

Linden & Vale Architecture — Business Plan

Architecture firm in Charlotte, NC · Startup plan

Executive summary

Linden & Vale Architecture is a new architecture firm in Charlotte, NC offering feasibility studies and zoning checks before you commit; additions and renovations: schematic design to permit set; accessory dwelling units and garage conversions; small commercial fit-outs: restaurants, offices, clinics; and construction administration: site visits and the punch list. The model is one licensed architect from a home office: residential additions, ADUs and small commercial fit-outs, billed hourly at first and by phase once the hours are known, with a signed agreement before any drawing and a drafter hired by the project.

Startup budget: \$14,459 across 9 items, funded from savings. Target: \$12,000 in monthly sales.

Twelve months from now, success looks like this: About \$12,000 a month in fees by the end of the first year — two addition projects in design at about \$4,500 a month each in phased fees and about twenty hours a month of feasibility studies and consultations at \$150 — with three general contractors sending the next ones

Products and services

Linden & Vale Architecture's core service is feasibility studies and zoning checks before you commit. Every project starts with a signed owner-architect agreement and a retainer, runs in one BIM model from schematic design to the permit set, is invoiced at each phase milestone, and is visited and reported on through construction.

- Feasibility studies and zoning checks before you commit
 - Additions and renovations: schematic design to permit set
 - Accessory dwelling units and garage conversions
 - Small commercial fit-outs: restaurants, offices, clinics
 - Construction administration: site visits and the punch list
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Market analysis

The customers are homeowners who need stamped drawings the permit office will accept; small landlords and business owners fitting out a leased space on a deadline; general contractors who need an architect of record; and the realtors and developers who want a feasibility sketch before they commit.

- Homeowners planning an addition or an ADU who need stamped drawings the permit office will accept
 - Small landlords and business owners fitting out a leased space on a deadline
 - General contractors who need an architect of record for a design-build job
 - Realtors and developers who want a feasibility sketch before an offer
 - Past clients coming back for the next phase of the house
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Marketing strategy

Most projects will come by word of mouth — the contractors, engineers and realtors who send the architect who returned their call, and the past clients whose neighbors watched the addition go up — with Google confirming the firm is licensed and real when someone looks it up; the Google Business Profile, the photographed portfolio and a website with the services, the process and a start-a-project form turn a referral into a signed agreement.

- General contractors, structural engineers and realtors who refer the architect who returned their call
 - Google Business Profile and Google — “architect near me”, “ADU architect” plus your city
 - Houzz and the portfolio: the finished project photographed, before and after
 - Past clients and their neighbors, who watched the addition go up
 - The permit office and the building department, where contractors ask who drew the clean set
 - A website with the portfolio, the services and process, and a start-a-project form
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Operations plan

The architect designs, documents, bills and visits site in year one: hours tracked by phase, a retainer at signing and invoices at milestones, one coordinated model per project, field reports the same day, education hours banked through the year, and a drafter brought in by the project before an employee is hired.

- A signed owner-architect agreement before any drawing — scope, fee basis, additional services, who owns the drawings
- Hourly billing tracked by phase for the first six months, then fixed fees per phase once the hours are known
- A retainer at signing; invoices at each phase milestone; nothing stamped until the phase is paid
- One BIM model per project from schematic through permit; the consultants' drawings coordinated in it
- Site visits logged with photos; field reports the same day
- Continuing education hours banked through the year, not in December

Startup costs

What it will take to open the doors, funded from savings.

Startup costs

ITEM	AMOUNT
Entity filing and the firm's registration with the state board	\$903
Professional liability (errors and omissions) insurance, first year	\$2,350
General liability, or a business owner's policy with the equipment	\$632
One BIM seat and PDF markup (first year)	\$2,693
A workstation that runs the BIM software, two monitors and a backup drive	\$3,000
The owner-architect agreement: AIA B105 licenses, or a lawyer's template	\$825
Portfolio photography of two built projects, business cards, a Houzz profile	\$1,250
Website: portfolio, services, start-a-project form, plus Google Business Profile	\$0
Working capital: two months of running costs	\$2,806
Total	\$14,459

Typical range to start an architecture firm in the US: \$8,009–\$22,906. Your list is what you decided to spend — replace estimates with real quotes as you get them. Website: portfolio, services, start-a-project form, plus Google Business Profile: Your Zarla plan includes the website — the project portfolio, the services and the process, the start-a-project form, the contact page — and walks you through your Google Business Profile. Having one built typically costs \$1,000 to \$2,000 from a freelancer.

Financial plan

The numbers below come from your own startup list and typical monthly costs for a one-architect firm in the US. Insurance and the software seat are the real startup; the monthly lines are the seat, the insurance, printing, education and the drive to site; and the hourly rate times the billable hours — or the fee percentage times what the client builds — decides what is left.

Typical monthly operating costs for an architecture firm: \$680–\$2,495 a month, before the owner's own pay.

At \$12,000 in monthly sales, Linden & Vale Architecture would clear \$9,505–\$11,320 a month before owner pay and tax, and recover the \$14,459 startup budget in roughly 2 months.

Typical monthly operating costs

COST	TYPICAL RANGE
The BIM seat and PDF markup, by the month	\$149–\$300
Professional and general liability, by the month	\$184–\$313
Plotting and printing permit sets at the print shop	\$50–\$200
Continuing education	\$25–\$75
AIA dues, by the month	\$0–\$54
Houzz, photography and the contractor lunches	\$50–\$300
Bookkeeping and the tax preparer	\$50–\$200
Site visits and the permit office: 200 to 400 miles a month	\$152–\$304
A home office, or a coworking desk	\$0–\$400
Card and bank-transfer fees (on about \$12,000 of fees across four invoices)	\$20–\$349

US ranges for a small operation; replace with your own figures as you learn them.

Risks and honest downsides

Every architecture firm plan should say out loud what can go wrong. For Linden & Vale Architecture, the real risks are:

- Fees arrive at milestones: a permit set is six weeks of unpaid work if the client stalls at schematic
- A claim can arrive years after completion, and a lapsed claims-made policy covers nothing
- The hourly rate is the ceiling: one architect can draw one project at a time, so growth means a drafter
- Contractors send the first projects — lose two of them and the pipeline is the website alone
- Scope creep without additional-services fees is the quiet way a profitable project becomes a loss
- A permit denial or a code change mid-project is rework the fixed fee didn't price

Licenses, permits and insurance

What Linden & Vale Architecture needs before it can legally trade in the US. Rules vary by state and city — confirm each item with your local licensing office and an accountant.

- Your license, your seal and the title — In the US only a licensed architect may call the business an architecture firm or stamp drawings, and the license is the state's: the ARE is \$263 a division, six divisions, and a license in a second state usually runs through the NCARB Certificate (\$1,415 to apply, \$300 a year). Every state requires continuing education to keep it — Texas 12 hours a calendar year in health, safety and welfare, including one in sustainable design and one in barrier-free design (22 Tex. Admin. Code §1.69); Florida 24 hours every two years, two of them on the Florida Building Code (Rule 61G1-24.001); New York 36 hours every three-year registration. Check your own board's hours and renewal fee.
- The firm's registration and the entity — In the US most states register the firm as well as the architect: Texas registers every architecture business, even a sole proprietor, for \$45 a year; Florida issues a corporation or partnership a certificate of authorization (\$100, renewed for \$125 every two years); New York requires a professional entity — a PLLC, PC or design professional corporation, every member licensed, with a \$10-a-member certificate of authority from the Education Department before the \$200 Department of State filing and the newspaper publication; California has no firm license but regulates how an architectural corporation is named and owned. Confirm the entity with your board before you print letterhead.
- The owner-architect agreement and who owns the drawings — In the US the agreement — AIA Document B105 (\$149.99 a use) or a lawyer's — sets the scope, the fee basis (hourly — \$150 to \$250 for a principal, \$125 to \$150 at project-manager level — fixed per phase, or 8% to 15% of construction), the additional services, the schedule and the drawings' ownership; the drawings are the architect's copyright as pictorial and graphic works (17 U.S.C. §102(a)(5)) and the building design itself as an architectural work since the Architectural Works Copyright Protection Act of 1990 (§102(a)(8)), and the client gets a license to build the project once unless the contract says otherwise. Never work from an email thread, and have an attorney read your template once.
- Professional liability — In the US no state makes a solo architect carry professional liability insurance, but every lender and most clients ask for the certificate, a claim can arrive years after the ribbon is cut, and the policies are claims-made — so a firm that closes needs tail cover. Insureon's architect median is \$150 a month for \$1 million of cover; a limitation-of-liability clause in the agreement is the other half of the protection. Review the limits with a broker who writes design professionals.
- The stamped set, the code and the permit — In the US the architect of record signs and seals the drawings they prepared or directly supervised, and stamping someone else's drawings — plan stamping — is grounds for discipline in every state; the set has to meet the state's adopted building, energy and accessibility codes (the ADA for commercial work) and the local zoning, and the permit office is the client's deadline. Keep the code editions by jurisdiction and the pre-application meeting notes with the project.
- Sales tax on fees, retainers and getting paid — In the US architectural fees are not subject to sales tax in most states, but the states that tax services broadly tax them — South Dakota taxes

architectural services — a 4.2% state rate through June 2027, plus any municipal tax (its Department of Revenue), New Mexico's gross receipts tax names architectural services among the professional services it covers, and Hawaii's general excise tax reaches services — and printed sets sold separately may be taxable where drawings are. Take a retainer at signing and bill at each phase milestone; several states let a design professional record a lien for unpaid fees, with conditions. Confirm the tax and the lien rule with your accountant and an attorney.

Milestones: the next 30 days

The first month's to-do list for Linden & Vale Architecture, in order:

- Pick the project type for year one — additions and ADUs, or small commercial — and write the one-sentence offer
 - Form the entity your state allows, register the firm with the board and take the free EIN
 - Bind professional liability and general liability, and save the certificate template
 - Buy the BIM seat, Bluebeam and the workstation, and set up the project template and the title block
 - Buy two B105 licenses or have a lawyer review your agreement template
 - Get written permission to show past work, photograph two projects and put the website live with the start-a-project form
 - Claim the Google Business Profile and create the Houzz profile
 - Call five general contractors, two structural engineers and three realtors with the one-sentence offer
 - Set the hourly rate from the figures above, open the time-tracking by phase, and quote the first feasibility study
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Appendix: what a lender will ask for

This plan tells the story and shows the numbers. If you take it to a bank, expect to be asked for these documents as well:

- Two years of personal tax returns and a personal financial statement
- Your license, the firm registration and the certificates of insurance
- Signed agreements and the fee schedule by phase for every active project
- The accounts receivable by milestone and the retainers held
- The software and equipment list with receipts
- Your credit report and the business bank statements

Sample plan for a fictional business, written by Zarla's free business plan generator. Every figure is a typical US range or calculated from the sample's own numbers — nothing is a market projection. Make it yours in five questions:

