



RECOVERY HOUSING BEST PRACTICES

HOW TO SELECT A SITE

HELPFUL TIPS FROM THE FLETCHER GROUP RCOE

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Finding the right spot for a recovery residence isn't easy. Considerable time, effort, and forethought are required. But due diligence in advance can pay off handsomely later. That's because location is so important to a home's ultimate success or failure.

This is particularly true in rural areas because of the close-knit, symbiotic relationship houses have with the surrounding community. No residence is an island, but in remote houses must be especially mindful of location so they can access the services needed to provide a complete "Continuum of Care."

That's why the Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence made this brochure. On the following pages, you'll find a detailed, step-by-step methodology and checklist designed to help you through the process so you can obtain the very best site for your facility, staff, and clients.

A METHODOLOGY
AND CHECKLIST

To help you choose
the best site

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first step in the site selection process is to address the following "facts on the ground."

- The nature and character of the immediate surroundings
- The adequacy of local supportive services
- The availability of financial resources
- Greenspace and recreational facilities
- Community engagement
- Land-use factors such as:
 - Local infrastructure, including water, sewer, and power
 - Flood zone considerations
 - Toxic waste and environmental hazards

Unplanned or prolonged time delays can stifle real estate projects, especially complex ones, so selection should focus not only on areas where the need is great and the location is financially feasible. Consider also locations where there are fewer obstacles to efficient development.



"Not In My Backyard"

NIMBY stands for "Not In My Backyard" and refers to local resistance that can hamper or obstruct a Recovery Housing Project if NIMBYism isn't anticipated and proactively addressed.

For example: Is the project being perceived in the community as "healthy, affordable housing for a vulnerable community?" Or is it being touted as a "Halfway house for drug addicts and criminals?"

Knowing what people are thinking and developing a proactive strategy to address their objections is vital because misinformation can so easily spread regarding high-visibility projects.

What You Can Do

Definite steps can be taken to avoid unnecessary publicity and use public vetting processes proactively. As you promote positive public awareness education, be sure the site you choose meets as many pre-existing regulatory hurdles as possible. For example, does the site comply with existing zoning, land-use, and building codes? Is it compatible with the neighborhood so that it will be supported by your neighbors? Will it be looked on as a benefit, rather than a detriment, to the community? And is it close to potential resources such as a community college, a job center, a health clinic, a community center, or other civic institutions?

THE "RECOVERY ECOSYSTEM"

Recovery Capital refers to assets such as employment, transportation, housing, and social support that people on the path to recovery need to stay the course. The Fletcher Group believes the best way to develop Recovery Capital is with a "Recovery Ecosystem"—a network of supportive services and treatments combined with a safe, sober, and nurturing living environment. Isolated locations without nearby services are not recommended precisely because they make a "Recovery Ecosystem" virtually impossible, especially in rural areas that may already lack adequate healthcare services.

Financial Considerations

Land availability and affordability are obviously necessary. But less obvious factors include incentives such as those offered by state housing authorities and federal agencies. There may be incentives for building in areas where success is considered likely or in distressed areas in need of economic revitalization. Most policy objectives involve a mix of both. As a rule of thumb, site selectors should be aware of all incentives and funding opportunities that may apply to the potential site.

For example: Is the site located in a "Qualified Census Tract?" If so, this enhances the availability of Low Income Housing Tax Credits. It may also qualify the site for New Market Tax Credits or Historic Site Preservation Funding. (The latter often applies to what's called "adaptive reuse projects.") At the end of the day, however, all real estate fundamentals, including the site's location, must be sound. Finally, be sure to select a site that offers a multitude of opportunities while excluding as few as possible. A mixed-income approach that blends multiple sources of financing can result in a stronger, more sustainable project.



Zoning Regulations

It's important that your site comply with all current regulations as well as the future land-use vision or comprehensive plan the community is considering. The site should also be located in a zone where needed construction and/or renovations are allowed "by-right" so that special exceptions and variances will never be needed. Any site that will require an extensive public approval process should be avoided. The person selecting the site should always make a point of meeting personally with city, county, and planning board officials before making a final decision regarding the site.

A HEALTHY SPACE

To promote the health and well-being of staff, clients and visitors, the site should have plenty of sunlight, fresh air, and adequate greenspace for community gardening and other outdoor activities. Safe pedestrian pathways and bicycle paths are also important. Avoid sites that are difficult to reach by walking or cycling.

Community Engagement

Discussions with community stakeholders should begin as soon as the site is selected. Stakeholders include the property owner, the local Housing Agency, city and county governments, local corrections departments, and educational institutions. Before securing your site make sure to define your Project Team and take the time, also, to compile a complete list of allies, organizations supporting your project, and those opposed to it.

Important steps at this time:

- Define the area (in terms of a radius from a specific building)
- Identify resident referral sources
- Identify allies, supporting organizations, and opponents
- Set goals for engaging with the community
- Set the tactics to achieve those goals, such as meetings, public events, surveys, and assessments of community needs
- Define the desired outcomes and impacts

SITE SELECTION FLOW CHART

- 01 Determine the size of project and amount of land needed
- 02 Identify potential sites
- 03 Research land-use factors, i.e. zoning, flood zone, etc.
- 04 Investigate pricing and financing
- 05 Identify purchase options
- 06 Complete all due diligence
- 07 Exercise the option to purchase

Closing The Deal

The final step is to carefully research the property's history, including its deed and any easements or encroachments, preferably using a qualified land-use attorney to ensure legal due diligence. By this time, the project has progressed beyond a conceptual model and is well-defined with a solid budget, established funding streams and financial commitments. The long-term Operational Proforma—a tool used to estimate the expenses of a project during operation—should be in place before closing. Site control can range from an option to purchase or a land-lease agreement up to an outright purchase or a donation of the property.