

**HIRING A CONTRACTOR & ARCHITECT**  
**SMG Architects**  
**Healthy Neighborhoods, Inc.**  
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**Planning**

After deciding the extent of the work that needs to be completed, you will need to formulate a budget. If it is a small job, specific Contractors qualified for the work can help you (i.e. electrician, plumber, roofer, replacement window contractor, etc....).

If the job is larger and entails using many different types of Contractors, you will need to use a General Contractor to help you organize the scheduling, method and means of construction between the various trades. Obtaining a budget may require that a design professional help you – this may mean talking to a consultant from various product manufacturers or organizations (keep their cards), taking advantage of services that national building product stores offer, or hiring a design professional such as an Architect. If structural or life safety issues are being addressed in your job, then a licensed design professional should be consulted. Consult the AIA, Neighborhood Design Center, Neighborhood Associations, the Yellow Pages or the One Book for licensed design professionals.

In a complex job, where many different trades are required, you may expect interior work to have a median cost of \$60 - \$100 per square foot. Decks may cost \$25 - \$30 per square foot and patios \$25 - \$35 a square foot, depending on their finish. Sometimes, though, small specialty jobs could have higher per square foot costs. Internet data bases are also available to help you budget a project in specific geographical areas. Keep in mind that we are in a very strong market.

**Choosing A Contractor**

- Friends, Family, Community Organizations, The One Book, The Yellow Pages, and Internet Data Bases can provide you with names of various Contractors.
- Ensure that the Contractor is properly licensed for the type of work that is being done. Check to see if there are any problems with the license – either through the City Permitting Desk or the State Board of Licensure, The Better Business Bureau may be a resource for this type of information as well.
- Know with whom you are dealing. Insist on getting at least three references on each Contractor that you are considering. Go see their work, if possible.
- Chemistry can be a strong factor in making your choice. Take time to interview your candidates.

- If the work can be communicated consistently and clearly by written description or building plans, the bidding process may be helpful in getting the job done in a cost efficient manner. But if you know and trust a Contractor, you may want to negotiate the contract. This may result in a little more expense – but may produce a better job Typical payment may be a lump sum paid on an agreed upon schedule (beware of “front loaded” contracts and try to withhold some money at the end – typically 10% - until the work is completed. If you are working with a design professional, he/she can observe the work for its quality as well as to ensure proper payment amounts during its progress). Or you may agree on a time and material based contract – this can be more expensive but with some jobs – particularly those with “unknowns” – it may be the only approach.
- The Contractor should pull the necessary permits. Consult with the City Permitting office to see if your job qualifies for inspections of the work. There may also be historic guidelines to follow, a neighborhood design review process, or critical setback requirements – check with the Zoning Office as well on these matters.
- Change Orders or additional work beyond the original agreement can occur on a project of any size. Typically, they occur when unforeseen conditions are discovered or the Owner requests additional work. And unfortunately, sometimes errors or omissions in the work description or plans result in Change Orders.

### **Choosing an Architect :**

Though the AIA recommends that you hire an architect for every project, not every project requires an architect’s services. An architect is trained to have a competency in applicable codes and regulations and to provide assistance in the governmental review process as well as :

- In investigation, evaluation, consultation, and advice.
- In planning, schematic and preliminary studies, designs, working drawings, and specifications.
- In coordination of services and/or documents by technical and special consultants.
- In technical assistance in the preparation of bid documents and agreements between clients and contractors.
- In contract administration and construction observation.

Please be aware that only a licensed professional is entitled to use the term “architect” in Maryland. Though a contractor and architect may determine if a design professional is required for a given project – you may save yourself time and money by just discussing your project with a building official who will advise you if your project needs a licensed architect or engineer; this official will consider existing laws and as well as public health,

safety and welfare. The number to the Baltimore City Building Department is 410.396.3460.

You will want to use a design professional that is familiar with single family dwellings. Besides the requisite referrals and recommendations, you should be aware of the cost of an architect. Architects can charge hourly ( ranges from \$80 to \$150 /hr ) - or by lump sum – usually works out to be 10% of the construction cost. A wish list should be prepared in order to talk to the design professional which covers :

- The size, appearance, and functional requirements of your project.
- The services that you expect an architect to perform.
- What you intend to spend for design fees.
- What you intend to spend on construction.
- How the project will be financed and if you know, by whom.
- Anticipated starting and completion dates of your project.
- How you intend to construct your project.

You should also ask your architect the following questions :

- How long have you been in business ?
- How large is your firm ?
- Are you and your firm licensed – what is your license number ?
- Do you need consultants for this project – if so, which ones ?
- Do you have experience in residential design ?
- Do you carry insurance ?
- Can I see a portfolio of similar projects or visit one ?
- What services do you think I need for this project ?
- Who will be responsible for these services – you or a design associate ?
- What is your opinion on the construction cost ?
- What will your fee be ?
- What additional costs do you foresee – zoning hearing , neighborhood, presentations, permit application and cost ?
- How do you establish your fees and reimbursable expenses ?
- Will there be a charge to change the documents for technical, cost or governmental reasons ?
- How busy are you and can you meet my time schedule ?

### **Keeping Records**

Finally, it is important to keep records of all of the documents accumulated – both from the contractor and the architect – these are known as Contract Documents and have legal importance. You should also have a contingency fund to address any unforeseen conditions – usually budget 5%-10% of the total construction cost. Finally, be aware that good communication is the key to a successful project – do not be afraid to ask questions and request information.