



nerej

Three ways to ease the pain of permitting - part 1 of 2

April 14, 2011 - Construction Design & Engineering

Ask any real estate developerâ€”permitting is often a painful process. While nothing can make these bureaucratic procedures entirely pleasant, three area developers have devised successful approaches to help ease their permitting pain.

Vince O'Neill is the founder and president of VinCo Properties, the Boston-based real estate development firm responsible for Chestnut Green in Foxborough. An ambitious mixed-use community featuring offices, retail, a range of residences, and 40 acres of green space, Chestnut Green occupies the former grounds of the Foxborough State Hospital. What helped VinCo Properties navigate the potential landmines of permitting the project for this 115-year-old historic site? O'Neill cites the mutual trust he developed with the town of Foxborough and its public officials, a trust earned over years of meetings and cooperative interaction. Developing strong relationships with colleagues comes naturally to O'Neill, who is quite personable and likable. But even for those with less winning personalities, little thingsâ€”like being available for discussions and following through on action itemsâ€”make a big difference. Especially in a phased project like Chestnut Green, O'Neill feels that "it is imperative to do what you say you are going to do." VinCo proved itself to the town during Chestnut Green's earlier phases; the reward is a smoother permitting process for phase three, which is currently under way. The benefits of these trusting relationships will likely last beyond this project, advantageously positioning VinCo Props. for future work in Foxborough. As O'Neill said, "It's a small world and a long life."

Merrill Diamond, principal of Diamond Sinacori LLC, takes a relatively unique approach to permitting, actively engaging the community in the project from the very start. While many developers pay lip service to an inclusive approach, Diamond takes this concept to heart, "believing [himself to be] and acting like a guest in the community." Before design begins he solicits input from area residents on everything from traffic patterns to architectural aesthetics. After identifying key themes and creating a few possible schemes, Diamond's team returns to the community with an explicit message: "we heard you." Only after receiving feedback on the preliminary designs and reaching a shared consensus on important aspects does actual design begin. Diamond's involvement with the community continues beyond these initial meetings; he goes to great lengths to keep the area residents informed about the project's progress, in recent years developing project-specific websites and even posting regular construction reports on his blog.

Diamond's inclusive attitude cultivates a sense of local ownership, which facilitates the permitting process. This approach has served Diamond well during his 30 year career. Throughout the development of complex projects such as Stoneleigh Condominiums in Dedham, the Water Works at Chestnut Hill, and currently Charing Cross in Brighton (now in the midst of the Article 80 process), not one person has spoken out against his projects during permitting. It appears that Diamond is indeed the good guest he strives to be; he listens to and learns from his hosts, bringing the

community the gift of development.

Part 2 will appear in the May 20 C,D&E edition.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540