

Selecting A Post-Frame Building Contractor

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Post-frame buildings have been popular in the agricultural community for over fifty years. However, many agricultural producers do not have the resources to design and construct post-frame buildings and should rely on a contractor to do this work for them. The challenge for the producer is to select a contractor who will incorporate adequate materials with well-engineered designs to construct a structurally sound and functional building. Lack of an sufficient building design may result in a post-frame structure that looks structurally sound, but has an unacceptable risk for failure or that may not be suitable for the intended purpose.

Selecting a good post-frame contractor may seem overwhelming at first. Many variables including price, quality of workmanship, and scheduling must be considered before choosing the contractor. This publication provides guidelines to help make the contractor selection process easier.

Reputation And References

Employ a contractor with an established business in the area. Local firms are compelled to perform satisfactory work for their businesses to survive. The contractor should not hesitate to provide references from past customers in your locality. Ask these references specific questions such as:

- Were you pleased with the quality of the contractor's work?
- Did the contractor begin work on time?
- Was the job completed on schedule?
- Was the job site kept neat?
- Was the job completed within budget?

- Did the contractor fulfill all terms of your agreement?
- Did the contractor stay in touch with you throughout the project?
- Would you use this contractor again without hesitation?

Look at finished projects similar to yours to better assess the contractor's ability to deliver a worthy project on time and within budget. Be sure to review the quality of work performed by the contractor. Do not use a contractor whose quality of work is unsatisfactory.

Membership In A Professional Association

Choose a contractor who is a member of the National Frame Builders Association (NFBA). This organization promotes education and research for post-frame construction used for farm, residential, and commercial use. Members of NFBA are pledged to observe the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and responsibility in the conduct of business. The NFBA logo is the mark of a professional. Contact the NFBA to determine current membership status of a post-frame building contractor. See the "For Additional Information" section for NFBA contact information.

Engineering Design

Engineering design is required to construct a structurally sound post-frame building. Ask the contractor for building plans that have been prepared by a registered professional engineer. Professional engineers must qualify to obtain licensure in any state where they practice or provide services. Contact the Virginia Board for

Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers, and Landscape Architects (APELSCIDLA Board) to determine if the design engineer for your project is licensed in Virginia. See the “For Additional Information” section for APELSCIDLA Board contact information.

Some contractors will erect a “pre-engineered” or “package” building rather than constructing a building designed for a specific project. If the contractor plans to use a pre-engineered building, ask for the name of the professional engineer who designed the package structure and check the engineer’s licensure.

Contractor Licensing

In Virginia, the Department of Professional and Occupation Regulation (DPOR) regulates contractors by licensing or certifying these businesses through the Board for Contractors. There are three classes of licenses: A, B, and C. License class is based on the total value of a project (Table 1).

Table 1. Contractor license class and corresponding total value of project.

Class	Total Value of Project
A	\$70,000 and over
B	over \$7,500, but less than \$70,000
C	over \$1,000, but no more than \$7,500

A contractor with a Class A or B license has met standards established by the Board for Contractors to ensure that the licensee possesses the character, knowledge, and skills necessary to practice building construction without harm to the public. Class C licensure requires a contractor to submit information to the Board for Contractors concerning the location, nature, and operation of the business. Evidence of experience and information on the Class C license applicant’s credit history is also required.

Ask to see the contractor’s license or the pocket card issued with the license number. Check to be sure that it has not expired and that the contractor is working within the limits of his licensures. Contact the Board for Contractors to confirm that the contractor has not violated the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code or engaged in practices that constitute abandonment, gross negligence, continued incompetence, and/or revocation or suspension of the contractor’s license.

Disciplinary action by the Board for Contractors is limited to fines and/or revocation or suspension of the contractor’s license after a hearing or with the consent of the license holder and his agreement to waive his right to a hearing. The board does not have the authority to order a license holder to make restitution for losses incurred due to the contractor’s poor performance; efforts to recover such funds must be made through the civil courts.

Insurance

Ask for a copy of the contractor’s certificate of insurance and the name of the contractor’s insurance agency. Contact the insurance company to verify worker’s compensation, property damage, and personal liability coverage. Contractors should carry the minimum amount of insurance required by Virginia law. This provides a safeguard in the event that injuries or damage should occur during the construction phase.

For construction projects that will take less than six months to complete, it is more economical for the owner to insure materials that are in the ground or building. However, contractors should maintain responsibility for insuring materials that have not been used in construction.

Building Permits

Be sure the contractor obtains the proper building permits from the local building official.

Bidding

Bidding on portions of a complete construction job may be desirable, especially if funds are limited. To reduce construction costs, the owner may want the option of providing labor for site preparation or equipment installation. Bid alternatives provide a basis for selecting those jobs that can save the most money. However, be aware that the bidding process cannot gauge the competence, experience, and judgment of a contractor.

If you solicit bids from several different contractors, be sure they are bidding on the same scope and quality of work. For example, contractors should use the same roof design snow loads and design wind speeds in post-frame agricultural structures that are used for commercial buildings. Some contractors will build using reduced agricultural building loads. Such buildings will be less expensive to build, but have an unac-

ceptable risk for failure. Discuss variations in bids and beware of any bid that is substantially lower than the others.

Contracts

Be sure to have a detailed, written contract. Carefully review the contract before signing it to be sure that the terms of the agreement are clear and acceptable. Review by an attorney is recommended. Be sure the contract contains the following items:

- Total price of the work
- Payment schedule
- Starting and completion dates
- Detailed list of specifications and materials
- Provision for changes or “extras”
- Other details particular to the job

Customarily, the initial down payment is no more than 30 percent of the total value of the contract. Furthermore, in accordance with the Virginia Home Solicitation Sales Act (Code of Virginia, Section 59.1-21.1 et seq.), you have a three-day right to cancel a contract, which you have negotiated in your home. If you are dissatisfied with the work performed by the sub-contractors, you may hold the general contractor responsible.¹ For more specific information on post-frame building contracts, see “Signing a Post-Frame Building Contract” (VCE Publication 442-762).

Summary

Most post-frame contractors are professionals who use good quality materials and engineered designs. However, some individuals may not be qualified to build a major post-frame structure that will provide many years of servicability. Checking references, professional membership, and licensure will make choosing the right contractor manageable.

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For Additional Information

On Building Contracts

VCE Publication 442-762 “Signing a Post-Frame Building Contract”

On Contractor Licensing

Virginia Board for Contractors
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
3600 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230-4917
Phone: (804) 367-8511
Website: www.state.va.us/dpor

On Filing Complaints

Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
Enforcement Division
3600 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230-4917
Phone: (804) 367-8504
Website: www.state.va.us/dpor

On NFBA Membership

National Frame Builders Association
4840 W. 15th St.
Suite 1000
Lawrence, KS. 66049-3876
Phone: (800) 557-6957
FAX: (785) 843-7555
Website: www.postframe.org

On Professional Engineer Licensing

Virginia Board for Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers, and Landscape Architects (APELSCIDLA Board)
Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation
3600 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230-4917
Phone: (804) 367-8506 or (804) 367-8512
Website: www.state.va.us/dpor

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¹ For more precise information about the application of this law, see the Code of Virginia or seek advice from legal counsel.