



# The North Carolina Board of Architecture

How to Find, Hire and  
Work

with an Architect.

"Building your Dreams"



## Do You Need An Architect?

**If** you're planning to construct or modify a building, you may need to hire an architect. In North Carolina many commercial and large residential building projects, whether they involve new construction or remodeling of an existing building, require an architect to oversee the planning, design, documentation and construction. The architect must hold a license from the North Carolina Board of Architecture. As usual, there are exceptions to most rules!



### Exemptions...

An architect is not required on:

A family residence, up to eight units attached with grade level exit, which is not a part of or physically connected with any other buildings or residential units;

A building upon any farm for the use of any farmer, unless the building is of such nature and intended for such use as to substantially involve the health or safety of the public;

An institutional or commercial building if it does not have a total value exceeding ninety thousand dollars (\$90,000);

An institutional or commercial building if the total building area does not exceed 2,500 square feet in gross floor area;

Alteration, remodeling, or renovation of an existing building that is exempt under this section, or alteration, remodeling, or renovation of an existing building or building site that does not alter or affect the structural system of the building; change the building's access or exit pattern; or change the live or dead load on the building's structural system. This subdivision shall not limit or change any other exemptions to this Chapter or to the practice of engineering under Chapter 89C of the North Carolina General Statutes

Even if it is not required, it may be a good idea to hire an architect to...

- Help define your project goals and building programs
- Provide you with a variety of unique design options
- Create a design that reflects your own style and personal image that meets your budget

- Create an environmentally friendly structure that suits the site and community
- Solve construction problems, such as how to enlarge or modernize a home or business so you don't have to move
- Decrease your building's energy needs
- Represent you when working with planning officials, general contractors, material suppliers and other building professionals.

## How do you find an architect?

To determine if your architect is licensed in North Carolina you may search the Board of Architecture database at [www.ncbarch.org](http://www.ncbarch.org) in the 'licensee look up' section or call 919-733-9544.



The Board cannot recommend one architect over another but can provide you with the information to help you make your choice. The Board can also tell you whether an architect holds an active North Carolina License or has a disciplinary history.

You can also contact the American Institute of Architects which has several chapters in North Carolina. The AIA may also be able to provide you with a list of architects for your particular project. To find a chapter in your area visit the website [www.aia-nc.org](http://www.aia-nc.org) or call 919-833-6656.

## How do you select an architect?

Architects practice in a variety of firm sizes: from sole proprietors to large businesses. Some architects specialize in specific types of buildings while others design a variety of building types. Before hiring an architect it's a good idea to interview several. When meeting with a prospective architect be prepared to:

### Describe Your Project.

Describe the site and building purpose, size and preferred appearance. Present your budget along with the desired start and completion date. If you are unsure of these issues, an architect can help you analyze your options. Ask how the architect will work with you through the various phases of your project.

### Ask About The Architect's Experience and Qualifications.

How long has the architect been in business? How big is the firm? Has the

architect worked on other projects similar to yours? Ask to see examples of other projects the architect has been involved in. Ask if you can visit them and talk to the building owners and users.

#### Ask About How Fees Are Determined.

You should determine how the fees for basic services will be charged; by an hourly rate, as a percentage of construction costs, or as a lump sum. You will also want to know who pays for reimbursable expenses such as document reproduction and other project related costs. You may also want to find out the architects' policy on changes and any anticipated or potential services beyond the basic services.

#### **Some Questions You May Wish to Have Answered:**

Are construction cost estimates provided by the architect?

What additional costs (permits, redesign charges, changes required by building code officials, etc.) might there be?

Are consulting engineer, interior design, and landscape architect fees included with the estimate? If so, which ones?

#### Find Out The Architect's Insurance Coverage.

Find out what type of professional and general limited liability insurance the architect carries. What are the policy limits? Have they had any claims and how were they resolved?

#### Ask For References.

Some questions you might ask a reference:

Did the architect's design meet your needs and goals?

Did the architect provide the promised services?

Were services completed in a timely and professional manner?

Was the project completed on budget and on schedule?

Did the architect keep the client informed during the building process?

Were there any problems during the design or construction? If so, how were they resolved?

Would the client hire the architect again?

#### **Contract, Finances and Records.**



## The Contract

In North Carolina, there is no law requiring that a contract be completed before an architect begins working with you on your project. In general, a written agreement is a good idea. The contract agreement should include a specific and thorough description of all services to be provided, fee arrangements, insurance requirements, and termination provisions. A legal arrangement of this kind should be taken very seriously. Consider having your attorney, insurance agent and financial advisor review it before you sign it.



## Finances

Make sure you agree to a payment schedule before the architect starts work on your project. By putting this information in writing, perhaps in the contract/ agreement, disputes can be kept to a minimum.

Understand the conditions of any advances or retainer fees, and make sure you are clear on how consulting charges and reimbursable fees are determined. Many architects require that progress payments be made during the course of the project. Be sure you understand ahead of time how these fees are calculated. You may also want to discuss the conditions for final payment once the services are complete and you are satisfied with the results.

## Records

Keep a copy of the written agreement and organized records of all written and verbal communication with your architect in case questions arise in the future. During progress reviews make your comments precisely on the drawings and specifications then return them to the architect, retaining a copy for your records. Following verbal conversations it's a good idea to write a memo to your architect confirming what was said. Include any photos, notes and financial records that are appropriate. Careful record keeping will minimize misunderstandings as the project progresses.

## **What If You Have A Complaint?**

The vast majority of architect-client experiences are positive and rewarding. They are often a result of referral work for the architect based on other client satisfaction. You have a right to receive professional and qualified services from your architect. Hiring an architect who is licensed to practice in North Carolina is an important step in making sure this happens. It is against the law in North Carolina to use the title 'architect' or to practice architecture as defined by G.S. 83A without first being licensed by the Board.

If you encounter issues you believe are not professional or equitable, first, discuss the problem calmly and thoroughly with your architect. Try to work together to find

a mutually agreeable solution. If you are unable to resolve the problem, further action may be necessary.

In North Carolina, contractual disputes generally are resolved through arbitration or civil action. The North Carolina Board of Architecture does not have jurisdiction over fee disputes or other contractual issues. You may need to hire an attorney or professional mediator to resolve such a problem.



The North Carolina Board of Architecture does deal with issues of professional misconduct, negligence, misuse of the title architect and practicing architecture without a North Carolina license. The Board investigates all complaints it receives. If you wish to file a complaint, request a complaint form or send a letter to the NC Board of Architecture 127 W. Hargett Street Suite 304 Raleigh, NC 27601. You can also download complaint form at [www.ncbarch.org](http://www.ncbarch.org).

When filing a complaint with the Board, it is helpful if you include the following information:

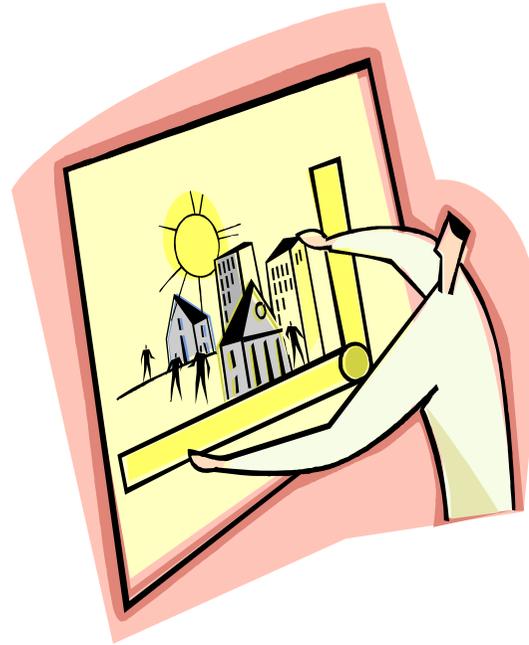
- Contact information for you and the architect or designer
- Address or location of the project
- Project owners name and contact information
- Name of the construction company/contractor
- Status of the project
- Size and use of the building, including number of stories, square footage, etc.
- Why you believe a violation of the NC Board of Architecture law or rules exists

The Board staff will contact you if any further information is necessary during the course of the investigation.

During a formal investigation the Board contacts the parties involved, obtains necessary evidence and gathers facts for review and analysis to determine if a violation exists. The Board then determines what action should take place. The Board has the authority to discipline individuals and can assess civil penalties. The Board does not have the authority to award civil damages.

A thorough investigation takes time. The Board meets approximately ten times a year and is made up of seven members appointed by the Governor. Two Board members, assisted by the Executive Director and Board Counsel apprise the Professional Standards Committee. It is this Committee that handles disciplinary investigations. Some complaints are resolved within a few months; however, it can often take longer. Disciplinary action proposed by the Board is subject to due process. All individuals and firms have a right to a hearing.

If you have questions about your building project, feel free to contact the North Carolina Board of Architecture by phone or by visiting our web site. Our goal is that your building project will be a rewarding and satisfying experience, one both you and your architect can be proud of.



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