time and effort it takes to find professional design consultants in each discipline who also know how to navigate the permitting and review procedures over a broad geographic area. Clearly, this is a daunting task.

Time and money. So often, they are one in the same. Due to ever changing markets and the fickle nature of potential buyers, real estate developers scramble to bring their products to market more quickly than ever. But how to do so? The best solution to this problem is finding a competent, full-service design consultant who represents the client and their financial interests.

Take the golf course community known as Regents’ Glen located in Spring Garden Township, York County. This mixed-use project includes a golf course, social club, and multiple residential communities that are being built over the course of many years. After initial development and a few years of poor sales results, the original developer sold the project to its current owner. The new owner has retained a full-service design firm familiar with the municipality, the individuals who review the plans, and the importance of completing the project on time. As a result, the project is moving forward and residential sales have steadily improved. The developer is able to get in touch with a single project manager who oversees each of the disciplines involved in the project and no longer gets passed around to the numerous companies that were working on the project.

Utilizing a full-service consulting firm offers real estate developers the convenience of “one stop shopping” for engineering, geotechnical, and planning services. This streamlines the entire development process and helps projects large or small, urban or rural, stay on budget and be completed on time. Who doesn’t want this kind of wingman?

Joshua George and Jonathan Raab are Associates with Morris & Ritchie Associates, Inc. and Geo-Technology Associates, Inc., respectively – affiliated planning and engineering firms. Both work in their firms’ York office.