

**SERVICE FEATURE**

# Unlocking Site Selection Success

For many projects, the perfect site can feel just beyond reach. The process of finding your ideal location may seem daunting at first, but working with an experienced site selection team to do all the heavy lifting — from sifting through sites to learning about unique site features and determining a ranking — can help make the process smoother.



When you're considering new locations for your manufacturing project, details matter — and the details are growing in volume. Helping economic development agencies respond to your site selection requirements involves a careful balancing act. Economic developers need to know as much as possible about your requirements to provide a thoughtful response. Yet, many site selection executives hesitate to provide the full picture because of competitive concerns.

## Site Selection Criteria

The primary goal in the site selection process is to identify locations that support long-term operational success. Access to robust information — including goods produced, the methods of production used, raw products sourced, workforce demands and consumer locations — is critical to the stability of operations for years to follow.

While the attributes included in setting priorities for a site search vary depending on the client, there are common categories of critical factors typically considered by end users in the decision-making process:

**Logistics:** Site selectors need to know the sources of the manufacturing facility's raw materials, the final destination of its finished products, and the transportation resources available so that there is timely and efficient movement of both.

**Infrastructure:** This includes electric, water and wastewater capabilities; condition, size, and proximity of local roads and highways; and rail and port access. Depending on a community's size, a new manufacturing center can place significant demands on existing infrastructure. Knowing what, if any, infrastructure upgrades or process changes are needed for a community to accept a manufacturer's additional load is critical, as is understanding the community's interest in and commitment to making any needed accommodations.

**Permitting:** Site selectors must be familiar with local and state permitting requirements for emissions, effluent and other environmental considerations — and how they mesh with the manufacturer's operations.

**Entitlements:** Permitting questions should be addressed early in the site selection process for many reasons. Perhaps the most important is their bearing on entitlements — the legal right to develop a property for a certain use or type of building — that government bodies must grant before a project can move forward. Entitlements can be a major factor in determining the use, viability and value of a property under consideration and should be part of the upfront discussion with local, state and federal officials who have jurisdiction over a site.

**Public opinion:** Manufacturers don't want to wait until a site is selected to find out the host community's position on their project. Projects that create demand for housing, infrastructure, schools or immigrant labor can produce widescale opposition in some communities — while being welcomed with open arms in others.

The site selector must be upfront about planned operations when working with local communities. Public opinion can sometimes be swayed when stakeholders understand a project's full impact on their community, but it is often an uphill battle. Manufacturers generally prefer to eliminate sites in uncooperative communities early and focus on those in places that are more amenable.

**Workforce:** Site selectors must understand the manufacturer's workforce needs and a prospective community's ability to meet them. Not every location has access to the people and training needed to deliver necessary staffing, nor interest in recruiting new workers who meet a manufacturer's requirements. This information is valuable because it informs engineers as to whether to go manual or to automate portions of the operation to fill in gaps in skills and training.

**Local tax environment:** Taxes can have major implications on a plant's economic feasibility and long-term viability. Understanding local tax rates and histories can shed important light on a potential site.

Employing a firm with engineering know-how offers you a comprehensive look at a site and its ability to support your goals. With a cradle-to-grave solution set, Burns & McDonnell provides a team of experienced professionals who understand the site selection process and dedicate themselves to locating the optimal site for land and facility investment.

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