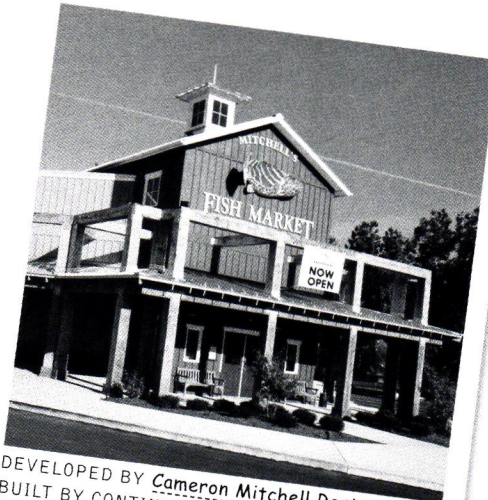


# C O L U M N S

*What Is Fair?*  
*A Roundtable Discussion*  
*on the Selection Process*

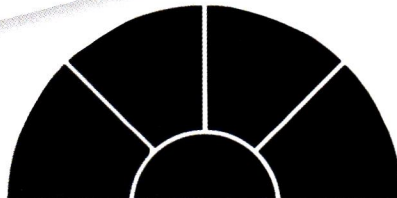
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# The Most Important Part of Our Profession?

By Anthony G. Poli, AIA • Vice President, Manager of Architecture, The Maguire Group



*The County did what we all hope clients do when selecting architects. They made a selection based upon qualifications and approach.*

## What is the most important part of

the profession of architecture? "Get the job..." according to Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, and supposedly, many of the stars of our profession. Although I disagree, clearly getting the job is important. In my current position of managing the architectural practice of Maguire Group in Pittsburgh, and previously as principal in my own firm and in partnerships, getting the job has been central to my professional existence. So when Allegheny County announced plans to build a major office building downtown to house the Department of Human Services and the Crime Lab, I began to evaluate a potential response to the County's request for qualifications.

To those of us who commit our firms' resources to business development, the selection process in a project of this size is so important. After considering such factors as the project type and the firm's portfolio, if the decision to respond is a "go," the selection process becomes central to much of what happens next. My favorite selection processes are with existing clients who want to "select" us for their next job. At the other end of the spectrum are publicly advertised projects, open to any firm who sees the solicitation, like this Allegheny County project.

We all know that many factors come into play when considering responses to these kinds of solicitations: previous experience with the client, personal relationships, the respective responses of each firm. The Transportation Group at Maguire had worked with the County and, in their experience, the selection process was based on qualifications and a fair evaluation of the respondents' submissions. For the new office building, the County crafted a design/build delivery method that provided two opportunities for an architectural assignment: one for completion of design development documents and management of the subsequent project phases and the second for the design/build team responsible for contract drawings and construction. By using two solicitations the County was providing the opportunity for two architectural firms to be involved.

Since Maguire's Pittsburgh Buildings Group was in its infancy, we teamed with a local architect, Renaissance 3 Architects, with their strong design ability and experience in urban office structures and lab design. We added URS to the team for construction management, Klavon Design for

landscape architecture, and Timothy Engineering for mechanical design. Elsewhere in the city, the same process of negotiations and teaming was playing out in similar ways since the County received 21 responses to this RFQ.

As expected, the selection process designed by the County involved the evaluation of these submissions by a diverse team of county personnel involved in this project. Members of the legal department, the office of MBE compliance, the Human Services Department and the Crime Lab (the primary user groups), and the Industrial Development Authority all read and ranked the responses. They chose to interview the top five firms, including our team.

These teams were then asked for a more comprehensive technical proposal, and a price proposal which was sealed and opened after the final selection. Each of the teams was given one hour to present their approach to the project in an oral presentation.

As this process unfolded, there were rumors about town: supposedly, one team that is well connected with the County had the project locked up. This prompted the AIA to contact the County with an offer to help regarding their process. Although the AIA's efforts were appreciated, in this case, the rumors were indeed rumors. The County did what we all hope clients do when selecting architects. They made a selection based upon qualifications and approach.

The County also selected a project delivery system that allowed more firms to compete for the work. A young branch office like Maguire, and a growing firm like R3A were able to get consideration for the design portion of this significant project. Had the delivery system been more conventional, only larger firms would have been under consideration.

Celli-Flynn Brennan Turkall was ultimately selected for the assignment (we came in second). I want to congratulate Tom Celli and his team on their efforts to secure this project. And I want to congratulate Tom Donatelli and Allegheny County for an open selection process, one that allowed such firms as Maguire and R3A, as well as Burt Hill, WTW and Kimball (the short list) to present their qualifications for a fair evaluation. If I may offer a word to the two Toms, *now* the most important part of the architectural profession begins: design. Continue to do well.

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AIA Pittsburgh serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and AIA Pennsylvania. The objective of AIA Pittsburgh is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields.

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## Influencing the Process

By Anne J. Swager, Hon. AIA



*While we have a broad mission which speaks to improving the quality of the built environment, the means to this end is through you.*

In the May issue of *Columns*, President Rich DeYoung, AIA reported on the planning meeting the AIA Board had attended in March. While every executive director extols the virtues and necessity of planning meetings, I must confess that sitting through them can be akin to a root canal without a pain killer. In the vast majority of these sessions our eyes are bigger than our stomachs, so we start by listing everything we wish the organization was doing, implying of course that the organization is not doing enough. By the time we finish, there is usually a huge list of possible to dos for the next year without any clear idea of who is going to do what.

As a staff person, you are mostly worried that the list will end up on your desk with no additional resources to get it done. A year evolves, the list is still there and then its time for another planning session and another long list. The only way to break this circular pattern is to engage a very competent facilitator who makes you focus on just a few doable goals. This year our facilitator, Sally Mizerak, helped us narrow our list and now, with Rich's leadership, I expect good results. I know from experience that the really important *stuff* rises to the top. Even the long lists have recurring themes that help keep us on track.

While we have a broad mission which speaks to improving the quality of the built environment, the means to this end is through you. We play a role in educating you, promoting you and what you do and advocating on your behalf. The baseline? Enabling you to do the best job you can do is what the AIA is all about.

Many years ago we began advertising in the yellow pages, touting ourselves as a referral service. When people call we refer them to our website which has lots of information

on what you do, how you do it, who does what, and how you charge. If the caller lacks access to the internet, we print the information and mail it to them. Over the past several years, these calls have included not just individuals but a whole host of organizations looking to hire architects. With increasing frequency, we have been helping a variety of entities with their RFQ/RFP processes.

Our offer is simple. If the potential client lets us influence their process, we publicize, at no charge, their RFQ/RFP to our members. This creates an opportunity for a better process that leads to a better fit between client and architect and, in the end, a better result. As simple as this may seem, it isn't. We don't always get to influence the process to the extent we would like since we usually aren't brought in soon enough to make a significant difference. The only tool we have to help potential clients is the information from our website and staff interface.

Nevertheless, we continue to make a difference. Church groups, municipalities, small companies and other groups have all benefited from our tutoring on what you do and how to hire you. Our conversations center around helping the potential client define what they want you to do.

In this month's issue of *Columns*, we asked several of you to talk with us about good and bad processes. We wanted to measure how important this issue was to you and, as you can see from the passion of the discourse, this ranks right up there with family, taxes and the future of the environment. Our hope was to generate some ideas on how the AIA can do a better job in this area. Our participants did not disappoint. They gave us much food for thought and we thank them again for taking the time to talk to us.

Now we ask you to please take the time to read what they said. Then let us know what *you* think.

