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IN-DEPTH CONSTRUCTION DEVELOPMENT & DESIGN

BONING UP ON HISTORIC CODES EASES URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Renovations of older buildings have been a large part of Columbus' focus on downtown housing. This trend has been great for the city, yet these renovations require specialized knowledge of a building's structural elements and city building codes specific to historic urban structures for the project to be successful. It's critical that developers partner early on with architects who can not only conceptualize a workable design,

but who also are experts at understanding and using city building codes to a project's advantage. Developers can't afford to ignore or underestimate the complexities of a building before they purchase it. Without that knowledge they risk investing in a project that, in the end, is too expensive for the market or their own available funds.

Do your homework.

As developers consider renovation of historic buildings for residential living, some key elements should be considered before the project begins to ensure its feasibility.

Gather information, test ideas and analyze results.

- Analyze the building's structure by investigating the soil conditions and the wood, concrete and metal structures as well as the history of alterations to the existing building.
- Consider the sustainability of a building's design by making sure it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. By choosing recycled building materials, energy-efficient HVAC systems, water conservation tools and natural energy systems, you can reduce the footprint you leave on the environment.
- From an environmental standpoint, this includes testing for asbestos, lead, chemicals and other hazardous materials. Finding out how the site was previously used is helpful in determining its environmental safety.
- From a legal standpoint, developers should ensure there is a clear title for the building and discover any liens, easements and encroachments that may exist. It may

also be helpful to identify any unclaimed or available adjacent land to the property. Development restrictions including area commission guidelines and review processes and zoning code restrictions also need to be considered. These commission reviews need to be anticipated in the project schedule.

Have clear and concise plans.

- Remember that you are building a community - not just housing. Look at the neighborhood as a whole and the impact a project will have on its future. A community evolves over time and each building, each project, helps determine its fate. Consider mixed-use developments that reflect the existing or anticipated character of the neighborhood. Most of all don't be afraid to be creative with your project and do something unique, but also smart.
- It's important to accurately measure the building and develop an initial conceptual design for the renovations and additions. This includes space plans, vertical/volumetric openings and the relationship of new construction to existing. Don't be afraid to make your

mark – we're building in the 21st Century.

- Developers also need to have a clear idea of the building's new or altered structural, electrical, HVAC, plumbing and fire protection systems upfront. Architectural materials including interior and exterior finishes also need to be considered. Try to uncover, rather than cover up, the character of an older building and recognize its value.
- Perform a code review including an Article 34 Alternative Code Compliance analysis for buildings built before 1979 and learn the advantages and limits of this tool. Article 34 permits alternative solutions to building alterations that do not compromise the integrity of the minimum code standards as they relate to fire safety, emergency egress and general safety.
- A project budget should be developed early based upon square foot or component costs. Look into using historic tax credits if they apply.
- A pro forma should be generated if the project is speculative. This includes identifying all revenue and expenses for

planning, construction and marketing phases. Identifying life cycle costs and projected profits should also be part of this process.

Proceed with informed caution.

- The design, development and construction team needs to know, accept and manage the risks involved with each project. It's also important to be flexible and respond quickly and creatively to changes in the field.

Developers need to leverage design to communicate a project's identity and market brand with a depth and efficiency that takes full advantage of every dollar they spend. Good design doesn't happen by chance or by accident. It's not artsy or trendy, but reflects a thinking process, a purpose and a solution. The value of design lies in the ability of a space or building to shape, inform, comfort, engage and stimulate.

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