

43 CONSIDERATIONS FOR SITE SELECTION

A) BASIC LOT INFORMATION

- 1 Legal description, which is in deeds. Might include a subdivision name and lot number.
- 2 Lot area in SF or Acres.
- 3 Property lines and corners: position, length, most recent survey. Any disputes?
- 4 Available maps and surveys, including adjacent lots or subdivisions.
- 5 Aerial photos can be very helpful, often available in stock of local companies.
- 6 Price and terms, as related to house value and budget. Lenders suggest 1:3 to 1:4 ratio for value of land to value of house.
- 7 Easements: could be for roads, utilities, other uses. Title search should provide the history of easements for a property; a lawyer's interpretation might be needed.
- 8 Circulation: City or County roads or alleys; private access road, flight paths, other trails. Possibility of "adverse possession?"
- 9 Utilities: availability and connections for:
water, electricity, telephone, cable, gas, sewer, trash collection, recycling.
- 10 Value of comparable properties and houses in the neighborhood, as matched against your estimated building costs. (enerally, it's good to stay in the rough vicinity of neighborhood values.)
- 11 Other information as presented on realtor's Disclosure Form, such as a buried tank.

B) INVENTORY OF NATURAL FEATURES

- 1 Local geology
 - a) Soil types, fill, erosion, individual rocks, ledges.
 - b) Possible foundation problems, need for retaining wall.
 - c) "Percability," in places where septic system will be needed.
- 2 Seismic activity, since structure and detailing is more costly in higher-rated seismic zones. (U.S. is mapped as Zones 1-4.)
- 3 Hydrology; springs, water-courses, water table, open water, downstream and upstream, drainages, wetlands, larger watershed or flood areas. (Flood insurance can be costly.)
- 4 Topography: shape, slopes, elevation change, special features, possible house sites, and if septic system needed, room for tank, drain-field and drain-field reserve areas.
 - a) Climate: solar exposure, precipitation, temperature, wind.
 - b) Microclimates of the site and adjacent areas: influences on wind, sun, water flow, etc.
- 5 Heating and cooling seasons and requirements in degree-days.
 - a) Biotic communities: General understanding of plants, esp. trees, animals, insects, birds, etc.
 - b) Chance of toxic creatures, toxic plants, or endangered species?
- 6 Is there some type of ecological succession occurring?
- 7 Views: close, medium and long-range. Scope of views: territorial to vast. A few feet vertically can make large differences in view.
- 8 Privacy from neighbors: visual separation generally does not stop noise transmission.
- 9 Items from the site for landscaping for use as building materials: rocks or trees for example.

C) HISTORY, NEIGHBORHOOD CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 Historical or archaeological significance -- e.g. relics, graveyards.
- 2 Previous uses: abandoned houses, outbuildings, other materials, trash, toxic waste?
- 3 Strategy questions: demolish vs. restore vs. transform a structure or landscape.
- 4 Plantings or clearings of human origin. Introduced vs. indigenous plants & animals.
- 5 Night and day differences in a neighborhood.
- 6 Possible annoyances from upwind or upstream, such as polluting manufacturers.

D) PRESENT REGULATIONS

- 1 Deed restrictions, possibly including required design guidelines.
- 2 Rights to water, mineral resources, fuels, timber, crops.
- 3 Homeowners' or neighborhood associations: fees; maintenance agreements, as for roads or common areas? Any shared facilities?
- 4 Current zoning: minimum lot size, setbacks, lot coverage, allowed uses; adjacent zones. Other possible overlays, such as "environmentally sensitive" zones.
- 5 Temporary dwelling allowed during construction?
- 6 Fire district: closest hydrant or other water source.
- 7 Environmental regulations, e.g. preservation of natural vegetation, or wildlife habitat.

E) FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

- 1 Current and projected future value. Dwelling vs. investing for resale value. The debate between resale value and personal eccentricity.
- 2 Current and possible future zoning and neighborhood development patterns. Research at local government might produce zoning plan, comprehensive plan, or other types of master land use plan.
- 3 Town and regional plans, e.g. for power lines, transportation systems, densification.
- 4 Number of "splits" or units which would be permitted for a given property.
- 5 Your own "master plan," thinking of phases of development.
 - a) Sitework bconstruction, such as: utility extensions, possible long-term plantings.
 - b) Spatial considerations for future buildings or additions: space, adjacencies, circulation.
 - c) Long-term growth and change of your landscape.
 - d) Possible future acquisition of adjacent lots or easements.

F) PERSONAL RESPONSES

- 1 Overall feasibility for your uses and lifestyle.
- 2 General feelings: "What are you in love with -- or dislike -- about this lot?"
- 3 Openness vs. enclosure: your back is toward what? Which view pulls you most?
- 4 Does it offer the richness of being in two zones, e.g. forest to meadow?
- 5 Proximities: jobs, transportation, schools, retail, kinds of neighbors.