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A design-build professional can help in selecting a suitable site for your building

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The decision to invest in a new building is a major commitment for any business, regardless of its size. Without proper knowledge of issues that need to be addressed before signing on the dotted line, the potential margin for error can be daunting. Working with a trusted Realtor and design-build company in tandem can help avoid major problems.

When choosing a design-build company, as with any major endeavor, you need to align yourself with professionals who have the experience and are financially stable. Going with your brother-in-law because he's a nice guy isn't smart. Design-build companies need to be financially stable to keep the job from being halted midway because sub-contractors aren't being paid.

Individuals or businesses should know what size building they need. But how do you calculate how much acreage you need to accommodate what size building? Businesses need to look at property four to five times larger than the square footage of the building. For example, a 20,000 s/f building requires 80,000 to 100,000 s/f of land to be comfortably sited. (One acre encompasses 43,560 s/f). The reason is to accommodate topography, grading, zoning requirements, driveways, parking lots and landscaping.

Once the decision is made on the size of the building, add a minimum of 50% to 100% to the building for future expansion. Businesses should buy enough land for expansion before it becomes necessary. Building a new facility is a major step for a company to go through, and you want to be able to expand without being forced to relocate and have to go through the process all over again. It is considerably more cost-effective to plan in the beginning for the prospect of expansion.

After you identify your building size and property size, make sure the area is zoned properly for your type of business, be it industrial, general business use or retail. It's also smart to meet informally with the town planner and local economic development officer. Don't forget to include someone from your design-build company. They will be prepared to answer questions that you might not. Buyers should also always investigate the possibility of tax incentives with local economic development offices. After all, all cities and towns want new businesses in their jurisdiction and just might be in a position to offer some tax breaks.

At this stage, it's time to explore whether there are any environmental issues or concerns. Lenders will require proof that the property is environmentally clean.

Although design-build companies don't do this study, they should provide two or three environmental company names to the client. Phase I of an environmental study is researching the site and surrounding property as well as past uses - all the historical background. As a part of this process, the company will do an on-site inspection to look for visible signs of dumping environmental contamination or hazards. If Phase I concludes positively that marks the end of the environmental assessment.

On the other hand, if contamination is discovered, a Phase II environmental study will need to be conducted. This consists of installing monitoring wells on the property to monitor groundwater for any contamination. If the monitoring wells show no problems then that is the end of the environmental issue. Contamination discovered in monitoring wells means that corrective measures may be required that will have to be discussed and addressed.

The next phase of investigating the property is to assess the site. Are there any wetlands on the property? Begin by checking with the local wetlands commissioner. Each town has a wetlands map indicating wetland sites. This may be sufficient, but local officials may require a wetland scientist to inspect your parcel. Again, if wetlands are found they need to be addressed.

Another part of the process is to perform test borings to investigate what subsoil conditions are. A geotechnical engineer is needed to determine the bearing capacity of the soil. Borings would also be used to determine if there are rock or ledge issues as well as water table levels.

If the process sounds overwhelming it certainly can be without the assistance of design-build professionals. In addition to providing names of professionals who can do the various tests needed, they can view property up front. The better ones have been in business for a long time and have a sense of what to look for.

If the design-build contractor is comfortable with a visual inspection of the site, then the client can tender an option to buy with a contingency that all these issues are satisfactorily met to enable the purchaser to build the facility he or she needs.

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