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Team Collaboration through the Design Process, or What an Architect Says to a Friendly Archivist

Larry C. Sweat

The intent of this article is to remove the shroud of mystery behind what a design professional does and to help create a viable dialogue between the archivist and the architect. Archivists should be viewed as experts. The complexities of operating an archival library are best understood by the people who work day-to-day in and maintain their facility. Conversely, architects are trained problem-solvers who should be able to present creatively alternative solutions about how the building may work or how people may use it. Consideration of these different solutions can often lead to improvements of existing situations. A significant contribution from both parties throughout the design process is critical to a successful project.

Below is an outline of this team approach.

I. PREDESIGN
   A. Roles of the Archivist.

   1. Accept responsibility for clear, timely direction to the architect. Establish one point of contact, who has the authority to make decisions.

   2. Develop a detailed program, even if it ultimately changes. This program should include but not be limited to the following:
      a) Approximate square footage calculations of each space,
      b) A written description of each building component and how staff and the public use them,
      c) A list of equipment required for each space, and

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d) Specific do's and don't's for each space (natural light, security, climatic control, etc.).

3. Provide site information which should include the following:
   a) Topographical survey,
   b) Area or campus map, and
   c) Architectural drawings of the existing facility.

4. Use colleagues as a resource.
   a) Interview other administrators of similar facilities.
   b) Gather published technical data on equipment.

5. Use case studies of other leading facilities and collect drawings of these projects.

6. Nuts and bolts
   a) Be able to describe the current structural, mechanical, electrical, security and fire protection systems.
   b) Be prepared to describe how "smart" a building from a technical standpoint is needed.

7. Involve the campus planner in early design discussions.
   a) Input from this professional will be important to integrate the facility into a campus plan or city context.
   b) Public access and physical connections to other buildings can be improved or designed at this stage of the project.

B. Roles of the Architect.

1. Questions for the archivist.
   a) What are the goals of the new facility?
   b) Why are the archivists in need of this project?
   c) What existing conditions work well, which do not?
d) What elements of the facility can be flexible in their location? What elements have to maintain certain adjacencies to function properly?
e) What should be the perceived image of this new facility?
f) What quality level will be expected?
g) What will the budget constraints be?
h) In what sequence do different uses of the building occur (public, staff, service, processing of documents, etc.).
i) What will the schedule be?
j) What technical equipment is required?
k) What parts of the facility, if any, could be added at a future date?

2. Code Research.
a) The architect should do a thorough code analysis of zoning and life safety requirements.

3. Correspondence.
a) The architect should provide clear and accurate documentation of project meetings.

4. Contractual agreement.
a) Both parties should resolve this issue as soon as possible.
b) Contracts should include but not be limited to scope of work, schedule, payments, add services, reimbursables, etc.

5. Site Analysis.
a) In initial meetings, the architect should request a visit to the proposed site and a walk-through of existing conditions with the archivist.
b) The architect should incorporate this site research into a site analysis.

a) These diagrams should be organized in a clear format and should illustrate the different
relationships of each building component. They should be used as a tool to gain client input.

7. Quiet time.
   a) The architect will need a period of time to formulate alternative conceptual solutions to the design problems.

II. CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

A. Alternative design schemes.
   1. These schemes, produced by the architect, should be diagramatic and to scale.
   2. They should be presented in a clear, comparative format.
   3. The architect should encourage the archivist’s participation in working sessions and provide him with multiple sets of prints to review with his staff.

B. Strong direction.
   1. The archivist will have to prioritize and evaluate design considerations.
   2. The archivist must provide clear direction of which concepts to pursue.

C. Revision or refinement.
   1. The architect will require time to generate other concepts or to revise and refine one of the previously discussed schemes.

III. FINAL CONCEPT

A. Architectural drawings.
   1. As a final concept is developed, the architectural drawings should become more detailed and accurate.
   2. The architect should discuss with the archivists what type of presentation techniques will be most suited for their needs.
   3. At this stage of the process primary or larger scale issues should be solved, and more time should be
spent on refinements to secondary and tertiary concerns.

B. Cost estimates.
   1. The architect should begin to formulate a construction cost estimate of building components and building systems.

IV. FINAL APPROVAL

A. Value engineering.
   1. Before the final presentation can begin, the archivists and the architect must discuss the pricing estimate.
   2. Design elements must be given priorities within the assigned budget constraints by eliminating or modifying any elements or equipment from the present scheme.

B. Final presentation.
   1. The archivists will give the architect direction to proceed with his final presentation.

As the architect completes his work, the archivists should feel as though they have been an integral part of the design process. Most likely, they will be called on to help sell this project to other parties and should feel knowledgeable in doing so. The process can and should be a learning, enjoyable experience to both parties.

Larry C. Sweat, AIA, is a design principal in the Atlanta, Georgia architectural firm of Moseley Sweat Thompson Standard & Dines, Architects, Inc. The firm provides design services in planning architecture and interiors for commercial, housing, and university projects. They have recently completed the design for the Georgia State University archives building of the William R. Pullen Library in Atlanta, Georgia. This article is an excerpt from a presentation given at the annual meeting of the Society of Georgia Archivists, Roswell, Georgia, 22 September 1989.