



## Tips When Hiring Consultant(s) as part of Construction or Change of Use Building Permits

When planning a renovation or construction project, you may need to hire a Consultant (Architect, Engineer, or Qualified Designer) to prepare construction drawings required for a building permit. If this is your first time hiring a consultant, you might feel uncertain about who to choose. The City of Kitchener has compiled helpful tips to guide you in selecting a consultant for your project and set you up for success.

### 1. Determine the Type of Consultant You Need

Depending on the size of your project, you may require one or more of the following consultants for your construction project:

- **Architect:** Change of Use, some minor and major renovations, additions, new buildings.
- **Professional Engineer:** For specialized areas like structural, mechanical (HVAC & plumbing) or electrical systems.
- **BCIN Designer:** Qualified under the Ontario Building Code for certain types of projects; may be sufficient for smaller renovations or new home

To confirm which consultants are required for your project, speak with a Municipal Building Official at City Hall (contact information below)

### 2. Start with Recommendations

- Ask your friends, family, or colleagues for referrals: “Who did you hire?” and “Would you hire them again?”
- Check the internet (i.e. Google, LinkedIn) for past reviews or recommendations.

### 3. Meet the Consultant

- Once you have a shortlist of potential consultants, schedule an in-person meeting or phone call. It is difficult to gauge working with a consultant over email or text only.
- Use this opportunity to discuss your project needs, expectations, and whether the Consultant’s experience aligns with your project goals.

### 4. Key Questions to Ask the Consultant

- **Relevant Experience:** “Has your company completed similar projects before particularly with the City of Kitchener Building Division?” This will help gauge if they have experience and are qualified to complete the required work.
- **Timeline:** “How long will it take for your company to complete the construction drawings to submit the building permit application?” This will help you understand timelines and scheduling.
- **Recommendations:** “Do they have any recommendations for materials or design choices that could save time or reduce costs?” An experienced and helpful consultant may offer these types of tips that add value.
- **Application:** “Will you be responsible for the application process with the City?” Note: Sometimes there is an additional fee if the consultant is the key contact for your project.
- **Fees:** “What is the cost for the consulting services and what are the payment requirements?” Note: Reputable consultants usually do not request payment up front before any services are provided.

## 5. Review Past Work and References

- Ask for examples of past projects within the City of Kitchener or locally, preferably on similar types of projects as your project.
- Ask for a minimum of 2 references and follow up with those owners.

## 6. Do not Choose Based on Price Alone

- While it can be tempting to select the lowest quote remember that lower costs may reflect the quality of work. Poor-quality work can lead to errors and delays, costing you more overall.

## Example Projects and Required Consultants

### Project 1

**Scenario:** Interior finishing permit for new restaurant with up to 30 seats.

**Who:** Architect, engineer, or BCIN designer for architectural drawings.

**Other considerations:** May require structural, mechanical, or electrical engineers for the kitchen, HVAC, plumbing and electrical drawings.

### Project 2

**Scenario:** Interior finishing permit for new restaurant for 31 seats or more.

**Who:** Architect required for architectural drawings (no BCIN designer).

**Other considerations:** May require structural, mechanical or electrical engineers for the kitchen, HVAC, plumbing and electrical drawings.

### Project 3

**Scenario:** Interior finish permit for retail store with very few changes proposed.

**Who:** Architect, engineer, or BCIN qualified designer for architectural drawings.

**Other considerations:** May require structural, mechanical, or electrical engineers for the kitchen, HVAC, plumbing and electrical drawings.

## Additional Resources

- [Welcome to the OAA](#)
- [Home | Professional Engineers Ontario](#)

Note: Architects are licensed through the Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) and Engineers are licensed through the Professional Engineers of Ontario (PEO) and do not need to file with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) with a Building Code Identification Number (BCIN). Prior to hiring a BCIN designer, verify that the BCIN designer is qualified for the work proposed and type of building. BCIN designers taking responsibility for the construction drawings must be qualified per MMAH requirements.

## Disclaimer

The City of Kitchener follows the requirements prescribed in the Ontario Building Code and the OAA and PEO requirements for professional design. This tip sheet is shared to help future customers with tips when interviewing and hiring a consultant.

## For Questions – City of Kitchener Building Staff

Phone: 519-741-2312

Email: [Building@Kitchener.ca](mailto:Building@Kitchener.ca)

In person: Walk-in or book an appointment at Kitchener City Hall

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What does a Consultant do in the building permit process?

- Prepares detailed construction drawings
- Verifies compliance with Ontario Building Code and reference documents and local regulations
- May assist with permit application submissions and responding to municipal comments

### 2. Should I attend a pre-application meeting before hiring a Consultant?

Yes, attending a pre-application meeting with municipal staff can be very helpful. It allows you to clarify project requirements and get a better understanding of the types of services your project needs. This step can also help you ask more informed questions when interviewing potential consultants. Note: Pre-application meetings are available to be arranged in-person in the Downtown Kitchener area only. Online format is available for other areas in Kitchener.

### 3. What are common mistakes to avoid when hiring a Consultant?

- Not verifying the Consultant's credentials
- Choosing a Consultant solely based on the lowest quote, which may indicate a lower quality product
- Failing to establish a clear scope of work, which can lead to misunderstandings

### 4. What is an example of a successful Consultant-Client relationship?

A local business owner hired an experienced architect to renovate a café in an older building in downtown Kitchener. The project faced challenges such as outdated plumbing and the need to meet strict accessibility and health codes. The Architect conducted a thorough site assessment, coordinated with a mechanical engineer, and helped navigate the building permit process by attending a pre-application meeting with City staff. This proactive approach resulted in smooth permit approval, on-time project completion, and cost savings through efficient design recommendations. The business owner opened on schedule, citing the architect's local knowledge and clear communication as key factors in the project's success.

### 5. How can I verify a Consultant's credentials?

- [Ontario Association of Architects \(OAA\) Member Search](#) for Architects.
- [Professional Engineers Ontario \(PEO\) Directory](#) for Engineers.
- [Building Code Identification Number \(BCIN\) Lookup](#) for BCIN Designers.

### 6. What is the process for hiring a Contractor?

When hiring a contractor, a similar process applies. Refer to this comprehensive tip sheet for guidance on selecting and hiring a qualified professional contractor to ensure your project is completed efficiently and to a high standard.