

How Long will it Take? - *Using the Project Schedule Matrix*

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One of the most important questions that needs to be asked when a company is planning to relocate their office to a new space is, how long does it take to do everything? Determining a time frame from when you start, from selecting your design team to the day when you actually are able to move-in to your new space, is difficult considering all the variables involved. Once some of the variables are pinned down, such as the size and complexity of the new facility, and whether a building permit is required, a rough schedule can be identified. It is best to discuss the specifics of your project with your Broker, Architect and Contractor so you can get a better idea of the three main phases of the project: Leasing Phase, Design Phase and Construction Phase, respectively.

We have put together the Project Schedule Matrix to help pin down the distinct steps in each of these phases and what time frames you can expect. To get a better handle on the process we have separated the project into distinct phases and coupled that with a listing of "levels of construction". Once you identify the type of processes which best fit your firm for the **Selection of your Architect**, collection of the **Space Programming** data, how many buildings you will consider for the **Fit Plans**, and the **Level of Build-out** which you expect to do, it becomes a matter of adding up the time frames for each step to get to a realistic overall schedule.

ARCHITECT SELECTION

The time allotted for this phase can vary anywhere from several days, to up to 4-6 weeks depending on how many Architects you would like to consider, how formal the Request For Proposal (RFP) process is, and how many people in your organization will be involved with the selection process. If a company has a short list of several architects in mind and is comfortable with making an executive decision following informal interviews of 1-2 architects, the entire process can be completed in several days. On the other hand if a more formal approach is required, a RFP can be written and issued to a select group of four to six Architects, with a reasonable time period for them to respond. Once the responses are in and reviewed the field should be narrowed to two or three, followed by conducting face-to-face interviews, and then making your selection. This could take anywhere from four to six weeks; or more if you want a Selection Committee to be intimately involved in the process.

SPACE PROGRAMMING

Once your Architect is on board, the programming phase is the first and most critical step in the project. This step will help you identify and determine your company's overall goals, priorities and needs for their new space. This phase will establish overall space requirements so your broker can confidently search and develop a short list of possible buildings.

Programming requirements can be determined in several days in relatively small uncomplicated projects, and result in the preparation of a 1-2 page report. In some larger projects, where companies have very specific requirements or where individual department heads will need to be interviewed and where companywide buy-in is necessary, this phase can take upwards of six weeks and can result in a highly detailed written report.

FIT PLANS

Once your broker has identified several buildings that match your specific program requirements, it is highly recommended that your Architect prepare Fit Plans for the leading contenders. A Fit Plan is a relatively quick design exercise to determine how well a space generally works with your program requirements. The Fit Plan will show the various program area requirements in a block diagram fashion and may indicate walls and generic work stations, but will not show such details as doors, casework or finishes. It is *not* intended to represent the final Space Plan layout. Although the short-listed spaces may contain the same amount of usable or rentable square footage space, such things as the overall building geometry and column spacing may or may not mesh well with your space requirements. Variations of 10 to 20% in efficiency between one space and another are common. Over the course of a 5-10 year lease this efficiency variation in your lease payments can have a major financial impact on your bottom line.

LEVELS OF CONSTRUCTION

The time required for the subsequent phases will vary depending on the size and complexity of a project, but for simplicity sake we have used the following scope of work definitions in the Matrix:

- “Plug and Play”:** “Plug & Play” terminology refers to projects where the new space is immediately ready to move in and requires no changes whatsoever. No building permit is required and no Title 24 Accessibility Upgrades to the Path of Travel will be necessary. Systems furniture is already in place and phone/data systems will utilize existing cabling.
- “Carpet and Paint”:** “Carpet & Paint” refers to projects where the new space will receive a modest make-over which is limited to new paint and installing new carpet. No building permit is required and no Title 24 Accessibility Upgrades to the Path of Travel will be necessary. Systems furniture, if applicable, may already be in place and phone/data systems may require new cabling infrastructure. Some or all new FF&E will be needed.
- “Minor Remodel”** A minor renovation is defined as moving 5% or less of the existing walls/ doors etc. Adding or removing any walls will trigger the need to obtain a building permit and likely trigger some, if not full, Title 24 Accessibility Upgrades to the Path of Travel. Systems furniture, if applicable, may already be in place and phone/data systems may require new cabling infrastructure. Some or all new FF&E will be needed.
- “Renovation”** A moderate renovation is defined as moving up to 50% of the existing walls/ doors etc. Adding or removing any walls will trigger the need to obtain a building permit and likely trigger some, if not full, Title 24 Accessibility Upgrades to the Path of Travel. Systems furniture, if applicable, may already be in place and phone/data systems may require new cabling infrastructure. Some or all new FF&E will be needed.
- “Complete Build-Out”** A Complete Build-Out is defined as moving more than 50% of the existing walls/ doors etc., or the build-out an all-new space, such as in a Shell space. This scope of work will trigger the need to obtain a Building Permit and likely trigger full Title 24 Accessibility Upgrades to the Path of Travel. Some or all new FF&E will be needed, and phone/data systems will require new cabling infrastructure.

SPACE PLANNING

This phase will establish the overall floor planning layout and determine where and how the various programmed spaces will be arranged. It is not uncommon to prepare Space Plans for one or two of the short-listed buildings if the client wishes to carefully compare one space to another. The Space Plans will locate walls, doors, glazing, casework, furniture and may be annotated to describe various finishes and speciality features.

CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

Following the Owner's approval of the selected Space Plan and further adjustments in the scope or quality of the Project, or in the construction budget authorized by the Owner, the Architect will prepare the Construction Documents. These will consist of drawings which illustrate in detail the requirements for the construction. The drawings are usually in scale, show dimensions, and may include a variety of plans, elevations, details, and schedules. If a Building Permit is required, additional documents will be needed to illustrate Exiting/ Fire-Life-Safety and Disabled Access compliance. For multifloor projects we recommend that you allow 1-2 weeks per each additional floor for this phase.

BUILDING PERMIT PHASE

A building permit will be required if walls and/or doors are added or removed from a space. Other permits may be required as well for other types of work such as the electrical or mechanical work. The permit application documents will be submitted to the building department, and they will be thoroughly reviewed to ensure that the proposed work complies with the Seismic, Fire and Life-Safety, and accessibility regulations. Unfortunately, these departments are bureaucratic by nature and they typically process the plans in a first-in, first out method. However, some jurisdictions have provisions to speed up the process for small projects of little complexity, or allow the use of previously approved outside plan checkers when the in-house staff is overloaded, and some have overtime procedures which allow you to pay additional fees to cover the Plan Checker's overtime expense. Utilizing these special programs allow you to get your plans approved faster (theoretically, anyway). The timing of this phase is very difficult to pin down and it is best to discuss it early on with your Architect and Contractor to develop a strategy for keeping the permit turnaround time to a minimum.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE

After obtaining the Building Permit, the Contractor can begin construction of the space. Once the construction starts the Contractor will be responsible for all the scheduling and coordination between the various building trades, job site safety and obtaining necessary sign-offs from the Building and Fire Officials. When necessary, overtime charges can shorten the time to move-in, and can be effective when judiciously applied. But don't rely on overtime as it is not only expensive, but many times with certain aspects of the work it won't help (e.g., some woodwork finishes take a certain amount of time to dry and no amount of overtime can speed this up.) Once again allow 1-2 weeks per each additional floor for multiple floor projects. Also, if the allowed time frame is really compressed, you may want to discuss with your Contractor if a phased completion schedule is feasible or a benefit for you.

MOVE-IN

Once the Contractor has your space substantially complete and they obtain the Certificate of Occupancy from the Building Department Official, move-in of your personnel can take place. If you are purchasing new/used furniture this can be installed prior to Substantial Completion with the Contractor's cooperation. Movers can be scheduled to work after-hours and over weekends to minimize the interruption to work and to accelerate the schedule. But allow enough time to install computers, phones, network equipment and time to debug the systems prior to employees showing up for work. Allow more time for multiple floors or phased move-ins.

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