

Site Analysis

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In many respects site analysis is the most important step in the successful site design process. The purposes of the preliminary site analysis are to gather data for preliminary planning, evaluate the site for compatibility with the proposed project or use, recognize concerns requiring additional study, and form an understanding of the administrative requirements of the project such as building permits and approvals. The value of an analysis is in its clear and complete identification of issues and the character of the site as they relate to a proposed use. Although it is usually subject to fairly limited resources, it should be as far-reaching and broad in scope as feasible. The nature of the design business is that very often the initial site assessment is part of the proposal effort and is completed “out-of-pocket.” Even more troublesome is that the effectiveness of a particular analysis may be difficult to measure until well into the design process or even after site work has actually begun. Corners cut or inaccurate assumptions made in the site analysis for expediency or economy may result in expensive rework and change orders during the design process or worse yet, during construction.

The site designer rarely has the resources or time to complete a comprehensive site investigation on speculation of winning work. Instead, site analyses are usually conducted in two steps: a proposal phase to facilitate winning the work and a postcontract phase. The *proposal phase site analysis* is extremely important because the proposal, sometimes even including preliminary design and costs, will be based on the outcome. Since the in-house resources provided for the assessment are usually limited, it is important that they be carefully used. The costs of collecting physical information at this stage of a project may be problematic so other sources of information must be found.

Site characterization is a more detailed site investigation that is usually undertaken after some degree of preliminary site planning. Site characterization generally includes a geotechnical analysis of subsurface conditions such as depth to