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Key Takeaways From Construction Roundtable on “Digging Into Pre-Construction: What Owners and Developers Need to Know When Starting Projects”



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The key to a successful construction project often lies in how much work you do long before the first shovel of dirt is turned. But where should an owner or developer focus their time and resources for the best possible result?

To help answer that question, Gould & Ratner was honored to host a roundtable in early June featuring five construction industry panelists who shared their unique experience and perspectives about how investing in pre-construction can make the difference between harmony and headaches on any project. The panel included Justin Brown of Skender, Keating Crown of Sterling Bay, John Couri of CC Industries, Chris Hume of Cullen Construction Management and Mike Lingertat of SOM, with Gould & Ratner Construction Practice Chair Rich Reizen moderating.

During the lively conversation that covered a wide range of topics, several important action items emerged for owners and developers who are in the midst of planning new projects that have not yet broken ground:

- **Start Early** – Assemble the internal and external project teams as soon as it's practical. The best results come from teams that include your architect, the general contractor and an owner's representative. As our panelists indicated, even if you change the team after pre-construction for some reason, the planning done by a good external team will pay dividends.
- **Consider Materials Lead Times and Alternative Sources** – As the project quickly takes shape, identifying all materials with potential lack of availability or that could require long lead times will help inform a schedule that is realistic and doesn't negatively impact budgets and financing. When possible, consider alternatives or easy substitutes that will save your schedule if problems arise.
- **Stay in Touch** – It doesn't matter how big or small your project is, keeping regular contact with the general contractor and the architect can be key to ensure the greatest value added from them throughout the project. Communication and collaboration are key elements from the very earliest planning stage.
- **Consider Your Risk and Make Sure It Is Insurable** – Insurance has a significant impact on all construction projects, and figuring out the costs and availability of various types of required insurance both during construction and after completion will save you major headaches on a variety of fronts, not the least of which is financing. With the increasing number of climate disasters, the increasing costs of insurance and the decreasing number of carriers willing to write policies in certain areas of the country, no project should be planned without some assurance that the owner/developer will be able to insure the project both during construction and after completion.

- **Be Prepared** – Identify, assess and plan accordingly for any safety or environmental concerns that could arise during the project. Problems can inevitably arise, but being prepared for them can make the difference between a stalled or completed project.
- **Get Good Help** – Labor needs and coordination often drive the ability to complete a project on time and on budget. Make sure before groundbreaking to perform a complete assessment of local labor supply and skill, assuring that availability of workers will continue throughout the project, not just its start. Understand, too, whether your project's costs might benefit from bringing in skilled labor from outside the area where you're building. A general contractor's ability to adequately staff and supervise projects is one of the key considerations in selecting a general contractor, and that issue should be raised with the general contractor as part of the selection process.
- **Keep Your Eye on the Bottom Line** – Identifying budget items that could be trimmed or value engineered is part of every construction project. But early assessment and plans help make any need to trim costs a little easier to implement so as not to delay the project.

As Yogi Berra astutely pointed out, "If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else." While there are no guarantees, a robust pre-construction phase can make it far more likely you will not end up "somewhere else."

For more information on pre-construction strategies or to discuss any of these topics, please contact a member of Gould & Ratner's [Construction Practice](#).