18 TOUGH QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CHOOSING A LAND DEVELOPMENT ENGINEERING FIRM

Introduction

Selecting the right land development engineering firm is more than a technical decision, it's a strategic move that shapes the entire trajectory of your project. The right partner will anticipate challenges, streamline approvals, and engineer solutions that maximize both efficiency and profitability. The wrong choice risks bureaucratic bottlenecks, costly redesigns, and missed opportunities. Choosing the right engineering firm requires more than reputation alone. Ask the hard questions - these 18 key insights will help you make an informed decision.

1

What strategies do you use to accelerate timelines?

Speed to market matters. Ask about specific processes or technologies they use to accelerate design submissions and streamline approvals to keep projects moving forward without unnecessary delays.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL has focused on speed and precision for more than 30 years. Proprietary processes such as the 10 Minute Subdivision, 10 Day Subdivision and Easy Check Drawings are the gold standard for speed and precision to accelerate your subdivision and reduce the time to market.

DSEL

2

Why can’t my 100-acre subdivision be designed quickly if I really need to submit and I’m willing to pay for speed?

Speed is highly desirable…but it can be dangerous if your engineer is ill-equipped to deliver. A rushed design could trigger costly errors, redesigns, approval delays, and frustrate the municipality and the consulting team. Only a skilled team with a proven track record and purpose built tools should be considered for a time sensitive design.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL accelerates timelines without cutting corners. Our proprietary 10 Day Subdivision is the pinnacle of 30 years of innovation that was purpose built to deliver precise, optimized designs in a compact timeline.

DSEL

3

How do you streamline municipal approvals and keep projects on schedule?

Navigating approvals is one of the biggest hurdles in land development. An engineering partner should have a deep understanding of municipal standards and practices, a proactive approach to achieving approvals, and a track record of moving projects forward quickly without unnecessary delays.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL shifts approvals from red tape to green light, proactively working with municipalities to accelerate approvals based on knowledge, experience, quality control and the revolutionary introduction of Easy Check Drawings.

DSEL

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How, specifically, do you help municipal review agencies move approvals forward?

Many firms take a passive role, waiting for feedback instead of actively problem-solving with municipalities. Ask how the firm engages regulators to keep projects on track.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL doesn't just submit designs, we collaborate with review agencies, resolving issues proactively to keep approvals moving. DSEL's Easy Check Drawings have redefined the approvals process and demonstrably reduced review times by visually demonstrating conformance with municipal standards.

5

Does the engineer have experience and strong relationships in your municipality?

Local experience is helpful… but it's really not that important! Municipal staff universally prefer engineers who simplify and accelerate the completion of their work. That means providing complete engineering submissions that comply with municipal standards together with professional, courteous service.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL has a 30 year track record of constantly moving into new municipalities, and quickly becoming a preferred engineering consultant using speed, quality and innovation to accelerate municipal approval times. With the introduction of Easy Check Drawings, the effort required by the plan review staff is greatly reduced while providing enhanced confidence in the design.

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What tools or methodologies do you use to improve design efficiency?

All firms rely on industry standard software, to design cost effective grading, servicing, and swm. Yet, industry standard software does not include optimization algorithms. Ask how they optimize for efficiency.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL has 30 years of proprietary optimization approaches for all subdivision design elements, including earthworks, roads, sewers, lot grading and swm, bringing precision and efficiency to every element.

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How do you maximize land development returns through engineering?

An engineering firm looks beyond the minimum compliance requirements by analysing effective earthworks strategies, lot grading plans that builders want to build and homeowners want to own, cost effective infrastructure, and designs that generally increase the project's financial returns.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's proprietary approach includes embedded optimization algorithms to optimize earthworks and infrastructure,as well as grade lots to precise builder specifications, to the extent possible.

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Can you design the grading plan to match builder specifications and reduce building costs?

Grading is the most visible element of a subdivision design which impacts builder costs and the homeowner experience. The right engineering partner balances municipal requirements with builder-friendly designs to achieve enhanced homeowner satisfaction while minimizing building costs and site preparation costs.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's grading design starts with a discussion with the builder to understand their grading preferences and grading conditions to avoid. This information is loaded into our proprietary software to optimize the grading outcome by applying the builder's preferences to the design.

DSEL

How do you manage retaining walls and grading to reduce unnecessary costs?

Poorly planned retaining walls drive up costs. A proactive engineering firm should optimize grading strategies to minimize walls, reduce fill, and create flatter, more livable backyards.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's proprietary grading approach is purpose built to optimize outcomes and reduce costs. Walls are minimized and lot grading is designed generally to builder expectations.

DSEL

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How do you communicate how lot grading impacts home architecture and buyer appeal?

Grading affects everything from drainage to curb appeal, yet many firms fail to illustrate these effects clearly. Ask how they visualize grading impacts to improve decision-making.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL has developed proprietary visualization techniques to clearly illustrate unit type, riser conditions, embankment locations and sizes, decks, walkout units and vertical fall through a lot. This information is available at all stages of the development process to fully understand the grading impacts of your site strategy

Why is preliminary engineering so expensive and time consuming?

Preliminary engineering is the foundation of the subdivision design. Similar to detailed design, preliminary design should consider all design elements, servicing, grading, swm, financial, timing, etc. It's an investment in the project outcome, so corners should not be cut. The time and cost of preliminary engineering can be reduced and the precision increased if your engineer uses purpose built tools to accelerate the analysis.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's 10 Minute Subdivision draws from 30 years of innovation and automation to quickly and comprehensively analyze preliminary engineering strategies.

DSEL

Can you model multiple land development scenarios to maximize financial return?

Land development is about trade-offs. A forward-thinking firm should be willing and equipped to test multiple strategies to find the most profitable option before locking in a preferred alternative. Each alternative needs to be assessed comprehensively, which may exceed the engineer's staff and budget. A skilled team with a proven track record and purpose built tools can look at unlimited development alternatives.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's proprietary 10 Minute Subdivision can analyse unlimited alternatives comprehensively, and communicate the outcome in an intuitive, builder-friendly presentation that can be comprehended in about 10 minutes.

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Can we make design changes during detailed design without significant delays or cost overruns?

Builders often change their subdivision plans to reflect changing market conditions or municipal regulations. These changes can trigger significant time and cost to incorporate the changes. Look for an engineer that has the flexibility to accommodate changes without derailing timelines or budgets.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's proprietary processes can accommodate plan changes while committing to a fixed timeline and budget that keeps your project on track.

How do you balance engineering best practices with creative problem-solving?

Every development presents unique challenges. The best firms thrive on solving tough problems with innovative, cost-effective solutions, rather than defaulting to conventional approaches.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL engineers use our proprietary approaches to solve problems and refine strategies to find solutions where others see obstacles.

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How can your firm help ease the housing crisis and contribute to more affordable housing?

Housing supply and affordability is now a crisis in Canada. Ask how the firm incorporates cost-saving strategies without compromising quality, whether through infrastructure efficiency, cost effective lot grading strategies, reduced time to market or collaboration with municipalities to accelerate approvals.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's proprietary 10 Minute Subdivision, 10 Day Subdivision and Easy Check Drawings significantly reduce the time to market and reduce site development costs through embedded optimization, resulting in significant time and financial savings.

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What post-approval support do you offer?

Engineering work doesn’t stop at drawing approval. How does the firm support developers during construction and beyond?

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's focus on time and costs extends through the entire development lifecycle, including construction, house siting review, top works and assumption.

How do you structure your fees, and what's included?

Clear pricing prevents unexpected costs down the line. Make sure you understand how they charge - hourly, percentage of cost, or fixed fees, and what's included. Fees should be clearly stated up to final assumption.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's pricing is as clear as our process; no guesswork, no hidden fees, just smart investments.

Can you provide references from past clients?

A reputable firm should have a track record of successful projects and satisfied clients willing to vouch for their expertise, communication, and results.

DSEL APPROACH

DSEL's clients return project after project, building long-term partnerships founded on trust and results.

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Smart subdivisions.
Smarter business.

Book a Consult
DSEL.CA
GTA: 905-475-3080
Ottawa: 613-836-0856
Alberta: 587-930-8151