



WHY CONSTRUCTION ADMINISTRATION MATTERS

Protecting Your Community's Investment

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When a homeowners association undertakes a major construction or rehabilitation project, such as repairs to balcony or stairs, retaining walls, parking structures, or building envelope upgrades/repairs, the focus is often on selecting the right contractor and securing competitive pricing. Less visible, equally as important, is the role of Construction Administration (CA) services performed by the engineering firm that designed the project.

Speaking from the perspective of a structural engineering firm, Construction Administration is not an “extra” or a formality. CA is the final phase of design; the phase that ensures that what was thoroughly engineered on paper is correctly built in the field. For HOAs, CA services help protect the community's financial investment, minimize risk and liability, and ensure the long-term performance of the repair or improvement. For contractors, CA services provide clarity, efficiency, and a reliable technical partner throughout construction to assist in oversight and collaboration. The collaboration portion is especially key as by working together, the engineer and contractor can create opportunities for value engineering, aka, cost savings for the community to truly maximize their dollars.

What Is Construction Administration?

Construction Administration includes a range of services provided by the design engineer during construction. These services typically include reviewing contractor submittals, responding to Requests for Information (RFIs), performing periodic site observations, addressing unforeseen conditions, reviewing change requests, and verifying that the work generally conforms to the approved construction documents.

In simple terms, CA services bridge the gap between design intent and real-world construction. There are plenty of things in the field that can change in a moment, and by working together, these unforeseen circumstances can be handled smoothly and help to avoid major project delays.

Benefits to the Community

Protecting the HOA's Investment

Projects within community associations are often funded through reserve accounts or special assessments, making cost control and quality outcomes absolutely imperative. When the engineering firm that designed the project provides CA services, the HOA gains an advocate whose sole responsibility is safeguarding the integrity of the design and acting as liaison for the community.

Engineers performing CA can identify deviations from the plans early, before they become costly mistakes or long-term maintenance issues. This oversight helps ensure that materials, connections, and construction methods meet the codes and requirements necessary for durability, longevity, and safety.

Managing Unforeseen Conditions

Existing buildings frequently conceal conditions that are not fully visible during initial site visits, assessments, and the design phase, such as hidden deterioration or undocumented modifications/deviations. When these conditions are uncovered, having the engineer actively involved allows for quick and effective solutions that keep the project moving forward.

Without CA services, these issues may be addressed solely by the contractor under time and budget pressure, potentially resulting in fixes that solve the immediate issue but, in some cases, could

compromise long-term performance. Contractors typically prefer that engineers take on the liability in designing repairs for these unforeseen existing conditions.

Reducing Risk and Liability

Construction is inherently risky, particularly for older communities undergoing civil and structural repairs or rehabilitation. Engineering CA services help reduce risk by documenting site observations, providing written responses to RFIs, and clarifying design intent. This documentation creates a clear record of decisions made during construction, which can be invaluable if questions or disputes arise in the future.

For HOA boards and community managers, this added layer of professional oversight provides peace of mind and demonstrates due diligence to the community.

Improved Long-Term Performance

Structural repairs are intended to last decades, and these repairs are designed with that level of longevity in mind. CA services help ensure that critical details are executed correctly. Proper execution directly impacts how long repairs last and how well they perform under everyday use, weather, and factors in other variables like foundation movement and soil quality, etc.

Benefits to the Contractor

Clear and Timely Technical Guidance

Construction documents cannot anticipate every condition encountered in the field. When questions arise, contractors benefit from direct access to the engineer who understands the project's design assumptions and constraints. Quick, consistent responses to RFIs keep work moving and reduce costly delays and additional strains on the community.

Reduced Rework and Disputes

Misinterpretation of structural drawings can lead to incorrect installations that require rework, which leads to frustration for everyone involved. Engineering CA services help prevent these situations by reviewing submittals and clarifying details before work is performed. This reduces wasted labor, schedule disruptions, and disagreements over responsibility.

Fair Evaluation of Changes

When unforeseen conditions require changes to the design by impacting constructability, the engineer can help evaluate appropriate solutions and associated costs. This creates a more transparent process where change orders are based on sound engineering judgment rather than assumptions, benefiting both the contractor and the HOA.

What Can Go Wrong Without Construction Administration?

When the engineering firm is not retained for CA services, several risks increase significantly:

Field decisions may be made without a full understanding of the original design intent. Contractors, even highly experienced ones, may substitute materials or alter details to address constructability challenges, not realizing the potential structural implications. Over time, these changes can lead to premature deterioration, moisture intrusion, or liability/safety concerns.

Additionally, unresolved questions can result in delays, inconsistent interpretations of the drawings, or disputes between the HOA and contractor. In the worst cases, deficiencies may not become apparent until years later, long after warranties have expired and the project budget has been spent.

From a risk management standpoint, the absence of engineering CA services can also blur lines of responsibility. When no engineer is observing and documenting construction, it becomes harder to determine whether issues stem from design, construction, or maintenance.

A Collaborative Approach to Successful Projects

Construction Administration is most effective when viewed as a collaborative effort. The engineer, contractor, HOA board, and community manager all play vital roles. When the engineering firm that designed the project remains involved through construction, communication improves, problems are solved faster, and the project is more likely to meet its technical, financial, and performance goals.

For HOAs undertaking significant civil or structural work, hiring the design engineer for CA services is an investment in quality, accountability, and long-term value. It helps ensure that the community receives not just a completed project, but a well-built one that serves residents safely and reliably for years to come. ⬆



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