### 1.1 Requirements for a Prepared Site

It is important to realize that for a site to be effective, it must satisfy the needs of a particular business. The site is constructed to improve the quality of life of a community, but it still must be a viable site to attract business. As we stressed above, a site must be prepared with proper amenities before a business will consider locating there.

Even given that business-specific needs do exist, certain basic site requirements must be in place in order for a company to even begin to consider a specific site or park. Most often these basics are assumed to be in place by a site seeker. The community that is aware of and has already prepared to meet these requirements will place itself at the threshold of competitive industry attraction. These threshold requirements include the following:

**Transportation and Accessibility:** Industry and business are looking for proximity and availability of transportation networks for a variety of reasons, including to carry product to market, receive raw materials and inputs for production, transport employees to and from work, and to allow customers to reach the business’s location conveniently. Businesses are, most often, looking for a site with interstate highway access. The type of industry and product produced may dictate additionally required modes of transportation. Heavy industry and those transporting bulk products may seek locations with rail and water access, because of its competitive cost, as well as highways. Call centers often choose locations with public transportation to accommodate employees’ needs. Industries producing smaller, higher value-added products such as electronics may desire easy access to air cargo services for transporting goods to markets. Corporate headquarters seek to be close to passenger air carriers for ease of executive and management travel.

**Available Labor Force:** Although required skill levels and cost of labor may vary from industry to industry, the vast majority of firms seek a location with an adequate labor force from which to draw. The identification of the labor market area is most often determined by commuting patterns. Commuting patterns are determined by the length of time it takes an employee to get to work. An average of 30 minutes one way for production workers, 20 minutes one way for clerical workers, and 43 minutes one way for technical and professional workers is a normal standard. Manufacturers generally prefer to see a job applicant to job ratio of 6 to 1 so that they have flexibility in the choice of whom to hire. Another common concern will be whether or not the labor market wage rates are at a level to enhance the industry’s competitive position in the world marketplace (Mullis 1998). In addition to wage rates and availability of labor, businesses will consider other crucial labor-force characteristics such as productivity levels, existing industry turnover rates and absenteeism, types and numbers of skilled workers in the area, management recruitment and retention potential, work stoppage or labor strife history, and usage of work-team concepts among existing local employers.

**Utilities:** Adequate water, sewer, power and telecommunication services must be available of the quantity and quality necessary to serve business and industry. Characteristics of these systems that are important to potential employers are reliability, excess capacity that will allow for growth, and the existence of redundant, backup systems. This is especially true for manufacturers, who may make certain quality demands of specific utilities above and beyond what would usually be available. For instance, computer chip producers require certain water-quality standards in order to meet process requirements, and call-center operations require state-of-the-art telecommunications networks in order to handle their volume of customer calls efficiently.

**Appropriate Land Use and Zoning:** Potential employers want to be assured that the site is zoned appropriately for the type of end use projected. For instance, they will want industrial zoning for manufacturing and warehousing, commercial for office space, and retail for outlet malls. Proper zoning should already be in place, not promised to be enacted once the company commits to locate on the site. Many a project has been delayed due to the length of the normal zoning implementation process. And if citizen opposition to the zoning process ensues, the project can be delayed to the point where the industry or business decides not to go forward with the investment.
Employers also want to be assured that the surrounding area is compatible with their own planned land use. A manufacturing firm will not want to be surrounded by or even adjacent to residential property. Gaining access to the site, especially by tractor-trailers in the case of manufacturing and large-scale retail, should not require going through residential areas. It is important for employers to know when going into a community that their neighbors will not impact negatively on their business operations, and that the surrounding property owners will find their land use to be acceptable.

**Ownership**: The lead economic development organization should have clear site control with a stated price per acre based on the fair market value of industrial, commercial or retail property in the area. This site control can be in the form of a legal option to purchase between the organization and the property owner, or as outright ownership by the organization. Specific conditions regarding the purchase should be noted, including who pays for closing costs, surveys and legal fees, and how crop loss will be covered.

**Topography and Soil Conditions**: Companies are looking for fairly level sites with good drainage to eliminate standing water. Some companies look for gently sloping sites for aesthetic purposes. Wetlands are generally to be avoided, although some business parks actually use wetlands and recreational amenities as selling points for the location if these items are designed as environmental assets to the site. The types of soils and load-bearing capacity should be analyzed through soil boring. With manufacturing, the equipment used actually requires a greater load-bearing capacity than the building itself. This information should be made available to companies looking at the site.

**Incentives**: Companies will want to know up front if incentives are available through the community, state, or both. In many circumstances a zone must be delineated and established by the local community in order to allow tax relief within certain geographic boundaries. Establishing these programs can take time, so they should be in place before a potential employer ever contacts the local community.

In general, incentives such as grants, loans and tax inducements will not make a bad location or site into a good one. Mullis (1998) tells his clients to let them do the analysis of the site first, and then plug in the inducements. In this way they have a clear picture of how competitive the site is on its own, and then inducements can be added to enhance the deal.

**Additional Studies**: A Phase I Environmental Assessment should be conducted by a qualified professional in order to identify any environmental conditions that warrant further study. This assessment will look at the historical and current usage of the site as well as other factors.

A wetland identification should also be conducted to avoid the violation of wetland standards. Floodplain maps must be obtained to ensure that the portion of the site that will be built upon is not on a floodplain.

A Phase I Archeological Survey may be undertaken to determine whether the site contains any areas or structures of historical or archeological significance. Identification of such assets may require further investigation. Some public funding sources may require the completion of an archeological survey.

These studies should be completed and reports made available to companies interested in the site. Identifying these site characteristics before making contact with a company will save time in the compliance process and avoid unanticipated delays and increased construction costs.