5. DEVELOPMENT OF GOALS FOR PARKS/SITES

It is imperative for a community to develop clear goals and objectives for industry/business parks and sites before it begins planning and implementation. To fail to come to agreement on expectations and desired outcomes of its investment is one of the most serious mistakes a community can make because it is likely to jeopardize the long-range success of the park or site venture.

As discussed before, parks and sites are frequently a cornerstone of a community’s economic development program. Therefore the goals for park/site development and economic development are often one and the same. In general, these goals are to increase wealth in the community through the attraction of new employers and to expand the number of existing employers. Beyond these basics, each community brings its own particular desired future and existing capabilities and assets into play when determining parameters within which to accomplish their goals. A variety of different strategies can be used that will be consistent with the values, priorities, and goals of a given community.

Each type of business or industry cluster brings with it certain identifiable benefits and certain known requirements. Some industries will help a community reach its goals while others, although perhaps "glitzy" or prestigious, may not. A community should determine, up front, whether or not a business is compatible and how much the community is willing to invest to design a site to attract certain kinds of businesses.

Some community’s goals may revolve around expanding and/or restructuring the local tax base, leading to a business attraction strategy. Such was the case in Fairfax County Virginia, where the community determined that it wanted to expand the local tax base, increase property values, and gradually shift the burden of taxes from residential to commercial and industrial properties. In 1979 the proportion of nonresidential tax base was 12%. The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority adopted the goal of increasing that proportion to 21% by 1985 through high-tech business attraction and appropriate site-development efforts. The program was highly successful; it led “Between 1979 and 1985 [to] ... a shift from 12 to 25% nonresidential tax base, a 10 percent reduction in the overall real-estate tax rate, an expansion in public services, fiscal stability, and an AAA bond rating” (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993, 234).

Other communities, perhaps those with high unemployment rates and low-skilled workers, may adopt a strategy of developing sites suitable for manufacturers that they know to be labor intensive but not in need of a highly skilled workforce, such as food-processing firms. The industry site requirements that the community would have to meet probably include large quantities of water for production, an available wage-competitive workforce, and access to the interstate highway system.

Still others may see benefit in offering sites that will attract outlet centers, with the goal of building a substantial sales-tax revenue stream for their county and providing a substantial number of retail jobs. Such was the case in the small Ohio town of Jeffersonville, which attracted two major outlet malls within a year. The Village’s strategic location on Interstate 71 halfway between, and an hours drive to, the major population centers of Columbus and Cincinnati set the stage. The community then enhanced the attraction by offering flat, large sites with all utilities and visibility from the highway.

Finally, some communities may seek a specific category of business to attract, such as those who are environmentally sensitive, high-tech, and supportive of travel and tourism efforts. There are as many different alternatives as there are communities and their goals.

It is important for each community to develop its own economic development strategies based on an honest analysis of its situation. If site development is deemed necessary, a community should begin the process of site development.