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Pre-construction planning leads to a faster, more cost-effective build

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With all the construction projects currently underway in the Carolinas, it's easy to see the work the general contractors and subcontractors do in bringing new buildings up out of the ground. What people don't see is all the work that happens prior to the first shovel hitting the dirt.

That period of time between the initial conversations with the owner and the first work at the site is known as pre-construction. It includes all of the planning, designing, cost-estimating, schedule development, bidding and hiring of subcontractors that occurs prior to construction. All of the principals involved in the project – the owner, general contractor and designers – work collaboratively to ensure the project is buildable, within the established budget and will remain on schedule.

“We build a schedule that helps manage the pre-construction process similar to how we build a schedule during construction,” said Andy Aldridge, vice president for pre-construction at Edifice. “We like to meet every two weeks on projects. It's important that we have open dialogue with the designers. We'll talk on the phone with the architects daily.”



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In addition to developing an accurate cost estimate and the final construction documents, the pre-construction process includes development of a site logistics plan and phasing plans with a detailed construction schedule.

Getting to the cost estimate

Early in the pre-construction process, the general contractor and design team give the owner accurate cost information so the owner can make informed decisions. This detailed estimate includes all of the building's components broken out as line items. It allows the team to describe what they understand the building to be before the final plans are drawn.

Creating an accurate cost estimate involves three components:

Use of in-house cost history information.

Contacting subcontractors for market pricing on materials, as well as lead times.

Creating a baseline pricing of the building by reviewing similar projects in the area.

"It's important to create an accurate cost estimate early in the process, at the beginning of design, that's when you have the greatest influence over the cost of the building," said Aldridge. "The longer you wait, the less influence on cost you have."

Bucci Development is currently working with Edifice on building a 41,000-square-foot office building in Myers Park at 150 Providence Road.

"It was important for us to get a budget that would be close to what the actual cost of the building would be," said Brian Bucci, owner at Bucci Development. "Once we had real numbers in place, we could decide if there were elements we wanted to put back into or add to the building."

An early cost estimate is often used by owners to secure bank financing. If the owner is not able to secure the amount of financing the plans require, the pre-construction team can revise the plans to fit the owner's new budget. "We tailor the project to fit the owner's needs and budget," said Aldridge.

Pre-construction also helps the project remain on schedule and within budget. If needed, changes to the design can be made quickly without a large increase in the cost.

"If you wait to make changes later in the design process, like a month before construction starts, it will slow down the job because the designers will need many