

■ ■ ■ Shovel Ready Sites



Shovel Ready Sites and the Site Certification Process: Importance of Environmental Considerations

By Frank Spano and Susan Riffle

By now, we all know that a shovel-ready, or certified, site provides great benefits to the community in which it is located and for organizations seeking a new location. But, do we fully understand what really is involved in this process? More specifically, what environmental concerns should be considered and why are they relevant?

Below, we outline the six key areas necessary for a comprehensive approach to site certification. Then, we take a deeper look at environmental considerations and their importance, as this area can often be less thoroughly reviewed, but often has a major impact on the property's ability to be successfully designated as a "shovel-ready – certified site."

Six Key Areas for Comprehensive Site Certification

Ownership. Ownership information covers the contact and documentation related to the legal status of the site. The

report should include legal property owner of record contact information; evidence of clear title to property owner; tax map and parcel number; dated letter from property owner with sales or lease price and term of price; and the economic development group (or broker) acting as the marketing agent if the site is controlled by a private concern.

Property. Property information provides a high-level overview of the site, including the specific address/location of the site, along with total site size and contiguous developable acreage. This report should also include: price; terms and conditions; site history – including previous leasing or uses; dimensions; general description and zoning; ALTA Survey; special covenants or deeded restrictions; topography and estimate of grading costs; surrounding land uses; and time/distance from nearest emergency services and hospital, along with any other pertinent background information.

Transportation. The certification analysis should include: roads serving the

site and nearest interstates, along with aerial maps showing the most convenient route from the site to interstate and major area highways; pending road improvements around the site; existing or potential rail service and rail spur location; nearest intermodal operation; nearest commercial, cargo and corporate airports; and public transportation information.

Utility. Utility information demonstrates to potential future tenants the capacities that currently, or will soon, exist at a given site. This data is important to ensure that the community and site have the appropriate utility capacities to support whatever operations are to occur on the site, once it is developed. This report should include: commitment letters from the dominant electric, natural gas, water, sanitary sewer and telecommunications providers; current and proposed utility line location, contact and capacity for each of those providers; estimated itemized monthly billing from each provider; and policy on charges for service improvements or planned improvements to a site, along

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with other pertinent information – such as sewer effluents.

Community. Community information helps future site developers navigate the plethora of contacts and standards for building permits, site grading and overall permitting process. This report should include: building code standards followed at the local level for the given site; assessment of one-time impact fees; property tax rates at the site; emergency service personnel; Hazmat Certification; "as-of-right" and potential discretionary local incentives; area demographics; and a listing of major manufacturing or distribution companies located within an approximate 20-mile radius of the site.

Environment. Environmental information is necessary for a site, not only for future structural implications, but also for historical and cultural significance, along with protection of endangered species or areas. Understanding these factors and having comprehensive environmental information readily available for a site can save a great deal of time and resources – not to mention headaches! – during the site selection process. Key considerations, along with reasoning behind their importance, is briefly discussed below.

Environmental Considerations

While each of the above six areas are important for site certification, one should not underestimate the importance that environmental considerations have on a given site. A deeper examination of this area requires more research and legwork, but the results are well worth the investment.

This checklist includes key considerations and studies that must be completed before any site is deemed "a shovel-ready certified site." These criteria remain consistent and relevant across all major industries.

- **Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)** – Summarize impor-

tant findings, including: evidence of hazardous substance on site, hazardous site history, risks of neighboring properties, environmental liens and drainage issues. A completed Phase 1 ESA is typically good for up to three years upon completion. This time frame is consistent with Environmental Protection (EPA) guidelines, including liability protection. A new ESA is strongly suggested to provide any updates even if no changes have reportedly occurred at or immediately surrounding the site.

- **Air Quality/Air Attainment Status** – Know and understand the site's current attainment, non-attainment and maintenance status by major source at county level and within a 50-mile radius of the site, including: air quality standards for ozone, particulates, hydrocarbons and sulfur dioxide levels. Air quality information presented at the county/regional level is important to the end user as it illustrates any potential air quality concerns that could inhibit new industries from locating into areas that are exceeding clean air standards.

- **Wetlands Delineation Study** – The presence of wetlands or streams within or surrounding a site can impact its marketability and cause considerable time, cost and efforts if a mitigation process is deemed necessary. Before a delineation study is conducted, the site must be reviewed to determine if a study is necessary. Qualified professional environmental engineering firms are the best source to conduct this type of study. In addition, a map prepared by local GIS sources at the county level that depicts potential wetlands and streams on-site and total site acreage categorized as wetlands is strongly advised. Our best advice is to do a comprehensive wetland analysis with the aid of GIS mapping and a wetland determination study before making a decision to either purchase or develop a large track of acreage for future development. If

wetlands are found to be within the site's proposed developable area, these concerns may cause the site to be too costly to develop.

- **Flood Plains** – Is the site located within or outside the 100 and 500-year flood plain? If within, indicate the percentage of the site on a map or discuss measures to remove site out of the flood plain. Include a GIS engineering map and a copy of the original FEMA flood plain map that clearly shows the site and location within or outside the known flood plain.

- **Endangered Species/Archeological/Cultural Resources** – Include the process, letter or report that confirms no endangered or threatened species or historic or cultural artifacts are located within the site or will be impacted by the site's development. Information pertaining to these categories must be reviewed, evaluated and approved at the state level by the appropriate environmental or conservation group agency.

- **Soil Boring/Geotechnical Study** – Include a comprehensive geotechnical study from an engineering or other qualified firm that includes sample soil borings on soil conditions, stability and supply for the property. The study should also include the soil type at site, results of the sample soil borings and documentation of their location on a map, and documentation of risk factors, including seismic vibration or activity, fault lines, sinkholes and past undermining. The number of soil borings is based on the site acreage and suggested drilling depth is 35 feet to get a good indication of soil conditions.

- **Weather-Related Information** – Provide a 10-year history of major natural disasters particular to the area and include as much documented information as possible. This may include conditions such as major snowfall, ice related-storms, tornado, hurricane, seismic and other weather-related information. A good resource for weather activity is the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration website, which provides information for specific weather conditions by county.

For each of these criteria, it is best to include official reports and documentation to support and cite the information that is provided. If a site, or a portion of a site, is found to have issues with any of these criteria, proactive steps can be taken to remediate those issues, if possible, before development begins and further complications arise.

As a community, are you prepared to provide this information to the next company or site location consultant that is investigating your site and community? As a corporation, are these factors included in your site selection criteria? Having both parties prepared with this information allows the site certification – and selection – process go as smoothly as possible. 🏡

About the Authors:

Frank Spano, Managing Director

As Managing Director, Mr. Spano leads the Austin Consulting division and develops new strategies to increase The Austin Company's leadership in food and beverage, nutraceuticals and other manufacturing sectors. Frank also serves as a senior project manager, directing site location studies and conducting detailed field investigation analyses for clients.

Frank has advised and recommended locations for numerous food processing clients in his 25 years with Austin Consulting. As of 2010, Frank also took the lead role for Austin Consulting to designate sites as "shovel-ready" for the food and beverage industry and marketing this service primarily to economic development organizations. In addition to the food and beverage industry, other areas of expertise include automotive, aviation/aerospace, general manufacturing and consumer products.



Susan Riffle, Communications Specialist

Ms. Riffle joined The Austin Company as Communications Specialist in January 2013. Prior to this position, Susan spent six years in marketing and communications roles, focused on developing and implementing all facets of B2B marketing and communications activities, from brainstorming and strategy, through creation and implementation.

As Communications Specialist, Susan is responsible for creating and managing corporate communications, employee communications, online and content marketing activities, and thought leadership materials, including whitepapers, articles and blogs. Susan holds a Masters degree in Business Administration with concentrations in Strategic Marketing.



"It is great to see the pro-activeness of the Town of Ajax to help investors reduce risk. They proceeded to get their site certified by a third party Site Selection Consultant, making this site one of the first certified in Ontario, Canada."

– C. Paige Webster, CECd



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