How Design Works For You

If you have not worked with a design professional such as an architect, engineer or interior designer you are likely to have questions. When is Design required? What are the benefits of Design? Don’t professionals add more cost to a project? What is my role in the design process?

Your design professional sees the big picture as it relates to your project. Non-Residential Design and Construction is a rigorous environment of codes, regulations and requirements. Today’s building systems are complex and can include ventilation, fire sprinklers, fire alarm, communications, data and exit pathways. The University of Washington has specific design standards written by Campus Engineering, Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S), and Information Technology (UWIT) to allow for maintenance and operations considerations. These may be more restrictive than state and national codes.

The questions and responses listed below are intended as a guide to both Project Managers and Clients to better understand the value of design.

1. When Design may be required?

Professional design is required whenever the project affects the health, life safety, and welfare of the public. Maintenance projects or projects not affecting health, life safety, and welfare are typically exempt from a required design and the building permit process. Campus Engineering and/or Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) may require professional architectural and/or engineering design and reviews as well. Contractors rely on a professionally prepared design to know that the project has met building codes, and use the design documents for pricing and as the basis of construction.

Project characteristics typically requiring code compliance, design and building permits:

- Changes in room use, such as changing an office to a conference room.
- Changes in room size, such as creating a larger room.
- Changes to exiting, such as moving, adding or removing a door.
- Changes to mechanical, electrical, structural or life safety systems.
- Changes to accessibility per American Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Projects characterized as a substantial alteration or repair.

Project characteristics generally not requiring permits however design is a recommendation:

- Changes in finishes, such as flooring or painting.
- Changes in built-in or moveable cabinets (items greater than 5’ high require bracing).
- Changes to wall shelving, tackboards, marker boards.
2. **What are the primary benefits of Design?**

A well designed project functions better, makes better use of space and will accordingly have both a lower first cost and ongoing maintenance cost. The design coordination of equipment and systems such as structural, mechanical, electrical, and life safety aims to achieve the best function and use of materials with the lowest cost. Studies show good design contributes to desired behaviors, satisfied users, increased worker productivity, employee retention, improved concentration and learning. By working with a design professional, the client can achieve a successful project in a shorter time, with higher quality, and with greater positive results.

3. **Are there other benefits of Design?**

Your designer can provide insights to your needs and can present fresh solutions. Great looking spaces are pleasing, invigorating, stimulating and impact how we feel and work. A documented design (drawings and specifications) allows the design to be shared, reviewed, and approved before construction costs are incurred. Costly field changes can be minimized or avoided. Sustainable design benefits us all by making us better stewards of our environment. During the construction phase, the designer answers questions and sees that the project is built the way it was designed.

4. **Don’t professionals add more cost?**

While it’s true professional services add a cost to a project, a good design can provide cost savings. Well considered selection of materials, based on the client’s budget and conditions of use, means the best use of resources and the best value. A design’s drawings and specs can be used for competitive pricing in order to obtain the lowest accurate cost. At the end of the project, prepared record drawings provides time and money savings on subsequent projects. Good Design saves money time and time again.

5. **What is my role in the design process?**

Design begins with your communication of your goals and needs including budget and schedule. Your timely response to questions and review of options are important to keep the project on track. Any concerns you may have can be expressed so they can be addressed at the earliest opportunity. By working with your design professional you will help ensure the best possible outcome for your project.

Be prepared to discuss:

- What are your needs or goals for the project?
- Describe your group, size and function.
- How does your group operate internally and externally?
- What are the specific problems you would like to see solved?
- What ideas do you have for design solutions?
- Will your project be needs driven or budget driven?
- What is your timeline needs?