6. Site Readiness and Feasibility

SECTOR:

PHASE: ●○○

Readiness and feasibility are related but **not the same.**

Across Michigan, communities use the term **"site readiness"** to describe how prepared a property is for industrial development. As with many planning terms, there is no universally accepted definition. "Ready" can mean different things depending on the industry, infrastructure systems, or environmental constraints involved.

"Site feasibility" asks a different question—when looking at the land, infrastructure, and zoning requirements as they exist today, what types of industrial uses are actually possible on this site, and under what conditions? In other words, feasibility depends on physical, environmental, financial, and regulatory factors that vary from parcel to parcel. "Site feasibility" may also be called "site constructability."

Programs like the MEDC's MI Sites Program or DRP's Verified Industrial Properties (VIP) program offer a structured process for documenting both readiness and feasibility. They do not dictate what a site must become; instead, they help communities compile reliable information that reduces uncertainty for themselves, regional partners, and eventually for developers. It is encouraged that municipalities apply this approach whether or not they pursue formal verification.

Establishing a Baseline: What the Site Is Today

Both readiness and feasibility rely on a clear understanding of existing conditions.

It can be a challenge to manage sites with long histories, environmental questions, and a loss of site knowledge due to staff turnover or record loss. The first step is establishing a baseline of what is known and what needs further study.

This typically includes:

> Environmental due diligence (Phase I and if necessary, Phase II)
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> Wetland and floodplain mapping
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> Natural features inventories
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> Soil conditions and geotechnical context
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> Historical land use and prior industrial activity

Site readiness programs formalize these requirements in order to create a reliable reference point for planning and decision-making.

A site cannot be considered "ready" without this baseline, and its feasibility cannot be evaluated without understanding these constraints.

Readiness Through Land Use and Zoning Clarity

Site readiness includes determining whether industrial uses are allowable or achievable under current zoning.

Feasibility, meanwhile, requires understanding whether zoning supports the building forms, intensities, and operational characteristics associated with modern industrial activity. *See Industrial Zoning District Guidelines.*

Municipalities can review:

> Permitted and special uses within the zoning district
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> The master plan and its future land use recommendations
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> Dimensional standards (setbacks, height, lot coverage)
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> Loading, parking, and access requirements
>
> Compatibility with surrounding land uses

If zoning is out of sync with current patterns or infrastructure capacity, feasibility may be limited even if development is technically permitted. A strong site readiness program should include zoning documentation for this reason. It helps municipalities understand what their own code enables and where adjustments may be needed.

Site Selection Is Site Elimination

Most industrial projects use professional site selectors, and their process works by elimination, not selection. Sites with little completed due diligence require an unacceptable amount of time, effort, and expense in the site selection process and are discarded early. Clients have low tolerance for risk and uncertainty, and missing baseline information—environmental studies, utility capacity, ownership clarity—signals exactly that.

Site selection phases are now a matter of weeks, not months or years, and requests for information (RFIs) need answers within days, not weeks. A site that cannot produce organized, verified data on demand does not get a second look. It simply falls off the list before the community knows it was ever on one.

This is why programs like DRP's VIP program or the MI Sites program matter. Verified sites offer the facts, transparency, and predictability that move a property from a prospect list to a final decision. Communities that invest in documentation are not just preparing a site. They are keeping it in the conversation.

Infrastructure: What Exists, What Works, and What Would Be Required

Infrastructure is where readiness and feasibility intersect most clearly.

Readiness. Can the existing site conditions, utilities, and infrastructure be described accurately?

Feasibility. What types of uses can the site conditions, utilities, and infrastructure support?

Documenting water, sewer, stormwater, electric, gas, and fiber availability helps partners key in on realistic paths. In some cases, upgrades may be possible within normal municipal planning cycles, while in other cases the site will be difficult to develop without a more significant investment, carrying risks.

Utility documentation processes provide a template for how communities can assemble this information. Maintaining updated utility information helps municipalities anticipate infrastructure needs and evaluate whether certain industrial uses or sites are practical. Municipalities should engage with other utility providers to build this information as well; it is important to share the municipality's interest for a proactive approach and understand each utility in more detail.

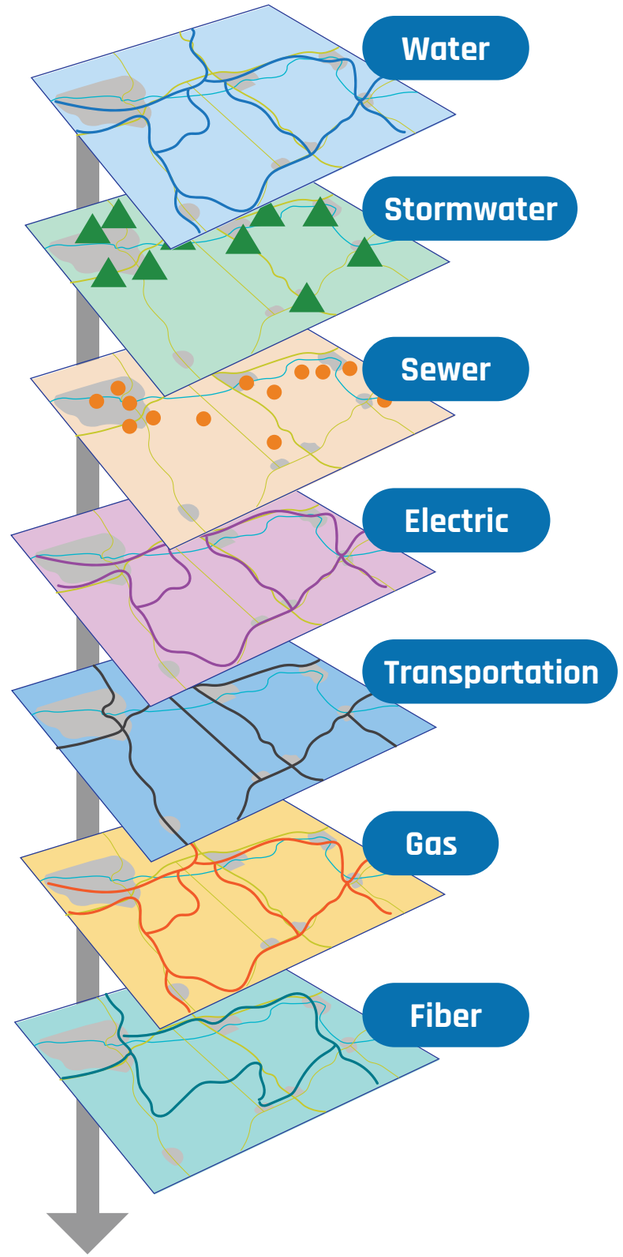
Integrate Feasibility into the Municipal Planning Process

Municipalities should integrate feasibility analysis during the master planning and zoning process to ensure land-use updates reflect modern industrial requirements. A site marked industrial on a future land use map is only feasible if the rest of the site conditions back up industrial development.

While industrial land was historically clustered near rail, modern users may prioritize direct highway on-ramp access, which streamlines logistics and reduces heavy truck traffic on local neighborhood roads. Communities should evaluate whether their industrial-designated sites actually align with current access patterns, or whether they reflect legacy configurations that no longer match demand.

Strategic planning must examine the specific location and capacity of sewer, water, and high-voltage transmission lines to determine which sites can realistically support industrial activity. A site without adequate power or water service is not a viable industrial site regardless of what the zoning map says. Identifying these gaps during the planning process gives communities time to coordinate with utility providers, right-size infrastructure investments, and avoid losing projects to better-prepared competitors.

Aligning the master plan, the zoning ordinance, and actual infrastructure capacity is what moves a community from having industrial land on paper to having industrial land that works.



Transportation and Access Will Shape Feasibility

Transportation will affect the operational viability of industrial sites as well as their community impacts.

Evaluating access helps municipalities understand not just what improvements may be needed, but whether a site's location can support certain industries at all, and if those uses can be accommodated within the broader community. Depending on the end user, sites will require different transportation access, whether that be rail, highway, or proximity to airports.

Key factors include:

- Truck routing and turning movements
- Road jurisdictions and maintenance responsibilities
- Traffic volumes and conflict points
- Rail access or potential future service
- Worker access (walking, biking, and transit)

Site readiness programs include a review of transportation access to assess readiness. Municipalities can take this a step further by using that information to assess feasibility, identifying which industrial activities fit well with the site's access characteristics and which may not.

Permitting and Process Transparency

Municipalities benefit both themselves and end users by clearly describing their development review process.

This information helps determine whether the review path aligns with the type and pace of development the site might attract.

Clarifying:

- Review bodies (planning commission, board, etc.)
- Decision points
- Typical timelines
- Required studies or submittals
- Engineering and building review processes

This gives municipalities and developers a clearer understanding of how a project would move through its system and whether the site's likely development patterns are compatible with local processes. Site readiness programs capture these elements to assess readiness; municipalities can extend this to feasibility by testing different development scenarios through their review structure.



When readiness (clear documentation) and feasibility (clear analysis) are combined, municipalities gain a more complete picture of the site's potential roles.

This might reveal:

> That the site is suitable for a wide range of industrial uses or a narrow range depending on site constraints
>
> Opportunities for phased development
>
> Opportunities for community benefits and other types of development

Site readiness programs help organize these inputs. Municipalities can use the resulting information to inform capital planning, land use updates, stakeholder engagement needed and long-term redevelopment priorities. However, having a great site does not mean that your community will support it; maintaining a master plan that supports community goals is crucial. *See Master Planning for Industrial* and *Infrastructure Needs.*

What if a site isn't what a community wants it to be?

If a community finds gaps such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental liabilities, or market misalignment, it does not signify the end of the process. For infrastructure, a community can partner with the MEDC or utility providers to align targeted site uses with potential infrastructure and utility upgrades. Similarly, partnering with those entities or engaging proactively with developers can help a community refine its vision for a site to align with market realities or infrastructure requirements and phasing.

Further Reading

MI Sites Program

VIP by DRP

Site Selectors Guild Best Practices

