

# TOPICS



## The Importance of Project Pre-Design: How Well Do You Know Your Property?

January 2008

In the excitement of purchasing land for a new development, the temptation is often to lay out the lots or buildings to see the site's potential. The initial emphasis on development costs and site design, however, can mean that the site constraints (and the long-term impacts of these constraints) get overlooked. By taking a thorough look at the property during the Pre-Design stage of development, land developers can gain a cost-effective perspective of the proposed project's viability.

Seasoned developers understand the value of engaging a Pre-Design team with wide-ranging skills and experience. As profiled in the December TOPICS, the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) during land acquisition is part of a time-saving, efficient, and simplified approach to site assessment. In addition to conducting a GIS analysis that reveals how natural resources, planning, and zoning issues affect the site, an effective Pre-Design team addresses:

- Land survey and title needs
- Environmental assessment
- Cultural resource concerns
- Infrastructure availability
- Traffic and parking analysis
- Entitlements and approval strategies



Site visits and field assessments are used to determine how environmental features and cultural resources will affect the design and viability of a proposed project.



A site inventory and analysis highlights the opportunities and constraints of a property, such as drainage patterns, access, historic sites, viewsheds, wooded areas, wildlife corridors, and water resources.

What's the return on investment for time dedicated to Pre-Design? Comprehensive knowledge of the risks and opportunities that a proposed project can entail. When land constraints are fully understood, a realistic site plan can emerge. Colorful concept drawings might be useful marketing tools for gaining the interest of commercial tenants or residential builders, but an unresearched plan is likely to create false hope for the property's potential. It may also encourage a premature submittal to the city and result in lost time and money for all involved.

The pitfalls of rushing into design and submittal can arise from several types of constraints. These constraints might include the land's physical features, the location of utilities and easements, or future land use plans for the surrounding area. A protected wetland, poor soils, a major pipeline, or a city's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan are all examples

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of constraints that can result in additional permit requirements, higher construction costs, or design revisions that could have been avoided if revealed during Pre-Design.

Following through on Pre-Design has multiple benefits. By ensuring that the scope of the project is realistic from the outset, costly reductions in project magnitude can be avoided. A site that turns out to be suited only for a small office building, for example, will be a disappointment where a large retail center was sought; likewise, a handful of single family homes will be small consolation where an expansive multi-family development was envisioned. By optimizing project value and minimizing delays caused by re-designs, revised budgets, and difficult approvals, a project's full potential can be realized. Pre-Design is a sound financial investment that helps to manage risk while laying a firm foundation for the Design and Post-Design phases of project development.

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