

**MEADE**  
CONSTRUCTION GROUP, INC.

**ANDY MEADE**  
Meade Construction  
Group Inc.



VICKI THOMPSON

## Know your market, avoid dragging your feet

The 6-year-old, \$55 million-a-year Meade Construction Group Inc. of San Jose is a general contracting firm working on projects from Richmond to Salinas.

President Andy Meade is well-acquainted with the process of obtaining use permits, with business in about 20 municipalities. Things are easier today than in the past, he said. Despite the construction slowdown, his company has a busy slate of projects, including the renovation of a 30,000-square-foot space at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation research building, construction of a new ambulatory surgical building at O'Connor Hospital in San Jose, a seismic upgrade of facilities at SRI International in Menlo Park, and construction of an animal research facility at the Stanford Hospital & Clinics in Palo Alto.

"Over the past five years, there has been a definite trend, a positive trend in city building and planning departments to help you get your permit," Meade said. "The folks we deal with want you to get your permit and then get out and build something. They view it as good for their cities."

That wasn't always the case, he said.

"The top people, like the mayor or head of the building department, would pay lip service to speeding up the process, but often the attitude didn't extend to people down the line," he said.

Cities that had the worst reputations in the past for bureaucracy and foot-dragging he said were Palo Alto, Mountain View and San Jose. But their performance has improved markedly, in Meade's opinion.

"Sometimes on smaller, simpler projects, you can come away with a permit after one visit," he said.

A call ahead can often generate a single meeting with a city's planning staff, public works chief and fire marshal, he noted. He said that increasingly occurs in places such as San Jose and Redwood City. He bestowed particular praise on the city that serves as the county seat of San Mateo County.

"Redwood City gets a gold star," Meade said. "There was one meeting where I walked out with a permit after one hour."

Contrast that with a few years ago.

"Before all of the changes occurred, you often would start off by dropping off your paperwork at a counter," he said. "It could be a fairly anonymous experience. Depending on the city, it could take from one to six weeks before you might hear anything about your project."

Meade isn't a fan of anonymity. For the uninitiated permit seeker, he recommends developing cordial professional relationships with city staff.

"You need to find a point person, a project manager who takes a real interest in what you're trying to accomplish," Meade said. "It's easier to do that today because most cities want to make projects happen. If it's a complicated project, work in advance with the key players in the process. Show them the project, discuss your expectations for it and get their feedback. They know what sells in their cities. You want the city staff to take some ownership for your success with the process."

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