

## Who Is Qualified to Conduct a Facility Condition Assessment?

**Lessons Learned:** *Why does the ASTM E2018-15 Baseline Guide for Property Condition Assessment focus on experience rather than professional license when conducting a property or facility condition assessment? The following is an overview of an assessment gone bad – using licensed professionals who are inexperienced in Facility Assessment.*



There is quite a bit of confusion on this topic in RFPs circulating throughout the country. Most RFPs follow the ASTM E2018-15 standard Baseline Guide for Property Condition Assessment which clearly states that the services performed for a Property Condition Assessment is not to be considered a professional service. The owner should select an assessor or assessment team based upon skill and experience.

Over the last two decades, I have been invited to discuss the qualifications for property condition assessors as an expert witness in 8 states. The question of: **What qualifications are the required to conduct PCA or FCA services?** is often one of the first to be settled by competing lawyers. Lawyers first ask me if I am licensed in the state of the pending law- suit. Typically, I am not licensed in the state of the court case. However, based on the ASTM standard, my 40 years of architectural experience, and 30 years of assessment experience (in 49 states and 6 countries) makes it hard to question my overall qualification, based on ASTM E2018-15. I have served on the ASTM committees for both PCA and ADA guideline discussions. I have been involved in the training of a couple hundred assessors who have come from a variety of backgrounds including architecture, engineering, facility management, construction management, and construction. I have managed the delivery of thousands of property condition reports per year in my role as Director of Engineering for one of the largest due-diligence companies in the US.

Well, this story is not meant about me, but about the industry we call Property or Facility Condition Assessments. For the purpose of this article, we will refer to assessments

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completed in the commercial sector, for loan origination as Property Condition Assessments. Assessments completed exclusively for the purpose of capital planning we will refer to as Facility Condition Assessments.

The best way I have to explain the answer to the question –**Who is Qualified to Conduct a Facility Condition Assessment** – is to share a story about an assessment gone bad. In 2018, I was invited to be an expert witness to review the work of 3 licensed professionals, an architect, a mechanical engineer, and a structural engineer. A local architect had won a contract to assess a local facility as part of a pre-purchase review for an entity considering the purchase of the property. The report I received for review and comment was considerably flawed and did quite a bit of dis-service to the client who was intending to purchase the property. The main flaw of the report was that it missed considerable evidence of building distress related to structural settlement.

So, what were the missteps by this team of licensed professionals who were rookies and performing and writing Property Condition Assessments. Here are a few of the flaws:

1. The team failed to request background information on the property, such as environmental reports and previous maintenance records. If they would have requested the available reports, the owner is required by law to disclose documents.
2. The team failed to identify that this property has previously been documented as having environmental issues including sink holes and land fill. Previous geotechnical soils reports were available but were not requested for review. The owner did not disclose the report since it was not requested.
3. The team divided their work into specialty groups and visited the site on different days that suited their schedule. The architect reviewed the interior and exterior. The structural engineer did the same at a different visit. The mechanical engineer reviewed the property on a different day as well.
4. Each of these licensed and local professionals noted some issues related slab settlement and cracking. Issues were also identified with the roof and exterior walls. However, because they wrote their own reports, there was little if any coordination of observations. Each professional referred to the building as being in “good condition” even though each of them made references to structural anomalies. They were not skilled at report writing and wrote a fairly streamline report with little attention to detail. The word cursory may be appropriate – sloppy with little attention to detail. The reports looked complete with photos, comments, and recommendations yet their assessments and recommendations were flawed.

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Would you hire such a team to assess your building and to write your facility condition report? Many engineering and architectural companies dabble in Property Condition Reporting for both loan origination and capital planning. I have been with large engineering companies with staffs ranging from 1,000 to 5,000. These companies will get involved in PCA or FCA work when they are not busy with other engineering or architectural work but their attention to the means and methods of doing quality training or reporting is minimal. Even with these large engineering companies, the staff assigned to PCA or FCA services could be counted on one or two hands. When necessary, they would bring in additional staff who have no experience with PCA or FCA reporting to assist. Schools and municipalities are often looking to support local or regional architects and engineers when they are looking for FCA or capital planning services. In order to support local business, many procurement specialists think they are getting high-end or technically competent consultants when they award work to local architects or engineers. In reality, they are getting part-time consultants who are willing to throw-together a report that may or may not be organized or defensible. Some agencies or institutions try to conduct their own assessments using in-house staff. This has many similar shortcomings

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such as time investment, cost accuracy, data consistency, as well as data storage and retrieval.

The company I currently work for has 70 staff and is 100% dedicated to FCA and Capital Planning services. They have experience with 10s of thousands of facilities from both the assessment and the reporting perspectives. The processes and procedures, costs and EULs (Expected Useful Life) associated with gathering defensible data and accurate costs have been vetted by years of practice. We have made it our entire purpose to create an efficient and excellent means and methods for conducting facility assessments. We have created software that is transferable from data collection to facility management. The reports are delivered in both static (written) and dynamic (digital) formats so that the client can use and manipulate the data for a variety of purposes.

The bottom line to this article is the importance of defensible data. Data delivered for FCA reporting must meet high standards for accurately identifying elements and systems using unit format libraries, accurately costing the value of the element or system using reliable cost guides, and for making consistent and defensible recommendations. After this defensible reporting is completed, a qualified facility assessment consultant should be able to provide software support and asset management guidance to build the bridge between facility management and necessary funding sources. Finding a facility condition consultant who has experience and who is dedicated to providing capital planning, facility condition-based reporting and software allows you the client to be miles ahead towards your end goal of defensible and usable data. On the other hand, part-time, local assessors or national design professionals who dabble in assessment work can put you miles behind.