

How to Hire a Lawyer

Building the professional team that is usually needed to successfully undertake a brownfield redevelopment isn't necessarily easy, but it is critically important. The best teams operate cooperatively, with the different voices (the lawyer, the consultant, the design team for the new project, community representatives, local government representatives, etc.) all sharing information and ideas about how to solve problems. A lawyer can contribute to the revitalization team by advising the client on environmental liability. Hiring a lawyer is a good idea when pursuing a revitalization project with complex and risky remediation or regulatory considerations.

Finding a lawyer who is comfortable working in this kind of environment can be very important. This is a matter of temperament, and there isn't much one can do but meet your potential counsel face to face and talk to them to gauge this elusive quality.

You don't have to (and perhaps you shouldn't) hire the first person you speak with. Use this chance to meet several so you can evaluate your options. It is wise to calibrate the team to fit the scale of the project – as it doesn't make sense to have a very large and expensive professional team for a small and modest-budgeted project. As you consider who the “right” lawyer might be, think about the wisdom of having a local lawyer available to deal with local real estate development problems.

Brownfields are a unique area of the law, and you should try and find someone who has done this kind of work before, so it is not a new adventure for them. If you are considering a large scale project, you might still find good value in hiring a brownfield specialist, even if they come from elsewhere and have to team with a local lawyer.

The best sources for information about lawyers are other people who have hired them. Are there any successful brownfield projects you know of? Even when the project is large enough or just complicated enough that a specialist is justified it is unwise not to have a local ear on the legal scene. Even if the local lawyer may not have as much brownfield experience, they could have good and valuable development experience in the community where the project is located.

Some helpful tips include:

- Consult web sites
- Call others who have managed similar brownfield projects and ask their opinion about lawyers they used
- Look for local builders and developers who have brownfield development experience, and ask them about lawyers on projects on which they have worked
- Spend the time checking recommendations and meeting lawyers face to face
- You almost invariably are better off with someone who is knowledgeable about particular local conditions and people

Just as you can find a specialist by talking to others (including others on your own team, such as your environmental consultant) with experience, you can find local lawyers by consulting with the local bar association and local builders.

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This link for the American Bar Association contains general information and identifies lawyers by state:

<http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/findlegalhelp/home.cfm>

Additionally, this American Bar Association link allows a search on a specific area of practice:

<http://www.abanet.org/lawyerlocator/searchaop.html>