The Developer and Land Acquisition Guide

FROM RAW SITE TO BUILDABLE OPPORTUNITY

Development risk is concentrated at the front of the deal. This guide covers site screening, how to structure a purchase so feasibility work is protected, what the engineering and municipal answers actually determine, and how assemblage should be approached.

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A Note From Patricia



Working with developer clients is the part of this business I enjoy most, in part because I intend to develop homes myself. That means I ask the questions I would want answered with my own capital at risk: utilities, detention, access, and jurisdiction, before anyone gets attached to a rendering.

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Step One: Screen the Site Before You Spend

A site either works or it does not, and the answer is usually available quickly and inexpensively if you ask in the right order.

- Utility availability and capacity: water, sanitary sewer, and the real cost and route of any extension. Capacity letters matter more than proximity.
- Drainage, detention requirements, and floodplain or floodway designation. Detention can consume a meaningful share of usable acreage.
- Access: frontage, curb cut permissions, driveway spacing, and any traffic impact requirement.
- Jurisdiction: city limits, ETJ, county, MUD, or a special district, and which rules apply to platting and construction.
- Deed restrictions, plat status, easements, pipelines, and mineral or surface rights.
- Topography, soils, wetlands, and existing structures or debris that will need removal.

Step Two: Structure the Purchase to Protect Feasibility

- Feasibility period long enough for survey, geotechnical, environmental, preliminary engineering, and municipal response times.
- Staged earnest money tied to milestones you control, with a clear statement of when each portion goes hard.
- Extension options priced at signing, because you will want at least one.
- Access and entry rights for your consultants, with insurance and restoration terms.
- Seller cooperation for plat applications, utility inquiries, and rezoning or variance requests where applicable.
- Consider takedown structures, staged closings, or seller financing to align capital with absorption.

Step Three: Feasibility Work in the Right Order

- Boundary and topographic survey first, since everything else builds on it.

- Geotechnical report to inform pavement and foundation design, which is a major cost variable.
- Phase I environmental, and Phase II if the history warrants. Agricultural, industrial, and fuel history all deserve attention.
- Preliminary engineering: layout yield, detention sizing, utility routing, and an early estimate of horizontal cost per lot or per acre.
- Municipal and utility district conversations documented in writing rather than remembered from a phone call.
- Build the cost model against realistic absorption, then test it against slower sales and higher carry cost.

Step Four: Assemblage and Multi Parcel Sites

Assemblage fails when the plan becomes public. Price rises, holdouts appear, and the deal that was viable stops being viable.

- Approach parcels in a deliberate sequence, starting with the ones that make or break the layout.
- Use separate contracts with cross conditions so you are not committed to a partial site.
- Keep the identity of the end user and the ultimate plan confidential during acquisition.
- Confirm each parcel's access independently. A landlocked interior tract is only worth what the neighbor allows.

Step Five: Closing and Moving Into Horizontal Work

- Confirm plat status and any dedication or reservation obligations before funding.
- Coordinate title exceptions, easement releases, and any required abandonments.
- Understand rollback tax exposure when agricultural use ends, and who pays it under the contract.
- Line up your permits, bonds, and utility commitments so horizontal work starts without a gap in carry.

How I Work: Transparency, Integrity, and Privacy

Site pursuits are handled quietly so that sellers, competing developers, and the broader market are not moved by your interest. I bring in the surveyor, engineer, and environmental consultant rather than speculating, and I will tell you when a site does not pencil.

Questions Worth Asking

Bring these to me, to your lender, or to your attorney. If I do not know an answer, I will tell you and get it from the right professional. Use the space to write down what you learn.

- ☐ Is there sewer and water capacity, and what does extension truly cost?
- ☐ How much acreage does detention consume?
- ☐ What jurisdiction governs platting, and what is their timeline?
- ☐ What easements, pipelines, or mineral rights encumber the site?
- ☐ Is my feasibility period long enough for the city to respond?
- ☐ When does each stage of earnest money go hard?
- ☐ What is the rollback tax exposure and who pays it?

Speak With Patricia

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