



Design Professional Involvement

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Under Wisconsin law, a registered architect or licensed professional engineer (design professional) must prepare the plans for any commercial building project that involves a building of 50,000 cubic feet or more, including the basement and attic. This requirement applies to new construction, additions, alterations, and repairs, even if the work affects only a portion of the building. “Commercial buildings” are all buildings other than one- and two-family homes.

A design professional has been certified by the State of Wisconsin to practice architecture or engineering. To be registered or licensed, an individual must prove he or she has a certain level of education and/or experience in the field, and they must pass a comprehensive national examination.

In many cases, even when the law does not require it, the involvement of a design professional can help you sort out the maze of design choices, building codes, zoning laws, contractors, and other elements of the building process.

The design professional you hire represents you throughout the process; he or she is sensitive to your budget, how you want space to function, your aesthetic preferences, and your timetable. If registered in Wisconsin, the design professional also will be knowledgeable about the many regulations that affect what you may build and where you may build it. A local design professional is also likely to be familiar with the process of having plans approved and applying for permits at the Development Center.

Remember, the staff members you work with at the Development Center are experts in what City and State laws require of you.

A good design professional is an expert in what you want and what the law allows.

What can a design professional do?

A design professional can be hired to do a wide range of activities relating to a building project, such as:

- Planning the project, in light of both your wishes for the space and the applicable building codes
- Helping you select building and finish materials
- Estimating the cost of construction
- Coordinating the work of other design professionals, such as engineers
- Preparing construction drawings and specifications required to get bids
- Applying for necessary permits
- Visiting the construction site to help verify that the project is being built according to plans

How do I find a design professional?

The Wisconsin chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) maintains a directory of architects practicing in the state. To receive a free copy of the directory, call AIA Wisconsin at (608) 257-8477. There is also an architect finding service on the Internet, at <http://architectfinder.aia.org>. Similarly, the National Society of Professional Engineers also offers assistance with locating their member firms at www.nspe.org.

How do design professionals get paid?

There is no set fee for a particular type of project. Some projects are done at hourly rates; others are done at a set fee per unit, based on what is to be built (for example, the number of square feet, the number of apartments, etc.). Some design professionals charge a fixed fee; others charge a percentage of construction costs.