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Ethical Bidding in Concrete Repair

Protecting Hawai'i's buildings and budgets

BY JOE MILLER

In Hawai'i, concrete repair is one of the most challenging scopes to price accurately. On the surface, two proposals might look identical, yet one can end up costing double or triple once the project begins. For boards and property managers, understanding what drives these differences is key to protecting both their budgets and their buildings.

Concrete repair in Hawai'i is not the same as concrete repair anywhere else. The salty air, humidity, trade winds and constant exposure to moisture all accelerate corrosion and structural deterioration. Even the best-maintained buildings in coastal environments are at higher risk for spalling and cracking. What starts as a few visible cracks can quickly turn into extensive damage once the concrete is opened and the full extent of corrosion is revealed.

Ethical Proposals

When submitting proposals for concrete repair, contractors can never be entirely definitive about the total extent of work required. Much of the damage lies beneath the surface and is only discovered once areas are opened and inspected.

What separates an ethical and experienced contractor from the rest is the ability to provide a realistic allowance based on years of hands-on experience with Hawai'i's unique building conditions. Ethical pricing means being transparent about the likely repair range rather than minimizing costs to secure a contract.

Unfortunately, it is common to see



Seal Masters of Hawai'i gives a presentation to address questions and concerns.

proposals that underestimate the repair allowance to appear more competitive. For example, one contractor might give a concrete repair allowance of \$250,000 while another bids \$500,000 for what appears to be the same scope.

Once work begins, the first contractor will submit numerous change orders as hidden damage is discovered, ultimately driving the total project cost well beyond the original amount.

In many cases, these contractors are fully aware that additional spalled areas will be uncovered once work starts, yet they intentionally underbid to secure the contract, knowing they can recover the difference later through change orders once the board has committed. The second contractor, who bid accurately and ethically, is often the one who saves the building money and frustration in the long run.

Vetting Vendors

Owners, construction managers, property managers and board members all play a role in establishing a quality standard before selecting a contractor. Doing due diligence at the beginning

of the process ensures expectations are clear and realistic.

A best-practice strategy is to hold contractor interviews and formal presentations during the proposal phase so board members can meet with each contractor, hear how they plan to approach the work, review the proposed scope and understand the projected schedule. These

meetings help stakeholders align on expectations and establish the level of quality that should be maintained throughout the project.

It is also important to confirm whether the contractor is bondable and, if so, the amount for which they are bondable. Bondability reflects the contractor's financial stability and accountability.

Another best practice is to check whether a contractor is currently involved in litigation or has a history of disputes related to similar scopes of work. This information is often available through public court records, including Hawai'i's eCourt Kokua website, which allows users to search court cases by company name to verify any active or past legal matters. This research can provide valuable insight into a company's reputation and reliability.

Another key factor in the success of any concrete repair project is how efficiently and safely the contractor can mobilize.

Many of Hawai'i's condominium and commercial buildings are located in densely populated areas where space, noise and access must be carefully

managed. Mobilization affects everything from traffic control and pedestrian safety to staging areas and swing stage access. A contractor who has experience working in active, occupied buildings understands how to balance safety, efficiency and resident comfort.

Communication and Transparency

Strong communication is just as critical. Effective coordination between the contractor, engineer, property manager, construction manager, building manager and board of directors ensures everyone is aligned on expectations, progress and safety. Concrete repair projects can span several months and maintaining open lines of communication helps prevent misunderstandings and keeps residents informed.

When evaluating proposals, boards should prioritize contractors who emphasize communication, transparency and collaboration during the bidding process. It is also best practice to conduct contractor interviews, check references and verify the company's litigation history, record of excessive change orders and bonding capacity.

These are all important indicators of credibility and financial stability.

In the end, the lowest bid is rarely the best value. The goal should be to choose a contractor who is honest about what can be expected, has a strong track record in occupied building projects and communicates clearly from start to finish. Ethical pricing builds trust, minimizes surprises and ensures that the repairs are done right the first time.

Concrete repair is as much about integrity as it is about technical skill. When boards and managers choose contractors who value transparency and professionalism, they protect not just their buildings, but their residents, budgets and peace of mind. ♦

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Top: What looks like a small crack or chip in the concrete may not seem serious to the untrained eye, but it can indicate deeper problems beneath the surface.

Bottom: Once testing and removal of the loose concrete begins, it often reveals that the damage underneath is much more extensive than it first appeared.

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