1. WHAT IS A SITE?

Most communities in the United States can claim to have sites available for business development. Under closer inspection, these sites are usually either undeveloped open spaces (often agricultural lands) at the edge of the community or former industrial lands within the community. Both of these share a common problem: Businesses cannot occupy them without substantial infrastructure improvements.

Sites that are undeveloped are often referred to as greenfield sites. They are open spaces that are currently (or were recently) utilized for agricultural purposes. Many do not have the infrastructure needed for business development. Infrastructure refers to physical improvements such as water, sewer, storm water, communication, and other utilities. These improvements are needed by most businesses, and they are usually among the criteria a potential business will consider in evaluating potential locations. Most sites will not be considered if they lack appropriate infrastructure (see Greenfields in Section 4).

Sites that have been previously used for industry or other activities are called brownfield sites. Most are in central city areas and are often surrounded by mixed land uses such as residential, commercial, or public (schools and hospitals, for example). Usually brownfield sites were occupied by industrial complexes. Since older industries used multistory facilities, these sites are often on small parcels of land. Modern factories are laid out horizontally (using one story) to facilitate assembly lines and flow of products. Older sites carry the risk of environmental contamination, especially since they were most likely operated during a period of less stringent environmental regulations. Environmental contamination can be costly to clean up. Finally, older sites may still contain the buildings or other structures from the previous land use. These will either need to be demolished or refurbished (this often includes such actions as bringing the structure up to current fire, building and disability codes as well as other standards). These factors add to the cost of using brownfield sites (see Brownfields in Section 4).

To minimize their costs and risks, businesses will usually locate on sites that require minimum investments in infrastructure and other improvements. This usually eliminates the unprepared sites. Hence, communities that want to have successful business sites must have developed a plan for creating a prepared site. Site development is utilized to create marketable, prepared business sites.