

# The Importance of Project Turnover in the Residential Market

By: Mary Leahy / Erland Project Manager



Turnover, the transitioning of a property from the construction or renovation phase to occupancy, is far from a simple process.

The formal turnover of a building is one of the most important milestones in the lifecycle of a project. It is the time when the owner commences use of a facility for their benefit and assumes control of the building systems and operations. As a construction manager, it is Erland's job to establish the turnover process at the start of construction; to ensure a project's schedule, quality goals, and speed-to-market requirements are successfully met.

In order to meet these requirements, it's essential for a construction manager to set owner expectations with the owner and design team upfront and consistently communicate any changes regarding turnover throughout the process. There is no more important role for its project managers than being realistic and transparent. Erland Construction prides itself on building trusted relationships with owners and design professionals by setting achievable expectations.

Erland recently developed two properties for Roseland Residential – a Mack-Cali Company in Malden, Mass., building 663 apartments known as “The Chase” and “The Chase II.” The projects encapsulated 721,677 square feet and included studio, 1-, and 2-bedroom living units, a fitness center, parking garages, a swimming pool, cabanas, and a screen room. Defining expectations and communicating throughout created a lasting impression of the turnover process that enhanced the integrity and reputation of the entire project team with Roseland—ultimately resulting in the award of their next phase of housing at Overlook Ridge.

After setting expectations, determining a clear turnover date – as Erland did with Roseland – is the next step in the process. The completion date draws a line in the sand as to when the owner becomes solely responsible for the operation of their facility and determines when occupancy can begin. This is also the date that many of the warranties will commence and insurance coverage and legal responsibility for the structure is transferred to the owner. The timeline can be dramatically different for each project, but typically the process for residential projects begins at least six months prior to occupancy.



Photo by: Dave Desroches

Working with the owner, facilities manager and leasing office, the project manager needs to learn the first occupancy date so that the construction turnover timeline can be established.

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It is also essential to know if both the owner and leasing office are planning for a turnover of the entire project at one time, or if phased occupancy is desired. One client may have 500 units but only want the first 100 units ready for the first phased occupancy date. Another client may want the entire building prepared for occupancy and then lease the building in phases. The project manager needs to know the details regarding speed-to-market from the leasing office upfront to work out the best construction turnover timeline.

Among the most important elements in making certain the turnover goes smoothly is assembling the right project team and setting its expectations. Subcontractors and members of the construction manager's team need to have benchmarks and must be accountable for reaching them. The owner, architect, construction management team and subcontractors must all be aware of the standards that were discussed and accepted before work commences on a project.



Such benchmarks are established in the construction of a model unit. All of the stakeholders – owner, architect, interior designer, construction manager – discuss and review project details and watch them come to life in this prototype. If there are issues that need to be addressed, the model unit is the setting in which the final details are all ironed out. That's why the model unit is of utmost importance. It sets the template for further development, and it is critical that any differences of opinion be worked out before moving on to the next stage.

As more units are built, a construction manager who sets firm and realistic expectations at the outset holds the key to how well the project proceeds. Teamwork is essential, but sending clear communication and holding people accountable is also an important part of the process. It's also vital for the construction manager to continually monitor and evaluate the quality of the work being performed.

Workmanship benchmarks are especially important when it comes time to turn the building over to the owner for leasing and occupancy. The owner, facilities manager,

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certificate of occupancy, and if they're not on board, you're not turning the building over.

When the building is turned over, the priority is almost always to have the amenities and leasing area completed first, and the units ready about one month prior to occupancy. Safety is especially important in phased-in occupancy, and all site work should be completed and inspections done before leasing can begin.

Providing good customer service during building turnover is essential. The last three months of a project provides the lasting impression of the project team to the building owner, and quality is considered at every turn. The project needs to meet the expectations that were established at the outset. Earning a positive relationship with the building owner is not only important for the current project, but could also lead to more work down the road.



The preceding six-month window is the time to work on the relationships with not only the owner and the facilities manager, but also the town officials such as the building inspector, electrical inspector, plumbing inspector, fire department, and health department. If those relationships do not evolve, the project will not go smoothly. Town officials hold the key to the

In the end, if expectations, including benchmarks, are established early and communication is consistent, the process should work smoothly. For The Chase and The Chase II, Erland established expectations and built the relationships that led to a stress-free transition. Having a dedicated team that knew the end-goal, achievable benchmarks and dependable relationships led to a successful project that was completed ahead of schedule -- and resulted in another satisfied client.

architect, subcontractors and even your own team will evaluate the quality of the work. Having a plan and being proactive in meeting standards that may have been missed helps keep away negative impressions.

During the construction of The Chase and The Chase II, project teams knew the end goal and worked diligently to achieve it. At the same time, Erland built relationships with the facilities manager to affirm expectations and keep them abreast of developments. Every facilities manager handles their role differently. It's essential to know their concerns and expectations in order to understand how to best work with them.

The issues at the final turnover phase can be big or small. It could be a smudge on the wall, a loose shower rod, or a scratch on the floor. A good project team will identify the items that need to be corrected and have subcontractors quickly fix any deficiencies. The construction manager will then walk through the project with the facilities manager and the owner to make any final adjustments.

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