Fargo Moorhead Regional Document Ready (Certified) Site Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

What is a document-ready site?

A Document Ready Site is a property that is often part of a larger portfolio of sites used to attract commercial and industrial projects by providing site selectors with immediately available, highly detailed and comprehensive site information for their facility location projects. A third party will typically review and verify site-and community-related data and then certify, sign off, or "badge" the site indicating that it meets program requirements.

To develop a piece of property, there are certain requirements and testing that need to be done. For example, the property needs to be tested for any wetland issues or archeological significance. When a region makes a property "document ready" or "shovel ready", they will pay for certain testing and review processes to be done so that it can be ready for a company to develop it, saving them time and money.

What is the difference between document ready and shovel ready?

A "document ready" site is an industry updated way to describe similar programs which have historically been called "shovel ready" sites. The evolution to the term "document ready" is a result of site selection industry leaders who have determined that a site does not necessarily need to be ready for a shovel in the ground but rather all of the critical data documented to allow key decisions about a project to be made. The goal is not to demonstrate that a site is ready for construction today for all types of projects, but rather we know all of the applicable information about that site - where all of the infrastructure is located and how far away it is, site usage history, easements that exist, mineral rights, and much more.

How does a site get picked?

A site is identified and chosen for a variety of reasons the chief amongst is that there are certain attributes about the site that make it particularly marketable to commercial and industrial projects: (40 acres or more, rail access, close to an interstate, near an airport, access to water, access to utilities, and wide variety of other factors could be part of the determination). Secondarily a site must have a willing seller and a price established.

Who are the organizations involved in this?

There are several significant stakeholders across the region who have partnered together to contribute time and energy to make this program a reality. Those stakeholders include multiple communities across the two-county region of Cass and Clay Counties, multiple utility companies, engineering firms, commercial real estate firms and economic development agencies. Fueling Our Future provided the funding to develop and market the program, but the actual expense related to each properties

development rests with the property owner and other partners (cities, for example) who will benefit from the development of the property)

Why create a document ready site?

The primary value of a Document Ready Site Program is that it reduces the time, effort and cost required to assemble and analyze site and infrastructure data for fast-moving company location projects. The effective site readiness program demonstrates to the company that they can get into construction and operation faster than other sites, without the additional cost and time required by doing all of the legwork themselves for sites that may or may not be qualified. For the Economic Development Organization (EDO) and site owner, the value and purpose of these programs is also to save time and effort. While developing these programs can take significant effort and certain necessary studies can be costly, once complete, having well-understood and fully documented sites provides the EDO and the site owner with ready-to-go "product" to present to expanding local companies and to market to outside companies. Having a portfolio of fully documented sites greatly reduces the scramble to respond to RFI's and RFP's by having complete and up-to-date site data on hand, packaged, and ready to send to a prospect the day the RFI is received.

It should also be noted, since the COVID-19 pandemic, national site consultants have shared that the speed of the projects they are working on have accelerated even more than they anticipated and having a document ready set of sites is becoming a critical criteria in their site selection process.

How effective is this strategy overall?

Document Ready Site programs entered the economic development world more than 20 years ago in response to the ever-growing demands of companies and their site selectors for immediately available, highly detailed, and comprehensive site information for their facility location projects. Since then, site readiness programs have evolved from a unique competitive advantage to economic development table stakes.

Now established in one form or another in more than 35 states, these programs have become an essential element of the economic developer's tool kit. For the EDO and site owner, the value and purpose of these programs is also to save time and effort. While developing these programs can take significant effort and certain necessary studies can be costly, once complete, having well-understood and fully documented sites provides the EDO and the site owner with ready-to-go "product" to present to expanding local companies and to market to outside companies. Having a portfolio of fully documented sites greatly reduces the scramble to respond to RFI's and RFP's by having complete and up-to-date site data on hand, packaged, and ready to send to a prospect the day the RFI is received.

Are other communities doing this?

More than 35 states have some form of certified, document or shovel-ready site program. The closest Shovel Ready Site Certification program is run though the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).