

SCHOOL SITE SELECTION GUIDE



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Education
Province of British Columbia

Preface

The Ministry of Education School Site Selection Guide has been developed by the School Finance and Capital Planning Branch to assist school districts in the selection and preliminary evaluation of potential school sites. The guide establishes a two-step process for determining the suitability of potential sites for school facilities. This process should *not* be considered as part of a detailed site assessment for development or cost estimating purposes.

Detailed investigation of a site will still be required after schematic designs have been completed.

However, school districts are required to use the School Site Selection Guide when selecting school sites. The Ministry will only consider capital funding requests for school site acquisition projects where the requests are supported by the results of the evaluation process outlined in this guide.

Purpose of the Guide

The School Site Selection Guide has been prepared to provide an uncomplicated evaluation tool for assessing potential school sites. It is intended to:

- ensure school districts comprehensively and systematically evaluate potential sites for new schools
- ensure the Ministry can be confident that public funds are wisely spent on sites for new schools
- avoid site development problem
- streamline approvals from the ministry

A site's condition and development requirements will determine both the costs and timetable of a new school project. Therefore, site selection is the first critical component of the school development program.

School boards in fast-growing districts must frequently compete with developers for good sites, possibly paying a premium for appropriate properties. However, even if it initially

costs more, a good site is usually cheaper in the long run than a marginal site which must be carefully investigated before purchase. This is because the full cost of a site includes the costs of development, costs stemming from legal, zoning, or geotechnical issues, or conditions which prohibit use of a portion of the site or require expensive measures prior to construction.

The process outlined in this document will produce informed decision-making by ensuring that a broad range of factors has been examined before a site is proposed for school development. In addition, the procedure streamlines the site selection process and helps ensure school boards meet the Ministry requirements for capital planning. Finally, it ensures that other parties have comprehensive and consistent information when they are reviewing the feasibility of a site.

Before Looking for a Site

School boards and the Ministry of Education must work together to ensure the timely and cost-effective provision of public schools in British Columbia. For their part, school boards must do the following before seeking to acquire a private site for school development.

1. Investigate the possibility of acquiring Crown land. This takes advantage of a protocol agreement that provides for the reservation and granting of school sites, at a reduced cost to school districts, in new residential developments.
2. Seek to jointly develop facilities with other agencies. The Ministry will give higher priority to capital projects that will be cost-shared between local school boards and other user groups.

No matter how a potential site is to be acquired, the following evaluation process must be followed and a summary report– based on the evaluation– must accompany a school board’s request for school site acquisition funding.

The Evaluation Process

The Evaluation Process

The school district must:

Step 1: Conduct a Snapshot Analysis

- A. Complete a **Details of Proposed Facility Form** (provided on page 5)
- B. Complete a **Snapshot Matrix** (provided on page 6)

Step 2: Conduct a Preliminary Site Analysis

- A. Have a consultant perform a Phase 1 Environmental Assessment.
- B. Have a consultant perform a Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment.
- C. If the site will require an on-site septic sewage system, arrange to have a series of shallow test holes dug to establish suitable soil and water conditions.

Each step leads to a decision. Step 1 may lead to rejecting a site or to more analysis. Step 2 may lead to a rejection or to a site acquisition. In all circumstances, the Ministry will approve site acquisition only after Step 2 has been completed. In addition, if more than one site is being evaluated, completion of Step 2 is required for all sites.

If the process is used to identify the best of several sites (i.e., a preferred site), the school district must describe the site that best meets the criteria set out. When submitting a preferred site to the Ministry of Education as part of its five-year capital plan submission, the school board must:

- (a) indicate how the site was selected from other potential sites
- (b) provide a summary of findings on all sites evaluated
- (c) describe the preferred site

How the Process Works

The two-step process includes a list of critical indicators which must be achieved before environmental and geotechnical assessments are performed by consultants.

Step 1 is to be completed by school district officials with additional input from other sources, as required. It will be necessary to check with the local government for much of the information required to complete the Snapshot Matrix. Other information about the site's conditions should be available from local residents or from professionals, such as land use consultants, real estate agents, landscape architects, or geotechnical engineers.

Step 1: Snapshot Analysis

A. Details of Proposed Facility Form

This form (see page 5) is to be completed by the school board as a ready reference for site requirements. These details are to be supplied to all consultants, along with the consultant's terms of reference. This information will also be needed by the regional office of the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, when it determines whether a detailed environmental assessment is needed.

B. Snap-Shot Matrix

A number of conditions are fundamental to basic site analysis or site development. These are critical 'trigger' factors and will quickly determine a 'go'/'no go' situation, thereby saving resources and time that might otherwise be used to evaluate a site. The Snapshot Matrix (see page 6) outlines these critical indicators.

If any of the indicators is checked "yes", the site should normally be rejected. If information is not immediately available or a decision is pending for any of the critical indicators further assessment will normally be postponed.

Step 2: Preliminary Site Analysis

When a site has passed Step 1, and therefore appears to have good potential for school development, districts should proceed to the second step. To begin this step, a Phase 1 Environmental and a Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment must be performed by consultants. It is expected that the school board will hire a firm that has geotechnical experience in the local area or region.

The consultants contracted by the school board for Step 2 should also:

- have a demonstrated knowledge of site analysis
- carry adequate professional liability insurance
- be registered professionals in the province of British Columbia

Lists of qualified consultants can be obtained from professional organizations. For example, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, Planning Institute of British Columbia, and British Columbia Society of Landscape Architects each have lists of potential consultants who may have experience in site analysis and planning. Ultimately, school districts are responsible for identifying consultants most appropriate for their needs.

A. Phase 1 Environmental Assessment

The Phase 1 Environmental Assessment will commonly include a site visit, a review of the history of site occupancy, the collection of relevant environmental information, and the inspection of any buildings on the site. As part of the environmental assessment, the consultant will contact the nearest regional office of the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. Depending on how much knowledge it already has about the site, they may require a detailed environmental assessment. The regional office can also advise

the school board of any requirements of current legislation related to site contamination.

B. Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment

The Preliminary Geotechnical Assessment will involve a visual reconnaissance of the site, as well as limited subsurface investigation. The consultant will determine geotechnical issues relating to:

- provision of underground services
- suitable foundation types for the site
- site grading and surface structures (i.e., slabs-on-grade and pavement structures)
- septic sewage systems (where required)

After a site is acquired, a more detailed analysis must be conducted prior to school construction.

This analysis should be done when enough schematic design work has been completed to determine the approximate shape and location of the school building, play fields, parking lots, and driveways. A detailed investigation will typically require four to eight borehole studies, analysis, and reporting.

For more information on site development, please contact the Capital Implementation Branch, Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations.

Costs

The Ministry of Education will assist school districts with costs incurred while following the site selection process. Fees paid by the Ministry are estimated as follows (exclusive of travel and disbursements):

Step 1

School district personnel should be able to complete the **Details of Proposed Facility Form** and the **Snap-Shot Matrix** with little or no expense.

Step 2

Phase 1 Environmental	\$1,500 - \$3,000
Preliminary Geotechnical	\$1,500 - \$2,000
Septic System (optional)	\$1,000

Total	<hr/> <hr/> \$4,000 - \$6,000 <hr/> <hr/>
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development. Other factors include the presence of buildings on the site, the type of activities previously conducted on the site, and the local availability of qualified consultants.

Fees will be supplemented to accommodate the costs of travelling to remote locations.

Costs of evaluating sites will be funded as a minor capital project in the same year that the Ministry supports a site acquisition project in a school board's Five-Year Capital Plan. Site funding may only be approved where the Ministry receives the results of the site selection process.

These estimates should help determine the extent of the work to be performed by consultants. Costs will vary, depending on such factors as the extent of known hazards or stage of

Details of Proposed Facility Form

The Details of Proposed Facility Form should be completed as part A of Step 1: Snapshot Analysis.

SCHOOL PROGRAM:

Proposed facility: _____

School capacity: _____

Catchment area: _____

Proposed site location: _____

Description of adjacent sites: _____

SITE REQUIREMENTS¹:

Site size: _____

Approximate building area: _____

Approximate playground area: _____

Approximate parking area: _____

Access requirements (roadway, highway entrance, etc.): _____

Describe proposed or anticipated community uses of the school facility: _____

¹ See Ministry of Education Area Standards, March 1999

Snap-Shot Evaluation Matrix

The Snap-Shot Evaluation Matrix should be completed as part B of Step 1: Snap-Shot Analysis. If any responses are marked “yes”, reject the site or obtain more information before proceeding to Step 2: Preliminary Site Analysis.

Critical Indicator		Yes	Unknown	Comments
Size	Inadequate size and/or potential for future expansion			
Legal	Title search reveals legal impediments to development			
Site Services	Necessary services cannot be provided to site			
Access	Ministry of Transportation and Highways or municipality indicates access difficulties			
Location	Location inappropriate for student population			
Zoning/ Land Use	Existing or proposed zoning/land use designation prevents development as school site			
Adjacent Uses	Known or anticipated unsuitable development on adjacent properties			
Area Hazards	Hazardous location, known or anticipated hazards from adjacent properties (e.g., floodplain, alluvial or colluvial fan, electromagnetic radiation, highway, railway, hazardous material storage or discharge)			
Site Hazards	Known or suspected site hazards (e.g. contamination, terrain hazards)			
Geotechnical	Unreasonable slope gradients (i.e., in excess of 15°), known geotechnical constraints (e.g., poor surface drainage, rock, uncontrolled fill sites, excessively soft soil conditions, areas of instability)			
Aboriginals	Known or potential aboriginal interest in site			
Habitat	Known or potential significant environmental concerns with site (e.g., fish-bearing streams, unique flora or fauna)			
Heritage/ Archaeological	Artifacts of known or potential historical/ archaeological significance			