

the development **PATH**

TAKING SMALL STEPS LEADS TO A MORE MANAGEABLE PROJECT

“Making an area of land more useful.”

A simple definition for a process that can seem so complex. Whether you are a parent allocating portions of the family farm to your children, an individual dividing investment property into lots, or a major development company creating a new master-planned community, getting off on the right foot will save you time, money, and probably a few headaches as you set off down the development path.

Rather than being overwhelmed by the prospect of seeing your entire project through, think of the process as a series of “go or no-go” decisions. At each step of the way, gather or develop just enough information to determine whether it’s worth proceeding. That way, you can make a logical decision that the project is still feasible—or not—without investing any more energy or money than needed.

Each of the following steps builds upon the preceding ones, and the initial steps draw heavily on information that is available from existing sources for little or no cost.

Know the ownership of your property, as well as where it ends and the neighbors’ begin. The first step is to have a solid grasp of what comprises your property. You will need to know:

- Is there a mortgage on the property?
- How did you take title?
- Do you have a deed, abstract, title policy, title insurance, or Certificate of Title?
- Are there multiple owners (e.g., part of an estate)?
- Where are the property lines?
- Has a survey been completed? If so, how old is it? Have things changed on the property since the last survey?

Know what is on, within, and near your property. From man-made structures to natural features, what is on and what surrounds your property will affect how it may be divided as well as its suitability for development. You will need to know:

- What improvements exist on the property?
- Are there factors that would limit the development potential of the property (e.g., wetlands, bluffs, poor soils, or inability to have a private water supply)?
- Is there access to a public road? Utilities?

Know the zoning of your property. To ensure land is developed in a way that fits within its community and is appropriate within its environment, all properties are defined by land use regulations. The zoning of your property will directly impact what can be developed on it as well as the types and sizes of lots you can create. A single agency or several units of government may have jurisdiction (e.g., city, county, township, watershed district, etc.), and each will be involved in the approval process. You will need to know:

- What local unit of government has jurisdiction over your property?
- Are there multiple jurisdictions?
- Would a zoning change be required to implement your plans?

Know the requirements. Research what will have to be accomplished to get the project approved and to complete it. You will need to know:

- What are the requirements of the approval agency?
- If there are multiple jurisdictions, what are their requirements?
- What steps will have to be taken to gain approval?

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adding VALUE

A development's success may hinge on something as simple as the curve of a road. There are positive and negative attributes on any site, and a good design will capitalize on the positive and minimize (or at least distract from) the negative. By working with the land, your project will not only be more natural but typically less expensive to develop. With all of the parts working together—road and utility layouts, grading, and natural features—your project will look like it has always been there, and that adds value to your investment.



Private Property Owners Polk County, MN

Wishing to build a new home, this land owner decided to separate the agricultural area from the existing homestead. The surveyor met with the owner and together determined the layout of the proposed parcel. During the meeting with the owner, zoning ordinances were discussed and used to create a conforming parcel. Polk County has jurisdiction, and the County's Planning and Zoning Department performs final review and approval.



Wilderness Point Resort Pequot Lakes, MN

This project has completed the public hearing and review process with the City's planning commission, and its impact on Middle Cullen Lake was reviewed by the lake association and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Stormwater, roadway, and utility designs were reviewed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Department of Health as well as by the city engineer. MPCA issued a permit for its large size sewage treatment system.



Felt-Anderson Addition Alexandria, MN

A long park ("linear park") connects and adds value to this single-family, multi-family, and commercial development. The project went through several City review processes by staff, the planning commission, and the council. A stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP) was required as well as permits from the Department of Health, MPCA, and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The County also required review and permits.

ask the EXPERT

Q Our architect has scheduled a programming meeting as the first step in designing our new building. What is “programming,” and is it important for the success of my project?

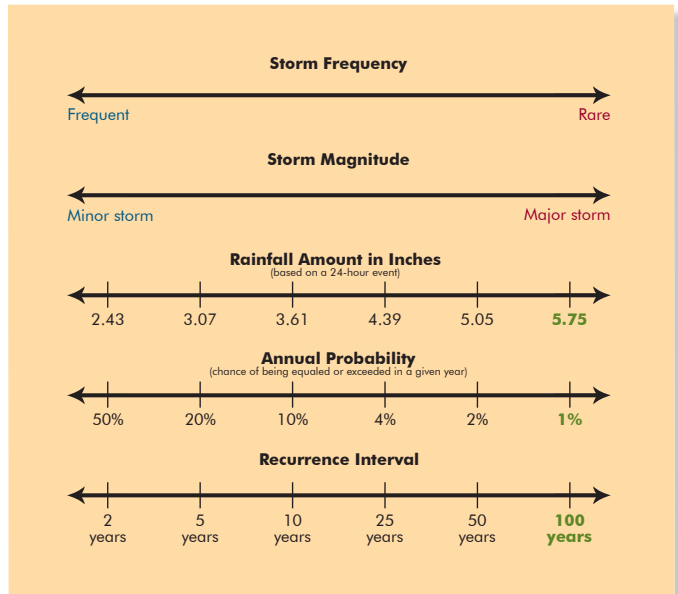
A Programming is the process in which the architect and client determine the project’s objectives, schedule, and constraints, as well as more detailed information such as space requirements and aesthetic preferences. Users of the facility may be asked to fill out questionnaires describing their use of the facility, interactions with other facility users, need for flexibility or expandability, equipment and storage requirements, and so on. The architect serves as a problem solver, working to ensure that the owner’s needs will be met. ■



Roger Helland, AIA, is an architect and vice president with Widseth Smith Nolling.

Q What is a “100-year storm”?

A A common misconception is that this phrase refers to a severe storm that occurs once every 100 years. In reality, this technical term describes rainfall—occurring over a specified period of time in a certain location—which meets or exceeds the amount that is expected to occur in a single event over a 100-year period. The annual probability of this happening is one percent. Therefore, while highly unlikely, it is possible to have two 100-year storms in consecutive years, or even within the same year. In our region, a 100-year storm is nearly six inches of rainfall in a 24-hour period.



Storm data are used by civil engineers to design a site’s stormwater drainage system, which may include options such as storm sewers, stormwater detention ponds, and rain gardens. ■

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outside the LINES

SAFE PASSAGE

Numbers are relative—depending upon one’s perspective, they can seem large or small. The figure 43,443 is rather small when compared to the United States’ population, which recently exceeded 300 million.

However, to a transportation engineer 43,443 is a big number—too big, as it is the number of people killed in motor vehicle crashes in the United States last year. To give it some perspective, 43,443 is:

- Roughly the combined population of Grand Forks, ND, and East Grand Forks, MN
- Equal to 119 people per day
- Just over fourteen separate 9/11 tragedies
- Nearly the number of people estimated to die this year of prostate and liver cancer

While the numbers are compelling, it is important to remember that traffic fatalities are not statistics. They are family, friends, and co-workers. And, in large part, they can be prevented.

Drivers and passengers can take steps to improve their safety on the road. Nearly 40% of all fatalities last year occurred in alcohol-related crashes. Driving under the influence combined with seat belt use (or helmets in the case of motorcyclists and their passengers), observance of speed limits, and awareness of and adherence to traffic laws would significantly reduce the number of people killed on our nation’s roads.

While drivers and passengers are on the frontline and must take responsibility for their own safety, roadway design also has a direct impact. Identifying, documenting, and addressing roadway safety issues can be accomplished by conducting a Road Safety Audit (RSA), which is a formal examination of an existing or planned roadway conducted by an independent audit team. The American Traffic Safety Services Association publication *Low Cost Local Road Safety Solutions*® outlines some common safety improvements, including

- Improving, replacing, or adding intersection lighting
- Realigning skewed intersections
- Constructing protected right and/or left turn lanes at intersections
- Paving shoulders to remove edge drop-offs on rural highways
- Striping edge lines or placing rumble strips

Federal support is available to local governments through the 2005 Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA–LU) federal transportation act. Recognizing safety as an integral component in highway programs, the act provides \$90 million annually, from 2005 through 2009, to address roadway safety. Minnesota is using a portion of these funds for its Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). Counties may respond to a two-year solicitation (\$2 million per year) to conduct RSAs or to complete projects identified under previous RSAs and other safety improvements. In addition, the 2006 Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$7.65 million for Greater Minnesota counties to use for roadway safety projects.

The North Dakota Highway Safety Plan (HSP) also works to secure funds for implementing traffic safety. The HSP is used for planning, seeking, and administering federal grant requests, and as a state budget document. Proposals are solicited throughout the state, targeting areas which have been identified as posing traffic safety problems.

Along with personal responsibility, the federal SAFETEA–LU, Minnesota’s CHSP, and North Dakota’s HSP play critical roles in reducing rural traffic fatality and injury rates through safe roadway design. ■

Tracey Von Bargen, PE, is a civil engineer with Wisdeth Smith Nolting.



- What information will be needed and in what format?
- What are the deadlines and fees?

Decide what kind of help you need.

With so many variables at play, retaining professionals who are well versed in land development will not only help you through the process, it may be required. Depending upon the complexity of your goals, professionals who may be needed to help you complete your project include land surveyors, engineers, attorneys, architects, land planners, or environmental scientists. A simple division of the family farm may be handled by a surveyor defining lots and an attorney preparing deeds, but a large development with proposed roads and utilities requires a broader team of experts.

Take it from concept to reality. Again, taken one at a time, the steps leading from initial planning to a completed development offer additional opportunities to make educated “go or no-go” decisions.

Armed with the information gathered in the preceding steps—and with your professional team at your side—you are ready to put together a concept plan or feasibility study as well as a preliminary engineer’s estimate of probable construction costs. If the cost is more than the benefit, this is a good place to stop, reassess the project, or redesign it.

Should you decide to proceed, the steps continue through design review,

preliminary plat, final plat, and construction plans and permits. If public money is involved, an assessment hearing or other type of public meeting may also be required.

After you and your team have finalized your plans, your last “go or no-go” decision comes after you have received bids yet before you have awarded a construction contract. The contract may obligate you to a considerable amount of money, but as construction proceeds, you will see the results of all your planning and preparation.

A venture down the development path may sound complex, but by taking it in small, thoughtful steps your project will be manageable and your decisions will be well-informed—regardless where your path takes you. ■

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public SIGHTINGS

The U.S. Department of Defense’s National Resources Conservation Team Award was presented to **Camp Ripley**, Little Falls, Minnesota.

SunOpta received the 2006 Alexandria, MN, Business and Industry Appreciation Day Award.

First Lady Laura Bush designated **Little Falls, MN**, a Preserve America Community.

Cindy Nelson, clerk/treasurer for Crosby, MN, was awarded the designation of Certified Municipal Clerk at the state and international levels.

Aitkin County Administrator **Scott Arneson** accepted the position of Goodhue County Administrator.

ISD 181 Superintendent **Jerry Walseth** (Brainerd, MN) was selected to serve as one of four Minnesota delegates to the American Association of School Administrators Regional Governing Board. ■

If you have a “public SIGHTING,” please contact Liesa Thill, Widseth Smith Nolting, 218.829.5117, lthill@wsn-mn.com.



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