

PACE Knows Land Planning

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“Good Fortune is what happens when opportunity meets with planning” - Thomas Alva Edison

Land Development is a focused venture designed to make money for the investors. Successful land development begins with solid site planning. Design Consultants must be informed and aware of the various economic performance thresholds that exist. Understanding the Land Basis Value is the beginning, then the cost of site construction of the land, the governmental expenses – facility mitigation fees and the profit margin goals related to the Pro Forma Return on Investment expectations.

The key to success is to discover the real sense of beauty of the property and nurture the best from it. We cannot lose sight that this is a place where people will be asked to invest a large amount of money, to live and work for many years. This is going to be someone’s HOME. The optimal site plan solution needs to “fit” into the context of the surroundings. When thoughtfully completed, the design solution will naturally rise out of the landform.

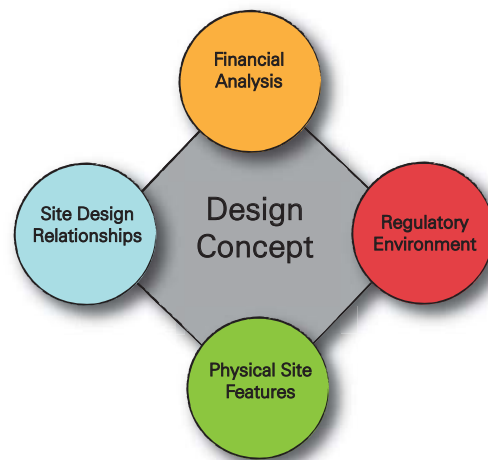
Influential Planning Practices & Methodology
Successful design solutions need to sustain themselves under the heavy scrutiny of criticism from a variety of professional fronts. Physical site planning is not simply a matter of “ringing a site” with lots and working inward, with the last unusable piece of land becoming a “Community Park. Nor is it a Surveyor striking a straight roadway alignment with lot-lines perpendicular to the right-of-way. And it certainly is not a software program that you set the parameters and push the “enter button”. A successful design solution is unique to itself.

A couple of the influential teachers in our industry are Ian McHarg and Christopher Alexander.

The legendary Ian McHarg has had a great influence on our education and thinking for decades. In 1969, he published *Design with Nature*, which is essentially a book of step-by-step instructions on how to break down and unpack a property by systematically analyzing the site features.

Christopher Alexander is an influential architect and mathematical thinker of our time. As an architect, he is noted for his practical theories about design. His theories examine the interrelationships of activities and patterns of human development in a systematic way.

From the cumulative foundational teachings of these contemporary thinkers we have a basis to begin the exercise of land development planning. Successful Site Design Concepts cannot exist in a self-absorbed vacuum. Success in the land development business means achievement in several areas:



The Four Legged Table. If we view each of these disciplines as the four legs of a table and then imagine the table top as the “Design Concept” the equation begins to make sense. In this picture, the table top is firmly supported by

the four legs. Similarly, the Design Concept is supported by the four legs of solid information and progress decisions. As the four legs – disciplines – grow in balance, we can examine our plans at any point for a “Compliance Evaluation”. If the table top – the Design Concept – is not level, we stop and level up the table top with more information for the lacking sources. A successful Design Concept will hold up under the weight of criticism when all four legs are Informed and Balanced.

Financial Analysis, Economics of Market & Site Engineering. Designers need to be thoughtful of the cost of pipes and storm drains, cost of earthmoving and building stormwater detention systems. Intangible details can enhance the emotional appeal of the home building site to the homebuyer. These are subtle, but should be brought into play early, e.g., the vertical grading relationship of the street to the lot to the home pad to the finished floor elevation. Understanding the placement and massing of the homes is influential as well. This can be viewed by some as an unnecessary expense to the precise grading plan, but it can pay back well in increased sales momentum for absorption of homes by the market. Thereby reducing the length of time the construction loan requires servicing and producing more profit.

Regulatory Environment & Jurisdictions. Assessment of the local Regulatory Codes is essential. Knowing the latitude to navigate through different options is crucial. Knowledge of site development regulations as well as site development standards is the key. Smaller streets, give back up to 20% of the land to the net useable development, saving on stormwater management costs. Additionally, building a partnership attitude with the local elected officials and Community Development Staff will benefit the proposal in the future.

Physical Site Features, Attributes & Constraints. We need to know the site in the “McHarg Way” - understanding the natural systems and the associated opportunities. Fighting the site will cause excessive expenditure of precious capital, resulting in a design scheme that does not fit the context of the equation and the region.

Site Design Relationships. The right Design Solution has a penchant for success at several levels of collaboration and innovation. First, strong emphasis is sought to define the appropriate local contextual solution. Second, the designer’s mission is to define solutions promoting balanced development, environmental stewardship as well as encouraging ongoing sustainability in a successful community building solution. Finally, designs strive for long-term stability in community planning. Solutions that incorporate “Green Values” further enhance the success of the compatibility of the natural and man-made systems.

Application. How does this approach translate to today’s challenges of surplus plats and small lots? PACE is in the process of evaluating approved preliminary plats and approved plans. We know the business of balance. Are the plans in “Compliance” with the objectives discussed, to direct these ventures to financial success? The plans never should be viewed as a static fixed object, but rather a continual work in progress. As the market moves, our plans adjust to capture that market. We can support your office in evaluating plans from market orientation, entitlement strategy and constructability analysis. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Steve Calhoon at 425.827.2014.



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