

# Master Plan

By Gary Baker

*Working from a master plan is the foundation of any successful development project. Skipping this step or pursuing it incorrectly can mean a loss in both perceived and actual value.*

Nearly every building, remodeling, expansion or relocation project today benefits from a master plan. Yet only some developments incorporate one, and even those that have one do not always use it correctly.

A master plan can be defined as a long-range site and floor plan that allows a facility to expand and grow in phases, as required by projected population growth. It could also be looked at as a carefully crafted tool to examine complex issues and propose a set of solutions, serving as a link to the growth, change and ultimate success of a project.

To achieve these goals, it may be beneficial to obtain the help of a professional planner, typically an architectural or land planning firm. Experience with a wide variety of project types with diverse needs adds to the creativity and sensitivity the planner can bring to each project.

Whether or not such involvement is sought, though, the most important aspect of master planning is to provide a road map for the future growth of a site or complex. While it is not intended to be a precise plan but rather a tool that establishes an orderly pattern and system for either current or future development, the goal of a master plan is to provide reasonable current development while keeping in mind future development. Every site should be planned

## Fluid Process

Developers should ask a number of questions in the planning stages to help the master-planning process move fluidly. Such considerations allow all parties involved with the project to reap the maximum project potential. The primary questions that should be answered are as follows:

1. What is the final image the client is trying to achieve?
2. What are the key goals necessary to accomplish the image?
3. What kind of time frame is necessary to accomplish the goals?
4. What kind of budgetary constraints does the client have?

before the first phase of construction to avoid costly mistakes in the future. For instance, without planning, many times the first phase is placed in a location that hinders future development, requiring the first phase eventually to be demol-

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ished. Careful planning would preserve all building for the future.

Master planning should also address such site-related issues as aesthetics, landscaping, parking, recreation, zoning restrictions, utilities, movement and retention of water, accessibility, signage, exterior lighting, separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, as well as biological and archaeological requirements. It also helps to consider other such often neglected elements as integrated pedestrian circulation and outdoor people places. Tenants spend precious little time outside buildings, partially due to the lack of a master design that finds opportunities to create those spaces.

One successful project that did incorporate such considerations is Intuit Inc.'s new 500,000-square-foot campus in San Diego. The project presented an ideal opportunity to create a wonderful pedestrian-scale campus in an ocean of parking. In the design, the five-story office buildings will be clustered around grand-scale plazas, with water features and employee amenities, such as basketball and volleyball courts. Due to the low allowable site density, large expanses of parking surround the core building plaza. Those areas are divided into smaller-scale parking zones linked by pedestrian paths to the plaza and are allotted a higher landscaping density.

The result of this preliminary and conceptual master-planning project is a more park-like experience that goes beyond the city's requirements for tree density in parking areas. The higher tree density could help prevent the "heat island effect" found in large urban areas, ultimately reducing cooling loads and benefiting both Intuit and the surrounding community.

Master planning can also apply to

denser projects. With the addition of a six-story, 190,000-square-foot office building and a 400,000-square-foot parking structure to the pre-existing PETCO campus, also in San Diego, the development team had to accommodate the existing 90,000 square feet of building occupants and their parking requirements. This forced architects to look beyond the design itself and to visualize how the campus would be physically constructed. The result is a projected four-phase construction process.

This campus ultimately will provide an interesting variety of building massing, plazas and gathering spaces that exceeds PETCO's people- and pet-friendly requirements. A "pedestrian

pro" concept links the entry plaza, waterfalls, outdoor cafe and lunch patio.

There are additional benefits to master planning as well. The key to a successful project includes accurately identifying, addressing and resolving conflicts that occur along the way. Master planning can help control such challenges by helping clients identify objec-

tives and set priorities, then providing recommendations for action on current and future needs.

The process also helps in decision making. There are distinct stages in which options can be considered and analyzed for consequences and alternative solutions. That analysis considers project function (program) and form (design), budget and schedule (phasing), financial feasibility and other factors.

In the end, master planning allows developers to gain all the potential benefits from a site and understand its impact on the surrounding community. It not only makes phased projects work, it takes advantage of all the site has to offer, including environmental and social networks. That should equate to both a perceived and an actual increase in value for potential buyers and tenants.

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*Have an opinion you would like to share? Contact Suzann D. Silverman at 646-654-4569 or [ssilverman@cpngroup.com](mailto:ssilverman@cpngroup.com).*