

Architects Consumer Fact Sheet

Board of Registration of Architects

Architects provide professional services in connection with the design, construction, enlargement or alteration of buildings including consultations, investigations, evaluations, preliminary studies, aesthetic design, the preparation of plans, specifications and contract documents, the coordination of structural and mechanical design and site development, administration of construction contracts and any other similar service or combination of services in connection with the design and construction of buildings.

The Board of Registration of Architects protects the public through regulation of the practice and the title of Architect in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in accordance with the statutes. The Board establishes the conditions and qualifications required for architectural registration and determines eligibility for admission to examinations. It investigates complaints of possible violations of the laws applying to the practice of architecture and takes appropriate disciplinary action against registrants found to have violated its regulations.

How Architects Can Help

Architects see the big picture

Architects are specially educated to help you define what you want to build, present options you might never have considered, and help you get the most for your valuable investment. They don't just design four walls and a roof - they create total environments, both interiors and exteriors, that are functional and exciting places in which to work and live.

Architects solve problems creatively

Architects are trained problem solvers. Need more room for your growing family? Architects can show you how to enlarge your home so you won't have to move. Have a limited budget? Architects can propose ways to get more for your investment than you imagined possible.

Architects help you get the most from your construction dollar

Architects can reduce building costs, decrease your home's energy needs, and increase its future resale value through good design.

Architects make your life easier

Building is a long process that is often messy and disruptive, particularly if you're living in the space while it's under construction. Your architect represents you, not the contractors. Your architect looks out for your interests and smoothes the process, helps find qualified construction contractors, and visits the worksite to help protect you against work that's not according to plan.

Choosing an Architect

There are several means of selecting an architect, ranging from formal design competitions to negotiated procurement to competitive bidding. You must determine which approach suits your requirements and designate an individual or group to manage your selection process. To begin the selection process:

- Make a list of potential architects by asking colleagues for referrals.
- Contact your local chapter of the American Institute of Architects.
- Discover who designed projects similar to yours that appeal to you.

You may need to ask for qualifications and references at this stage. If the scope of the project is still indefinite, narrow the field based on what you learn. You may want the architect to prepare a preliminary or full proposal explaining how he or she would approach your project. In that case, you may wish to send a written project description to the most promising firms; sending the same information to each architecture firm will make it easier to compare responses.

Decide how much cost information to request and when you want to request it; you may want to know only how the architect will charge for services, or you may need more - such as preliminary estimates or even a detailed proposal. The choice is yours to make based on your needs and the nature of the project. An in-house team should review the information you have collected. Useful factors to consider include:

- The size of the firm and the amount of time it has been in practice;
- Experience and past projects;
- Their ability to work within budget/time schedules;
- Cost of services;
- Special expertise including experience in your project type, management ability, and knowledge of building codes/zoning regulations.

Beyond review of the proposal, you may also wish to:

- Visit at least one finished project of each architect under consideration;

- Call client references.

An interview can give you important information on how well you will be able to work with a potential architect. If the written material you have received doesn't tell you all you need to know to select a firm, here is one way to pursue the process further:

- Create a short list of perhaps three to five firms to interview.
- Allow at least an hour for the interview.
- Decide on location of interview. At your home or office the architect can gain a better understanding of you and your project; at the architect's office you can see how the architect and staff work.

Make sure that the people you interview are the people who will actually be working on your project. In making your final determination, take into account:

- Design quality
- Technical competence
- Experience
- Cost
- Organization

You will need to evaluate for yourself the weight to give each of the factors. You should also be looking for an architect who:

- Is responsive to your needs
- Listens carefully
- Seems to understand your company
- Makes you feel comfortable

You will be working with the architect for a long time and may work with him or her on future projects. It is important that you trust the architect's judgment and ability.

Fees

The size, complexity, and specific goals and needs of your project, are a few of the factors which must be considered when establishing the fee amount and payment schedule. There are a few different ways architects may charge for their services, they are:

- Hourly - which may prove cost effective for some projects
- Stipulated Sum - as proposed by the Architect
- Stipulated Sum per unit - for example, unit cost by square feet, number of rooms, etc.
- Percentage of Construction Costs
- Combination of the above

You should discuss your concerns and needs about your project as it relates to fees (as a part of the programmatic issues), with your architect.

Not unlike other businesses, an architectural firm's location, company size, & experience are a few of the items that will contribute to its overhead/expenses, and thus, will affect the price of services. When selecting an architect, you should consider these issues as well.

Fees for Remodeling/ Rehab Work

Existing conditions, building technologies, age and location of the structure, maintenance (or lack of), and the level of competence of the original builder are all factors that will affect every remodeling project and in turn, affect the cost and the amount of time necessary to properly address the needs of your project by the architect.

There is no fail-safe way for architects, engineers, or builders to be able to forecast the existing conditions of your particular project. Without disassembling otherwise serviceable portions of a building, or access to accurate plans of an existing structure, architects can only make reasonable assumptions regarding existing conditions based on our experience and training. We do not have x-ray vision, and no architect can see into walls (or underground) in anticipation of necessary work.

The price for an architectural service is given only after the architect has had a chance to see some of the issues involved IN PERSON (i.e. visited the site), and after discussing with you, your project's goals and needs.

Filing a Complaint

While the majority of licensees conduct themselves as true professionals, the Division of Professional Licensure will take action against those who fail to maintain acceptable standards of competence and integrity.

In many cases, complaints are made by dissatisfied consumers - but, dissatisfaction alone is not proof of incompetence or sufficient grounds for disciplinary action.

If you have a serious complaint against a licensed architect, call or write the Division's Office of Investigations and ask for a complaint form. Or download a copy of the [complaint form](#)  .

Division of Professional Licensure

Office of Investigations

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