

MAXIMIZING THE VALUE OF YOUR ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS

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Many municipalities currently have professionals such as legal counsel and accountants on retainer, or on standby, to provide advice or representation when needed. Having a municipal engineering consultant firm on board works in much the same way. Building a relationship with an established municipal engineering consultant firm will pay off. Whether your town has a need for long-term service or an occasional project, a relationship is important.

Many communities put out a Request for Proposals when they have a specific need. If you select this course of action, you must carefully identify and define the need each time. Someone then has to write the RFP, establish the criteria for selection, and establish the meeting dates, site visits, and deadlines. Pre-proposal/site meetings may also be required. Responses must be evaluated; often interviews/presentations are scheduled and conducted. All of this costs the municipality time and money and the process may take weeks or months.

A municipal engineering consultant can help identify and assess your pending issues, investigate potential solutions and their benefits/impacts to the community, along with potential costs all while reducing the time to resolve the issue. Consultants are usually aware of available funding sources such as grants, low interest loans and other types of state and federal aid. A consultant with experience in this field can also assist the community in obtaining funds needed to rebuild or correct failing systems. Very often an engineering consultant who has worked for a community is able to recognize opportunities that the community does not recognize by itself. This ability is further enhanced when the engineering consultant is involved in planning and zoning review.

How do you go about selecting a consultant to work with your town? The most important word here is “with.” For the partnership to be successful, the engineering consultant must become an extension of the town. The process is much the same as acquiring a new employee. Always consider selecting your partner based on qualifications, reputation and rapport.

Some believe that fee should be the determining factor. Remember you are buying a service as well as specialized technical solutions to your problems. Fee-based only decisions may compromise the integrity of the service and information you require. In the long run, the benefit of using a consultant who is fairly compensated will outweigh the savings from a “fee-based” selection.

Select the consultant that you believe will best assist you in accomplishing your goals. Very often this is described as being the “best fit” for your town. Once on board, work with the consultant to prioritize your needs, set the short- and long-term goals within applicable budgets and use the consultant’s expertise to accomplish them.

Establishing a relationship with your consultant... one based on trust, communication, dedication, and comfort may take time. An engineering consultant for the long haul will learn your processes and become familiar with your town, its staff, its infrastructure, its concerns, and its governing members, along with its rules and regulations. Their investment in learning these things will allow them to recommend solutions that best suit your needs and your budget on an as needed, or on going basis.

Over time, if you have selected the right consultant your town should realize the following benefits:

- **Efficiency:** Your consultant will provide you with time and cost-saving tools to effectively manage the operations of the town.
- **Availability:** Your consultant is often “just a telephone call away.”
- **Familiarity:** Your consultant knows your needs, concerns, budget, regulations and process.
- **Cost:** Your consultant is able to quickly recommend and organize both his and contractor services to avoid duplication of services.
- **Economic Development:** By shepherding the project review process and understanding your town, a good municipal engineering consultant can aid both the town and applicants, in an effort to attract and sustain development.

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