

## **Step 4. Obtain Professional Design Assistance as Early as Possible**

### **Why is this important?**

Many of the critical decisions that affect the long term quality and even viability of a development project – goal setting, site selection and evaluation, concept development, ballpark cost estimates – often occur well before the project design team has been selected and put under contract.

These decisions often “lock in” specific aspects of a project in such a way that it can be difficult – and sometimes impossible – to “work around” them in order to achieve design quality.

Obtaining professional design assistance – from a qualified architect, engineer, or community design center – at the very beginning of the development process (i.e. well before the project design team is assembled) can help ensure that these critical decisions are made in a way that enhances, rather than inhibits, the overall design quality of a project.

### **When should this be done?**

As early as possible in the Concept phase of development.

### **Who should do this?**

The owner/developer.

### **What should be done?**

- Enlist one or more design professionals – architect, engineer or, preferably, both – who are knowledgeable about affordable residential design and construction in your market to assist your organization throughout the Concept phase of the development process.
- If at all possible, hire these professionals on a fee for service basis. (Local funding organizations, foundations, etc. may have modest amounts of money available for such purposes. Technical assistance may also be available from HUD or a local intermediary.)
- If funding is not available – internally or externally – try to obtain assistance on a “pro bono” basis; perhaps from a board member or from a friend(s) of your organization.
- If there is a **Community Design Center** in your region, contact it as early as possible in the development process. Many of these organizations are specifically set up to provide professional assistance in the early phases of affordable housing decision-making.
- At the conclusion of the Concept phase, transfer design decision responsibility to your project design team, which may or may not include the professional(s) hired for early stage assistance.

**How can doing this help move my project forward?**

- Professional design assistance will help ensure that design considerations are part of all the critical “go-no go” decisions made early in the development process.
- Having professional designers on the early decision-making “team” should also reassure potential funding sources, regulatory agencies and neighbors that your development takes design seriously and is doing everything it can to achieve design excellence.