



The Framework to Project Success

Section 3.1 – Plans, Selections, and Specifications

What You Need to Know about Plans

Construction plans are the detailed, technical documents that serve as the blueprints for everyone working on your house. They guide the construction process from start to finish. You don't need to be an expert on reading plans, but you need to understand what they do. Plans function as a...

- **Legal Document:** Plans are used to secure permits, ensure compliance with building codes, and finalize the agreed-upon design. They become a critical part of your contract.
- **Guide for Contractors:** Plans provide detailed instructions for the builder and all subcontractors working on site. Comprehensive plans save time and money by reducing the number of return trips and rework needed.
- **Communication Tool:** Plans enable clear communication between architects, engineers, contractors, and home owners. It allows easy identification of areas and features of the project.
- **Milestone during Pre-Construction:** Plans often go through 3 phases of development. The completion of each phase will get you more details about your project, budget, and schedule.

3 Phases of Construction Plans

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) lays out three phases of plan development...

1. **Schematic Design (SD):** An architect consults with the owner to define project goals and requirements, often producing drawings or other media to visualize the design concepts. This produces preliminary drawings which include site plans and floor plans.
2. **Design Development (DD):** This phase adds mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and all the other structural and architectural elements. The DD phase should end with the owners' approval.
3. **Construction Document (CD):** Once the owner approves the DD documents, the architect adds all the necessary details to build. The goal is to produce a 100 percent complete CD set. This is what the contractor will use to compile a final estimate of project costs.

5 Key Elements of Construction Plans

In the next section of the Framework, we have included a comprehensive checklist of all the sections that should be in a 100% complete Construction Document set. The bigger components of the CD are...

- **Site Plans:** These show the location of the building on the property, including grade, elevation, landscaping, and connections to utilities.
- **Architectural Drawings:** These pages show the overall design and layout of the house, including floor plans and elevations (both interior and exterior).
- **Structural Plans:** These details provide instructions for the building's foundation and framing, ensuring everything meets all federal and local safety standards.
- **Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing (MEP) Plans:** These drawings show the specifics for all the HVAC, electrical wiring, lighting, plumbing, and AV systems.
- **Specifications and Selections:** These are often tables and spreadsheets that provide detailed descriptions of all the materials, finishes, and construction methods.

What's the Difference between Specs and Selections?

You often hear these terms used interchangeably, but the key difference is the involvement of the homeowner. You will not be required to make decisions about specs. You will need to make lots of choices about selections. This can get confusing because each element of your project involves a combination of specs and selections.

There is significant overlap between specs and selections. Your selections can have specs that are not compatible with some element of your system. We see this often when it comes to electric capacity. Sometimes you need to listen to the professionals' recommendations, like when it comes to the balance of electric versus gas appliances.

Specifications (Specs)

A spec is a detailed, written description of the standards required for construction. They are the details that state how elements of the project need to be built and what materials should be used. Specs ensure your project is built to meet specific quality, safety, and durability standards.

Spec Examples

- **Boiler:** The BTU or kW output, thermal efficiency, and fuel type and consumption.
- **Windows:** The performance ratings, glass type, and installation requirements.

Selections

A selection refers to the homeowner's choices for the finishes of the project. This includes brands, styles, colors, and product features that personalizes the design of the home, making it uniquely yours.

Selection Examples

- **Flooring:** Choice of hardwood, tile, carpet, or other materials, plus the color and/or finish
- **Windows:** The frame style, wood versus metal, finish of hardware, and tint or coatings

Architects will make many selections for you. We often see this with mechanical equipment like boilers, furnaces, and humidifiers. Unless you have a strong preference, let them. Limiting the number of choices you make can save a lot of time and stress about things you don't necessarily need to have an opinion about. Know what features are important to you, but save your energy for your priorities.

The List of Selection Spreadsheets and What to Choose

There's no way around it. There are so many choices needed when building a home. From the big things, like appliances, to the tiniest components, like light switch plate covers. If you wish, you could have a say in every element of your home. We recommend deciding what's important to you and your family. Then let the experts take care of the rest.

You might decide to have under cabinet lights. But does it matter which ones? They are almost always LED strip lights these days. But which ones? Do you want Govee or Phillips? Do you want them to be concealed with a light rail or have a channel routed into the bottom of the cabinets?

Some people care about these things. Some don't. We recommend you limit the amount of choices you make to only the things you care about. Maybe it's important to you that the under cabinet lights are motion sensor. Or controlled by your phone. Tell your architect, builder, and contractors what matters to you, and let them figure out the specifications and low priority selections.

Here is the list of selection spreadsheets in the Framework...

- **Exterior Finishes**
- **Rough-in Equipment**
- **Interior Finishes**
- **Kitchen**
- **Laundry/Mudroom**
- **Bathrooms**
- **Bedrooms**
- **Living Space**
- **Home Office**

