

FROM THE GROUND UP



Staying Operational During Construction

by Peter Biber, AIA,
The Biber Partnership

When considering a renovation, there are several factors to take into account, including feasibility and finances. Many types of business or institutions choose to remain operational during construction. A continued revenue flow is important to the owner while the renovation is being done. Capital improvements will, at times, decrease cash flow, and the continued operation will provide some relief. Corporate offices, community or recreational centers, and educational facilities all present similar challenges and advantages. In the case of a community or recreation center that needs to expand, it is important for the building to remain functional and maintain a revenue stream. Planning and ordering materials in advance to take advantage of holidays is key for educational building renovations.

For all three types of facility renovation, innumerable safety and convenience factors must be incorporated into construction plans. The most vital is to create an open, or "swing-space" in order to keep a business operational. Next, access and egress from the building in accordance with all applicable building and safety codes throughout each construction phase must be obtained. In instances where fire suppression systems are present and required, sprinklers must be operational in all phases with the exception of the unoccupied places being built. Unobstructed access to and barrier-free restrooms must be maintained during renovation.

Often times, it is fiscally advantageous to stay in the current office space for the renovation. When companies decide on this option, they save money by not having to maintain two leases, nor do they incur moving expenses. However, in order to keep the company running smoothly, it requires that architects and business managers work closely. This is especially helpful in re-stacking an office. Moving furniture systems within corporate spaces can cause a considerable amount of disorganization and confusion. People no longer have a place to sit. Therefore, it is important to have temporary furniture or work stations within the swing space or adjacent to the swing space to allow an orderly renovation. Construction of temporary walls is a solution that provides a dust free and safe work environment for those working within the adjacent space. In order to maintain workplace continuity, technology should be stored at temporary locations, and all changes within computer systems or data centers should be completed on weekends or holidays. If possible, it is best to move an entire department into a swing space to allow

the contractor to move forward without impediments.

When renovating a community or recreational center, there must be special consideration paid to the membership. It is important to sell the phasing of the project to the constituency by communicating the benefits and the increased services upon completion. Constant communication eliminates confusion and provides an understanding of the scope of construction and the enhancements that the temporary inconvenience will provide to the facility and membership. It is important membership does not decline during this time period, and cash flow remains as high as possible.

In order to keep a community center operational, organization is essential. One must deal with the separation of functions and maintain access to each of the areas, and members need to be able to move freely. The issue of wet and dry corridors and air change volumes must also be considered when locker rooms and natatoriums are included. Coordinating egress with local building code officials is equally important. When a portion of the building is still being used, fire suppression and life safety systems must be in place, which requires careful phasing and coordination between architectural and MEP/FP trades.

Timing is key for renovation of educational spaces, especially dining halls, which involve sanitary and air flow issues. The best scenario is to have all kitchen equipment installed and hooked up for utilities during the summer shut down. This enables all trades to work at a high rate of speed without interference. Pre-order all materials and have long lead items so that the general contractor can use maximum effort while students are not on campus. Upholding a sanitary code is paramount, and can be accomplished by separating the area with temporary walls. Maintaining air movement with the proper CFM and exhaust ratios within the facility during construction is vital. The critical component is to ensure that exhaust systems are not being fed into fresh air systems and therefore spreading throughout the building.

Whether renovating a commercial space, community center or educational dining facility, the biggest factor is to create a temporary space so the building or facility can be operational to ensure a continued revenue stream. True, each building type has its own safety and logistical factors to consider, but they are united by the common interest to minimize user inconvenience.

Peter Biber, AIA, PP
President
The Biber Partnership
Tel: 908-273-8877
pbiber@tbpaia.com

