

A Consumer Guide

How to Find, Hire, and Work with an Architect



Oregon State Board of Architect Examiners

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Do You Need an Architect?

If you're planning to construct or modify a building or site, you may need to hire an architect. In Oregon, most commercial building projects, whether they involve new construction or remodeling of an existing building, require a registered architect to oversee the planning, design, documentation, and construction. The architect must be

registered by the Oregon State Board of Architect Examiners (Board). For most residential projects, an architect is not required but sometimes helpful.

Exemptions for projects that do not require a registered architect are:

- Any single-family residence or its auxiliary structure
- Any farm buildings or their auxiliary structures
- Buildings with a ground area of less than 4,000 square feet (measurements extend to the outside face of the exterior walls and the edge of horizontal projections) and less than 20 feet tall (measured from the top surface of the lowest occupiable floor to the highest interior overhead finish of the structure)
- Any buildings that will be remodeled and in which the occupancy type, construction type, or structural component of the building are not being changed, including but not limited to the foundation walls, floors, roof, footings, bearing partitions, beams, columns, and joists

Even if it is not required, it might be a good idea to hire an architect.

An architect can:

- Help define your project goals and building programs
- Provide you with a variety of design options
- Create a design that reflects your own style and personal image that meets your budget
- Create an environmentally friendly structure that suits the site and community
- Solve construction problems, such as how to enlarge or modernize a home or business so you don't have to move
- Decrease your building's energy needs
- Represent you when working with planning officials, general contractors, material suppliers, and other building professionals

How Do You Find an Architect?

For a list of Oregon architects and architectural firms registered in your area visit the Board's website at oregon.gov/osbae. The Architect/Firm Search tab includes a convenient, searchable database where any field can be searched including cities and zip codes. The Board cannot

recommend one architect over another. The Board's website search information can tell you whether an architect holds an active Oregon registration or has a history of any discipline. The discipline information is public information and can be downloaded as a PDF.

How Do You Select an Architect?

Architects practice in a variety of firm sizes from sole practitioners to members of large businesses or firms. Some architects specialize in certain buildings or project types while others design a variety of projects. Before hiring an architect, it's a good idea to interview several architects.

When meeting with a prospective architect be prepared to:

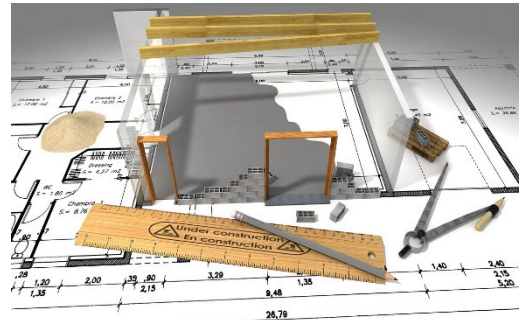
- Describe the site and the building purpose, size, and preferred appearance
- State the level of services that you require
- Present your budget along with your start date and estimated date of completion

If you are unsure of these points, an architect can help you analyze your options. Ask how the architect will work with you through the various phases of your project.

Questions to ask a Prospective Architect

Ask about the architect's experience and qualifications:

- How long has the architect been in business?
- How big is the firm?
- Has the architect worked on other projects similar to yours?
- Ask to see examples of other projects the architect has been involved in; ask if you can visit them and talk to the building owners and their contractors.



Ask how fees are determined:

- How will the fees for basic services be charged: at an hourly rate, as a percentage of construction costs, or as a lump sum?
- Who pays for reimbursable expenses, such as document reproduction and other project related costs?
- What is the architect's policy on changes and additional services?

Additional questions to consider:

- Are construction-cost estimates provided by the architect?
- What additional costs (permits, redesign charges, changes required by building departments, etc.) might be encountered?

- Are consulting engineers, interior design, and landscape architect's fees included in the architect's fee? If so, which ones?

What is the architect's insurance coverage:

- What professional (errors & omissions) and commercial general liability insurance does the architect or their firm carry?
- What are the policy limits?
- Have they had any claims, what types of claims, when did they occur, and how were they resolved?

Ask for references. Some questions you might ask a reference:

- Did the architect's design meet your needs and goals?
- Did the architect provide promised services?
- Were services completed in a professional manner?
- Was the project completed on budget and on schedule?
- Did the architect keep the client informed during the design and construction process?
- Were there any problems during the design or construction process? If so, how were they resolved?
- Would the client hire the architect again?



Contracts, Finances, and Records

Contract:

In Oregon, there is an Administrative Rule ([806-020-0020 Responsibility to the Public](#)) requiring that an architect or architectural firm use a written contract when contracting to provide professional services to a client. That written contract is to be executed by the architect or architectural firm and the client, or their representative, prior to the architect or architectural firm commencing work, unless the client knowingly states in writing that work may commence before the contract is executed. The written contract is to include, but not be limited to, all of the following items:

- (a) A description of services to be provided by the architect or architectural firm to the client.
- (b) A description of any basis of compensation applicable to the contract and method of payment agreed upon by both parties.
- (c) The name, address, and registration number of the architect or architectural firm and the name and address of the client.

The administrative rule does not apply to any of the following:

- (a) Professional services rendered by an architect or architectural firm for which the client will not pay compensation.
- (b) If the client knowingly states in writing, after full disclosure of the requirements of this section, that a contract that complies with these requirements is not necessary.
- (c) Professional services rendered by an architect or architectural firm to a professional engineer registered to practice engineering.

In general, a written contract is a good idea. A legal agreement of this kind should be taken very seriously. Consider having an attorney, insurance agent, and financial advisor review it before you sign.

Finances:

Make sure you agree to a payment schedule before the architect starts work on your project as outlined in the contract. By putting this information in writing, disputes can be kept to a minimum. Understand the conditions of any advances or retainer fees, and make sure you are clear how consulting charges and reimbursable fees are determined. Many architects require that progress payments be made during the course of the project. Make sure you understand ahead of time how these fees are calculated.

Records:

For your protection, keep a copy of the written contract and organized records of all written and verbal communication with your architect. Mark up your review comments precisely on drawings and specifications and return a copy to your architect. Following a verbal conversation, it's a good idea to write a memo, text, or email to your architect confirming what was said. Include any photos, notes, and financial records that are appropriate. Careful record keeping will minimize misunderstandings as the project progresses.

What if You Have a Complaint?



You have a right to receive professional and qualified services from your architect or architectural firm. Hiring an architect who is registered to practice in Oregon is an important step in making sure this happens. It is against the laws in Oregon to use the “architect” title, to practice architecture, or to provide architectural services as a business/firm without first being registered by the Board.

Careful planning, complete record keeping, and candid discussions with your architect will help you receive the services you deserve. But what if a problem arises?

Discuss the problem calmly and thoroughly with your architect. Try to work together to find a solution. If you are unable to resolve the problem, further action may be necessary. If you wish to file a complaint with the Oregon State Board of Architect Examiners, please see Resources – File a Complaint on our website at oregon.gov/osbae.

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