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New process providing quality, affordable, on-time construction

BY K. DENISE JENNINGS

In the past, the old adage “Quality, time, cost: Pick any two” has been an unfortunate reality for building projects, but a new twist on the design-build process might allow owners to have it all.

Bridging Documents, a building process developed by California architects about eight years ago, is making its way across the country for use primarily on large projects where the owner has identified a region but not a specific site.

With this variable left open, the owner is able to invoke competition in every aspect of the project. Construction costs, profit, interest rate, capitalization risk, cost of the land and consultant fees are all bid at the same time to ensure the best complete package.

More traditional building techniques such as design-bid-build and design-build have their advantages, but with each technique, you’re giving up a key area of the quality/time/cost contingency. With design-bid-build, what you gain in dollars you lose in time. With design-build, cost and quality often suffer.

The Bridging Documents method has proven to be the most efficient and cost effective of all building techniques because of its ability to engage the contractor, his bank, his consultants and his real estate agent in a highly competitive but quality oriented process, says Lee Askew, principal of Askew Nixon Ferguson Architects, Inc.

This is how it works. An owner hires an architect/engineer (A/E) team to produce a set of abbreviated construction documents out-
line team then sends out a request



Dock Levelers, M&M Mars Warehouse, Manteno, IL



FedEx AGT&T/DGO Facility, Hollywood, FL

(RFP) to a select number of developer/contractor teams asking for a response stated in total cost of construction, timeline, cost of land and breakdown of all other costs. A pre-bid meeting is held with all prospective teams.

A Team is selected and further areas of cost savings are explored by the owner and contractor/developer team. After the bid is approved and the contract is signed, the team identifies their A/E firm and begins site work, aiding the fast-track process. The owner’s A/E firm oversees the project.

“This process maximizes profit and lowers price by locking in the interest rate, cost of the land and cost of construction all simultaneously, which is

pretty unusual,” Askew says.

Engaging parties that have experience with Bridging Documents is a key factor in the success of the process, Askew says. Big companies such as Master Foods (formerly M&M Mars), Future Electronics, and FedEx Corporation are using the process in bidding out new projects, which may prod the industry to gain more knowledge of the process.

FedEx uses a version of Bridging Documents for bidding on its facilities. Although FedEx doesn’t have much wiggle room in the site selection area for its new projects, the company has developed a concise set of documents outlining specific standards for quality and components within all FedEx facilities for use in the bidding process.

FedEx uses their own architect to come up with their version of Bridging Documents.

The documents are then given to the team that is building the facility, most often in a different city, to adapt to different conditions in the project area such as climate or earthquake standards.

“It’s faster and there’s less chance of errors or something being left out,” says Hugh McVeigh, manager of construction for Memphis-based FedEx.

“It helps us better establish what we’re looking for in our new facilities. It allows us to take our standards and make them more site specific.”

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