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"HOW TO BUILD BETTER AND FASTER FOR LESS MONEY"

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SOME TITLES INVITE SCEPTICISM - "BRAIN SURGERY FOR FUN AND PROFIT" AND "MAKING MILLIONS IN THE STOCK MARKET BY OUIJA BOARD" COME QUICKLY TO MIND. THE TITLE I HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED, "BUILDING BETTER FOR LESS", IS ALMOST IN THAT CATEGORY, BECAUSE SOMEHOW IT IMPLIES THAT THERE ARE A FEW CHOICE TRICKS ONE CAN APPLY TO INSURE AN UNUSUALLY EFFECTIVE BUILDING AT AN UNUSUALLY LOW COST.

THE TRUTH, UNFORTUNATELY, IS DIFFERENT AND MORE COMPLEX. SOPHISTICATED CONSTRUCTION PEOPLE REALIZE THAT ONE RARELY GETS SOMETHING FOR NOTHING; THEY INTUITIVELY ASK, "WHAT AM I GIVING UP FOR WHAT I AM GETTING? AND RIGHTLY SO, FOR OURS IS THE COST-CONSCIOUS WORLD OF THE "TRADE-OFF", THE QUID PRO QUO, THE "HOW MUCH FOR HOW MUCH". AND THE VERY GREATEST WASTE IS ALWAYS THE WRONG END RESULT FOR YOU REGARDLESS OF COST.

PERHAPS, RATHER THAN THINKING OF "BETTER FOR LESS", WE SHOULD AIM AT "RIGHT FOR ME AT LOWEST FEASIBLE COST".

IN THE GRADUATE BUSINESS SCHOOLS, THEY OFTEN SPEAK OF COST/BENEFIT RATIOS; AND ONE RECALLS FORMER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHARLES WILSON EXPRESSING HIS PROBLEM AS "GETTING THE BIGGEST BANG FOR THE BUCK".

NO ONE, AS FAR AS I KNOW, HAS EVER PUT THE PROBLEM IN SPECIFIC REAL ESTATE TERMS BUT IT MIGHT BE FUN TO TRY:

"WOULD VERSAILLES HAVE PASSED F.H.A. SCRUTINY AS A PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT";

"HOW WERE THE ACOUSTICS OF THE PARTHENON";

"WHAT CAPITALIZATION RATE DID THE MORTGAGEE APPLY TO THE TAJ MAHAL?"

THESE REALLY AREN'T VERY GOOD, BUT AT LEAST THEY GIVE AN IDEA OF THE TRADE-OFF DIFFICULTY. HIGHEST QUALITY OF ANYTHING AND LOWEST COST USUALLY DON'T GO TOGETHER; THE IDEAL FOR ONE SPECIFIC USE GENERALLY CONFLICTS WITH FLEXIBILITY FOR MULTIPLE USE, WHETHER YOU ARE SELECTING WINE FOR A MEAL, DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACES OR PURCHASING

WHAT IN ARMY-NAVY STORES THEY LAUGHINGLY CALL "THE TOOL OF A THOUSAND USES"; IT TAKES NO STARTLING INSIGHT TO REALIZE THAT LOWEST FIRST CAPITAL COST OFTEN MEANS HIGHER MAINTENANCE OR OPERATING COST LATER ON, AND VICE VERSA.

A COMPETENT ARCHITECT OR GENERAL CONTRACTOR CAN USUALLY SOLVE ONE PROBLEM WITHOUT REFERENCE TO THE OTHER; THE DIFFICULTY COMES IN EXERCISING THE JUDGMENT NECESSARY TO WEIGH THE TRADE-OFFS. IN TODAY'S INCREASINGLY COMPLEX STRUCTURES, THE PENALTIES FOR ERROR WILL NECESSARILY BECOME MORE AND MORE SEVERE.

SOMEONE, EITHER THE OWNER HIMSELF, OR A SURROGATE, MUST EXERCISE AN OWNER'S FUNCTION IN WEIGHING THE INDICATED TRADE-OFFS AND IN INTEGRATING THE ANALYSIS, PLANNING, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION FUNCTIONS OF THE PROJECT. THE OWNER'S FUNCTION CAN BE UNDERTAKEN OR DELEGATED IN VARIOUS WAYS, BUT IT EXISTS, AND IF IGNORED WILL BE ASSUMED BY DEFAULT BY SOME ENTITY (ARCHITECT, G.C., AMATEUR BUILDING COMMITTEE, ETC.) THAT MAY NOT BE FULLY QUALIFIED TO HANDLE IT.

THE TRADE-OFF JUDGMENTS INVOLVED DIVIDE INTO TWO CATEGORIES, THOSE OF COST/TASTE/, SPECIFIC-TENANT-

REQUIREMENTS ON THE ONE HAND, AND THOSE OF GENERAL BUILDING DETERMINATIONS ON THE OTHER.

TO TAKE THE LATTER FIRST, IT IS A TRUISM TO SAY THAT EVERY SECURITY MAN KNOWS THAT PHYSICAL SECURITY AND EASY CONTROL CAN BE DESIGNED INTO A BUILDING OR CAN BE DESIGNED OUT; EVERY MAINTENANCE MAN KNOWS THAT EFFICIENT MAINTENANCE CAN BE DESIGNED IN OR OUT; AND SO CAN NOISE CONTROL, ATMOSPHERIC COMFORT, EFFICIENT PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION, SENSIBLE WASTE DISPOSAL, PROPER ELEVATORING, AND SO FORTH. THE BEST CURRENT PRACTICE INDICATES THAT INPUT ON THESE MATTERS SHOULD COME FROM SECURITY SPECIALISTS, MAINTENANCE SPECIALISTS, ACOUSTICAL ENGINEERS, ETC., AND THAT SOMEONE EXERCISING THE OWNER'S FUNCTION MUST BE PREPARED TO MAKE (AND TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR) THOUGHTFUL, WELL-CONSIDERED JUDGMENTS, BALANCING THE RELATIVE DEMANDS OF UTILITY, COST, BEAUTY, SPEED, AND SIMILAR FACTORS.

SINCE EACH BUILDING REPRESENTS A UNIQUE SOLUTION TO A GIVEN SET OF SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO GENERALIZE IN A WAY THAT IS EITHER MEANINGFUL OR HELPFUL; HOPEFULLY, THOSE OF YOU WITH SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

WILL HAVE A CHANCE TO DISCUSS THEM IN THE COURSE OF THE NEXT FEW DAYS WITH SOME OF THE IMPRESSIVE SPECIALISTS THE CONFERENCE CHAIRMEN HAVE PROVIDED FOR YOU. A SPACE PLANNER LIKE BUD SHINDLER OF SAPHIR, LERNER, SHINDLER INC., OR AN ENGINEER LIKE MARVIN MAAS OF COSENTINI ASSOCIATES, AND THE OTHER FIRST-RATE MEN YOU WILL HAVE AVAILABLE, ARE AS COMPETENT AS ANY IN THE COUNTRY; BE SURE, HOWEVER, THAT WHEN ASKING THEM ABOUT SPECIFIC PROBLEMS YOU HAVE GIVEN THEM THE PROPER BACKGROUND INFORMATION NEEDED FOR AN INTELLIGENT REPLY.

THE FEW OBVIOUS EXAMPLES THAT FOLLOW WOULD SEEM SELF-EVIDENT, BUT THEY ARE OVERLOOKED WITH SURPRISING FREQUENCY.

THE ELEVATOR PROGRAM FOR A BUILDING WITH A SINGLE-TENANT OCCUPANT REQUIRING MUCH INTER-FLOOR TRAFFIC, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD BE ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT THAN THAT OF A BUILDING WITH MANY SMALL, UNRELATED TENANTS; THE SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IS NOT REALLY HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE WORKING ON EACH FLOOR BUT WHAT THEIR ELEVATOR USE WILL BE. ESCALATORS, TWO-OR-THREE-STOP HYDRAULIC ELEVATORS, PRIVATE INTERIOR STAIRWAYS AND THE CAREFULLY PLANNED