

Master Planning

By Jeffery M. Seeley, Architect
Concepts for Present and Future

Why a Master Plan?

The most important aspect of master planning is to provide a road map for future growth for a site or complex. Many projects trim budget to a bare minimum and sacrifice land usage, hurting or making more expensive future land development more expensive. The goal of a Master Plan is to provide reasonable current development while keeping in mind future developments.

What is a Master Plan?

A site master plan is a conceptual layout for a site. It looks at historically placed buildings, the next phase of growth, and the future growth. It outlines a logical phased growth plan and indicates the maximum potential usage of a site.

It can be a quick sketch to help decide if a yet unpurchased piece of land is feasible. It can also be a formal, colored site plan used for presentations and fund raisers. However, a site master plan is not an attempt to generate a floor plan for every future building.

Who Should Master Plan?

Anyone who is considering a new site should at least have a feasibility site study completed. Often, a "30 acres for the price of 10" bargain is actually 8 usable acres for the price of 10. The quick study reveals the true potential of the site and will help avoid buying worthless or overly difficult sites.

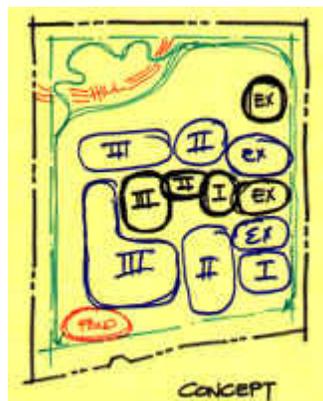
Every site should be planned before the first phase of construction. The goal is to provide a economical project without sacrificing future development. Good master planning will avoid costly mistakes in the future. Without planning, many times the first phase is placed in a location that hinders future development, requiring the first phase to eventually be demolished. Careful planning would preserve all building for the future.

How Often Should a Site be Master Planned?

A site should be reviewed before each phase of construction. Businesses, communities, ministries and zoning requirements change over time. Therefore, the long range goals of the site will also change. A master plan is nothing more than a snapshot in time of current conditions and ministries. As times change, so do goals for the site. This is the reason why exact buildings plans are not included in a site master plan.

How Do You Master Plan?

First a topographic survey of the property should be obtained. Next the overall land is analyzed with respect to streets, easements, buffers, zoning, setbacks, flood plains and natural features. The land remaining is the actual usable acreage.



A concept Sketch is first derived by assessing the long range goals of the site. The required parking and building sizes are then estimated and ready for placement on the site. Parking should typically encircle the buildings and not be to one side, aiding in exterior circulation. Interior circulation should be reviewed and building entry points determined.

Grades are reviewed for multiple story facility use. Finally, site amenities such as green space, walking trails, gazebos, playgrounds, gardens, etc. are added in the remaining areas.



The concept is then refined into the final product. Many projects use this final drawing for a marketing or fundraising tool. It is important to remember that while building masses are shown with some detail for visual character, changes to the building shape and overall layout are to be expected when each phase is completed.

Conclusion

Every site should be Master Planned before it is purchased and before every phase of construction. Consult an architect or civil engineer for this purpose and you may avoid costly mistakes or purchasing inadequate land.