



Commercial Project Planning Checklist

A practical guide for owners planning a commercial construction project.
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Before You Start

Use this checklist to organize key decisions before investing significant time and money into design and construction.

Project Goals

- Define the purpose of the building
- Determine anticipated square footage
- Identify future growth requirements
- Establish occupancy goals and move-in timeline
- Identify operational needs and special requirements
- Determine ownership structure

Site Evaluation

- Confirm zoning compatibility
- Verify utility availability
- Review access and traffic requirements
- Understand parking requirements
- Evaluate drainage concerns
- Investigate easements or restrictions
- Identify potential environmental issues
- Understand site development costs

Budget Planning

- Establish preliminary project budget
- Determine financing requirements
- Evaluate construction cost expectations
- Consider site development costs
- Include professional design fees
- Include permit and agency fees
- Include furniture, fixtures, and equipment
- Include contingency funding
- Evaluate escalation risks



Design & Development Team

- Select architect
- Select civil engineer
- Identify specialty consultants
- Engage contractor early for budgeting
- Establish project communication process
- Define decision-making authority

Schedule Planning

- Establish desired occupancy date
- Allow time for design
- Allow time for permitting
- Allow time for pricing and procurement
- Understand construction duration
- Account for weather and market impacts

Questions to Discuss With Your Contractor

- Is my budget realistic?
- Are there site risks I should understand?
- What cost drivers affect this type of project?
- What schedule risks should I expect?
- What opportunities exist to reduce cost?
- What should be decided before design begins?
- What are the most common owner mistakes?

Final Thoughts

Early planning is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk, control costs, and improve project outcomes.