

# Choosing Your Building Site

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There are many factors that affect the choice of a building site. While a particular lot may look like the perfect spot to put your dream home, thoroughly examining all the variables before purchase can help narrow down the choice between lots in a subdivision or even prevent making a totally ill-informed choice. The factors can be roughly described as regulatory factors and environmental factors.

## Regulatory Factors

- The first of these is the Zoning of the property. This will not only affect the allowable use of the property but also allowable site coverage, the distance buildings must be set back from the property lines, building height and total allowable floor area. There may be many additional restrictions with respect to fences, building projections, etc.
- In addition to the restrictions within individual zoning classifications, the local regulatory authorities may have a number of general restrictions related to parking, provision for fire fighting capability, etc.
- Some building lots may fall within Development Permit Areas. This may impose additional restrictions or require an additional approval process and additional permit fees. For example, restrictions may include limitations on the removal of trees or the use of certain materials.
- Steep slopes may be subject to geotechnical review requirements. Floodplain areas may limit siting and construction options.
- Regional authorities may require additional site reviews before granting approval for building. This may include environmental reviews for properties with watercourses or for well water quality. Lots without community sewage will require permits for septic fields. While it is unlikely that a lot may be allowed to be sold without the capability for its own septic field, the location of the field may severely affect the siting of a house.
- The connection of other services--electricity, telephone, cable, gas, etc. can affect the use of the building lot. Sometimes connection to the local power grid means crossing your property with unsightly wires or paying considerable additional costs for burying them. The location of the nearest water for fire fighting may influence available choices of building materials and the cost of insurance.
- Some properties fall under the regulation of local Statutory Building Schemes that have guidelines which place restrictions on the home you wish to construct such as limitations on roof pitch, roofing and other exterior finish materials, or even the use of clotheslines. Often a building 'envelope' is pre-defined on a lot because of topographical restrictions or to lessen the impact of each building on neighboring buildings.
- Building codes may affect construction from the fire-resistance rating of the structure to amount of glazing allowable. The use of wood stoves may be restricted in certain areas.

## Environmental Factors

The environmental factors that influence the nature of a building site include geographic factors such as soil, vegetation and topography; climatic factors such as sun and wind exposure, temperature and precipitation; and sensory factors including views and sound.

## Geographic Factors

- The soil conditions on the building site will affect the building's foundation, the drainage capability and susceptibility to frost action, and the types of vegetation suitable.
- The topography of the land will affect not only the foundation type but how the building can fit into the site, the drainage patterns and, in some cases, the microclimate of the property. The microclimate can also be influenced by proximity to large bodies of water.
- The vegetation will affect the degree of privacy from neighboring properties and the road, as well as sound absorption and micro-climatic factors. The extent and height of trees may affect the amount of natural light reaching a specific house site.

### Climatic Factors

- The sun usually provides the largest climatic impact on the building site. Its effect will vary depending of the climatic zone in which the property is located. Cooler regions will suggest different siting than warmer sites. Different regions also suggest different building shapes which in turn may be impacted by property line setbacks.
- Wind, not only the frequency and direction, but also the velocity and temperature, may affect building sites in dramatic ways. Seasonal and daily variations can be enormous. Wind can be both a liability in overexposed cool sites or an asset if it can be used for cooling in warmer regions.
- While precipitation will vary greatly from one climatic zone to another, it can also vary considerably with local geographic and topographic features. It will in turn affect drainage patterns, access and protection required for equipment, vehicles, firewood, etc. In northern climates, provision for snow shed may impact a building's design and siting.
- The air temperature and its affect on the cooling and heating of the building will be influenced by all of the above: the sun, the wind, and the precipitation.

### Sensory Factors

- Views often tend to be a predominant factor in choosing a building site. Existing views may be affected by regulations restricting tree removal, the future growth of neighboring trees, future neighboring development as well as climatic factors.
- The amount of environmental sound present on a building site can vary greatly within a local region. It may be influenced by natural features such as the proximity to mountains or by mechanical noise from transportation corridors. In many pristine areas, the ever-increasing amount of plane traffic can disturb what appears to be tranquil setting. Some environmental sound can be mitigated by local site features such as berms or dense foliage.

Other factors that affect the use of a building site may include provision of adequate area for access and parking. Steep sites may require transitions to the road and driveways that meet a road at a sharp angle may be prohibited.

While this is only an encapsulated look at factors influencing the choice of a building site, it can help us to make a more informed purchase and result in a better home and quality of life.

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