

LINE 101 – ARCHITECT, ENGINEERING, & SOIL STUDY FEES

GOAL: What problem are you trying to solve for this budget category?

Line 101 of the budget is reserved for costs regarding your new home's architecture, engineering and site study fees. These costs include all work necessary for the preparation of site plan and working drawings in order to be ready for plan review and permit issuance by the public agencies (Federal, State, County and City) with jurisdiction over your site with responsibility for code compliance.

This preparation will be based on your local requirements and criteria established by your governing agencies and will generally include but are not limited to:

1. Property Tax Number and Legal Description;
2. Site Plan of existing and new features;
3. Working Drawings both architectural and structural;
4. Information on Fire Protection System;
5. Energy Code Compliance for whole house system;
6. Critical area designation such as wetlands or shorelines;
7. Special Analysis for Snow, Wind or Flood conditions;
8. Certificate of Sewer Availability or Septic Design;
9. Certificate of Water Availability or Legal Well;
10. Contractor's Registration Number OR Ownerbuilder Affidavit.

Line 101 of the budget covers the costs, which you most likely will incur, working with an architect or residential designer or stock plan provider.

While working with your design professional, there will be engineering and site studies, which need to be outsourced to other professionals because they cannot legally be accomplished by an architect or designer, and these services are performed by surveyor, engineer, technician, or ecologist. Line 202 covers these costs, but it should be noted that the information derived from their work will significantly affect architecture, engineering and site plan for your project.

Across America, some locales are very lenient with their requirements for site plan and working drawings while others are very strict. It all depends on your situation so the costs for your architect or residential designer will vary from region to region.

The problem to solve is to establish a cost for creation of a site plan and working drawings when it comes time to engage the services of an architect or residential designer who will prepare documents that are code compliant and permit ready.

CONTACT: Who are the professionals and where do you find them for this budget category?

The most important thing about shopping for your home design is to do your homework prior to final selection of an architect or residential designer. There are some questions you should answer prior to and during the search process.

Some of the answers help form other questions and highlight important considerations for selecting the right design firm for you. Most important is to decide the level of service you need.

In deciding the level of service you need, develop realistic expectations of what stock drawings versus custom drawings will provide. A stock drawing will be quick and inexpensive, but may not meet all your design needs. A custom drawing will take longer to develop and is more expensive, but may be better suited to your needs. A hybrid of these two choices is to purchase stock drawings, then make minor changes adapting the design to your site and life style.

American Institute of Architects <http://www.aia.org/>

American Institute of Building Designers <http://www.aibd.org/>

Another scenario to consider is whether to use a manufactured or kit home such as modular, log or panelized. Manufactured or kit homes that include standardized approaches to residential design solutions will usually require site plans and most likely also require building plan ALTERATIONS due to local code requirements as a result of weather, geographic and seismic conditions that vary from region to region.

Modular Building System Council <http://www.buildingsystems.org/>

Stock drawings may cost \$400 to \$1,200 for a set of eight blue-line copies of a stock design. On a square footage basis, a residential designer may charge \$1.00 to \$3.00 per square foot of floor space to render a permit-ready design. A licensed and certified architect may charge 2% to 15% of gross hard costs of construction in order to provide a detailed set of construction documents plus full architectural services. Hourly fees vary widely.

It may be significant to attract a design professional who has created a home style which is similar to the style you're contemplating. This will largely depend on the complexity of the project or if it's a highly stylized design solution.

Keep in mind that good design work is much more than rendering drawings. Design work is really about creative, critical thinking! But the heart of design work is one's ability to

think through the entire design/build process understanding the interdependence of all factors, and how this interdependence affects decision making.

COMPETENCE: What questions are pertinent to arriving at a cost for this budget category?

What level of service is most important to your requirements? Is a schedule established for design services based on your time line? How will design solutions be evaluated against program and budgetary considerations?

Is a site survey required? Will the services of a structural or civil engineer be required? Does your site require a geotechnical analysis? Is there a presence of ecologically sensitive areas on your site which may require special consideration?

What style appeals to you? Victorian? Spanish? Colonial? Bauhaus? Usonian? Japanese? Pioneer? Are elements of universal design incorporated into the design solution?

Where can you view samples of the designer's work similar to your project? Is the designer experienced in the local jurisdiction where your site's located?

Who prescribes the design solution? Is one person in charge of the design/build process? What are the design phases? When will things be accomplished?

Are a variety of pre-designed, stock drawings available in the style you prefer?

Is a "conditions" statement describing terms of agreement provided by the design firm?

What will design services cost for the level of service provided?

Will valid and reliable construction budget parameters be established from the outset of the preliminary design concept?

Is credibility given to photographs or articles which you bring with you to your meetings with the design professional?

How will disagreements be handled? Who has the last say?

With whom will you work during the time you spend with the design firm?

If working with an architect, is s/he licensed to practice in your state?

If working with a stock plan service, is the residential design intended to be built in your locality?

Who makes permit application and responds to the questions of the plan examiner at the local building department?

What happens if the design solution is in conflict with the criteria set forth by the building code or local ordinances?

Who is responsible for code discrepancies during field inspections?

Will the design firm be available to clarify or correct problems? What will these corrections cost?

How will you determine timeliness of decisions/evaluations?

Will a complete set of specifications accompany the working drawings?

Who collects and monitors bid proposals for compliance with drawings and specifications?

Who is the person with authority over aesthetic and construction decisions?

Is this a team effort? Owner's responsibility? Consultant's responsibility? Designer's responsibility? Contractor's responsibility?

Are a variety of pre-designed, stock drawings available in the style you prefer or do you need a more customized version for your home design?

Is a conditions statement describing terms of agreement provided by the design firm for a range of services?

What will design services cost for the level of service you anticipate?

Are a variety of pre-designed, stock drawings available in the style you prefer or do you need a more customized version for your home design?

Is a conditions statement describing terms of agreement provided by the design firm for a range of services?

What will design services cost for the level of service you anticipate?

Where will I get my plans? Online? An architect or engineer?

How much do I want to spend on plans?

What kind of house do I want to build?

Has a soil percolation test been done on the property?

Is the architectural design unusual using a variety of materials in irregular spaces?

Are their extensive structural elements that must be custom designed/made for your project (e.g. trusses or beams)?

Are pre-fabricated structural elements available pre-formed or off-the-shelf (as opposed to custom-made) for your project?

Did you purchase one plan or reproducible plans?

Do you know if your plans will meet local building requirements and any covenants on the land?

Does the provider of the plans provide any support to meet local building requirements?

Will the designer provide engineer stamps if necessary?

Are there any known issues with soil in your area?

Can the lot accommodate a drain field?

How much red tape must you encounter to get permit?

Are there any prerequisites to applying for permits?

STANDARD: How do you know when you've gotten enough information to move forward?

A residential designer is much like a tailor. Their job is to take the measure of your life and soul and fit a physical environment to those criteria.

The building design you commission and construct will likely be the most expensive purchase you'll ever make. It's prudent to make sure whoever designs your residence is an expert in more than just putting pieces together. You'll want somebody who can fit your building to you like a fine suit of clothes. A house, in particular, is a very personal artifact. It will become a member of your family as well as a treasured possession. Through its design, it will express everything you find important. How well it fits your desires and personality will determine how easily you can live with it.

It's very common for consumers to go to an architect or residential designer or stock plan service with only sketchy ideas of what they want. A collection of hazy dreams, a few

magazine photos, maybe an idea of how much space you want, and a list of budgetary constraints are usually all there may be to work with at the beginning.

Design professionals are trained to ask you the right questions, to bring all your loose-knit ideas together, and to learn who you are, what you like, what your values are, and who you want to be. Much as with tailors, your designer will need to know things about you that few others know -- so s/he may better create an environment as an extension of your life style. As such, trust is essential -- on both sides.

When you interview potential residential designers, architects, or a stock plan service for your project, make sure to ask the right questions.

Look for a design provider who will tailor fit a solution specifically to you, rather than offer a cookie-cutter approach. One size does not fit all in this business, in spite of what many would have us believe. You intend to commit a lot of money to building a house -- search to find a design provider who will give you not only a roof over your head, but a place to love and treasure.

In short, find someone to design you a home, not a house.

The design professional provides examples of jobs accomplished like your project.

The design professional provides a boilerplate conditions document.

The design professional provides an hourly or flat rate for the scope of work.

The design professional identifies contingencies that may cause you to go over budget.

The client is sure that they have obtained total costs for each area.

The client has compared the actual cost to the estimated costs and has justified the reasoning for any excessive differences.

The client is satisfied with the plans, house, price, and number of copies of the plans they are getting for the price.

The designer will prepare a stamped set of plans for approval by a local building department.

The proposed house can fit on the lot.

The plans meet local zoning and permitting requirements.

The land has passed the percolation test.

The plans meet local covenants or HOA requirements.

Modular or pre-engineered home supplier has provided plans and support