

Site Selection Criteria

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How good a deal is your potential land?

As a church begins to look for a new site, there are many considerations that must be examined to determine the true value of the land. A church may purchase 15 acres for a cost of \$10,000 per acre, thinking they have gotten a bargain since it may be half the going rate for land. Then after the site is examined by engineers, it may be discovered that there is land lost to setbacks, road expansion, easements, flood plains, etc. which result in usable land of only 5 acres. The church quickly learns that they have actually purchased only 5 acres at twice the going rate along with 10 acres of worthless land.

Anytime a church is considering a new property purchase. It should be reviewed by local civil engineers to determine the feasibility of the site for church use. The following is a short list of issues that may affect the actual purchase price of the land when factored into the purchase cost:

Zoning:

What is the current zoning and can a church be built on it in the current zoning? If not, what are the requirements for rezoning? Is there possible opposition to the rezoning? Check to see if acceleration / deceleration lanes and sidewalks are required on the public street frontage. Check on local requirements for buffers next to adjacent property, as well as setbacks and other restrictions.

Purchase Price:

What is the actual price of the usable acreage. Take the total acreage, subtract the setbacks, easements, road improvements, floodplains and any other restrictions to the site. What remains is the usable area. Use this area to determine the actual cost per acre. A church will need approximately one usable acre for every 100 people in attendance.

Topography:

Is the site above or below the street? Typically a church should try to sit above the street, especially on a small site (less than 10 acres). It is not as critical on larger sites, but being too far below the road will mean lack of visibility.

Is the site flat or hilly? Parking requires a large relatively flat area. If the site is too hilly, then a large amount of earth must be moved to flatten it. This cost must be considered a part of the actual cost of the land.

Does the site shape hinder the usable acreage? Large triangular or odd shaped sites usually reduce the usable area at a greater rate than square to rectangular sites. For example, a 20 acre square has 18 acres of land after setbacks. 300 feet of frontage for 20 acres results in only 16.25 acres of usable land.

Is any of the land in a Federal Wetland or Flood plain? Typically, this land will not be allowed to be disturbed at all. Again this reduces the usable acreage of the site.

Utilities:

Is sanitary sewer available to the site? If not, how close is it to the nearest sewer line? If sewer is close, then you may have to pay to connect to the line. Verify the distance to the nearest sanitary sewer manhole.

On which side of the road are the underground utilities? It is more costly to either bore under the road or cut the pavement and patch?

What size is the nearest water line and will it serve the property?

Is the nearest fire hydrant within 400 feet of all points on the exterior perimeter of your building (distance measured as the truck drives)? If not, then a water main will have to run into the site at the expense of the church.

Are electricity, natural gas and telephone currently available to the site?

Storm Water:

Is storm water retention going to be a problem? Retention ponds are required for almost every site. However, will its placement hinder the growth or appearance of the site?

Subsurface:

Does the site have exposed rock or was it a fill site? Removal of rock or bad fill is an expensive undertaking. It is always advisable to have subsurface borings made before the purchase of property.

Other Considerations:

Where is the nearest landfill or wastewater treatment plant? Unpleasant smells are an unwanted condition.

Is the surrounding community a growing residential area? Will it continue to grow? An area changing to office or industrial may no longer support continued growth.

Competition? What other local churches are there? Will their programs / facilities overshadow your own?

Does the area match your own church demographics and is the site located near the geographic center of the congregation?

Can you afford to build in that community to meet expected curb appeal? The building and site must reflect the standards of the people that live nearby. Otherwise the church may appear unattractive and will not be attended by people who live in the community.

Conclusion:

Thoroughly investigate a piece of property before purchasing it. Call upon all the right experts to help you evaluate the feasibility of the property. Calculate the usable area of the land to determine the actual cost per acre.