



Environmental, Planning, and Engineering Consultants



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Anne Locke of AKRF works hand-in-hand with developers to preserve the historical integrity of New York City



New York, NY Development is largely thought of in forward-thinking terms. The challenges developers face tend to revolve around the impact a project will have on various elements of the surrounding environment. How will a project affect nearby businesses? Will there be a significant impact on traffic conditions? How will other development in the neighborhood affect this project?

One challenge that is often overlooked, however, is that of finding a way for infrastructure improvement and real estate development projects to proceed, while at the same time identifying and preserving elements of New York's past.

Anne Locke, senior vice president and COO of environmental, consulting firm AKRF, Inc., has been rising to that challenge for more than 25 years. As longtime head of and now senior advisor to AKRF's cultural resources department, Locke is part of a highly specialized team of historians and archaeologists who work

hand-in-hand with developers and government agencies to preserve the historical integrity of the city, by means of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

An EIS, a requisite part of the development process, ensures that a project's impact on the surrounding environment is thoroughly analyzed and, if necessary and practicable, mitigation measures are identified before approvals are given and construction begins. But as Locke will tell you, there is more to the environment than you might realize.

"Some people think of an EIS as being the examination of natural resources, such as air and water quality, or of traffic and mitigation," said Locke. "In fact, historic and archaeological resources are just as important as these elements."

Locke—a student of art and architectural history who holds a master's degree in city and regional planning and urban design from Harvard—began her professional career at Parsons Brinckerhoff, where she served as deputy project manager for the Jacob Javits Convention Center EIS. Working under the tutelage of Debra Allee and Steven Rosen, Locke quickly got a taste of the pressures that come with a controversial project—one she nonetheless remembers as "a wonderful opportunity, working with really great people."

When Allee and Rosen left Parsons Brinckerhoff in 1981 to found AKRF, Locke soon joined her two mentors and created the start-up's historic resources department. "For a while, I was the cultural resources department," said Locke. "In 1984, we hired another historian. Then there were two or three of us for a long time." Since then, the department has expanded to eleven, including seven historians and four archaeologists.

It might seem a bit unusual for an environmental planning and engineering firm to employ historians and archaeologists, but it is the depth and breadth of the company's expertise that has won them such a diverse and impressive array of projects. Ask Locke to name some of these projects and the response reads like an A-list of what makes New York New York: the Museum of Modern Art, Columbia University's planned Manhattanville campus, Battery Park City, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Hudson River Park, and the 42nd St. redevelopment project, to name a few.

Locke is perhaps most proud of the environmental review for the World Trade Center site following September 11. "I'm a downtown resident very personally touched by that tragedy," said Locke, who lives just two blocks from ground zero. "We had many unique analysis issues and an incredibly tight timeframe - but we understood the tremendous importance of the reconstruction and redevelopment, and we produced. I am proud of that effort and of all the people who worked with me on that extraordinary project."

Indeed, AKRF has earned a reputation as a dependable one-stop resource for the public and private sectors. With more than twenty-five years' experience providing master planning services, economic feasibility analysis, sustainable/green design services, hazardous materials analysis, transportation planning and historical analysis, it is no wonder they are the industry's go-to consultants in New York City.

And while AKRF's work is crucial to development, it is equally important in preserving the past. In fact, Locke estimates that her department's work on EISs has identified hundreds, if not thousands, of buildings that have been found eligible for listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

"AKRF, as a company, is really about helping build the cities of the future," said Locke. "And so I think the work that our cultural resources department does is significant because our history is so important to us—as individuals, as a city and as a country. It's essential that this history has a prominent place in the future, and we really try to ensure that this happens."