



CONCEPTUAL PLANNING

The first key step in development

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“What’s the plan?” A quintessential question we hear almost every day and probably more than a few times. We plan when to get up, when kids need to be in school, when and what to have for dinner. Planning is also prevalent in business. From operational and strategic plans to long term vs. short term planning, there is no shortage and far too many to count.

In essence, a plan results from the premise of “thinking before acting” - good advice mom and dad shared from a very young age. It is also the basic function of management whether a simple grocery list or in the case of real estate, a large development project for a new mixed use or multi-family site. It describes the project overview, addresses budgets and resources, sets expectations and looks ahead to possible outcomes or issues.

Keeping the focus on real estate development, conceptual planning is essential to any project. It is used by all involved – those buying the land, those building on the land and those marketing the property. In general, concept plans begin with a site assessment and includes a feasibility analysis. This is done on both a macro and micro level. It outlines the property boundaries, including front, back and side setbacks. The site topography needs to be surveyed and eventually it may require a more extensive ALTA survey when the major site plan is prepared and title insurance needed. Other components often include a preliminary review of environmental related conditions, such as Phase I environmental, wetlands, soils, basins and storm water management. Consideration is given to parking allotment, ingress and egress access, as well as turning radii specifically for industrial warehouses and sites with loading docks and bays. Any conceptual plan should review the approved zone, allowable site uses and any state or local permits previously granted for the lot. At times, the work will even include the most finite of details, such as landscaping.

Once prepared, the conceptual plan is put to good use. It allows parties to the project to evaluate risks and plot solutions in order to avoid potential pitfalls and ensure the best possible likelihood for success. The overview also assists in determining the ideal placement for the building itself. Incorporated within a black & white or color rendering, this plan is a critical component in presentation for the township workshop meeting, marketing the property and developing the full site plan.

First things first... Partnering with an expert civil engineer should be step one. They are able to guide clients through each phase of the conceptual design. They are skilled in plotting sites in a way to maximize the development return on investment (ROI) and escape the hazards hidden under the surface.

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