

# Marketing sites and buildings in your city

By Amy Whitehead

Most cities have vacant or available properties that can be utilized for economic development. There are several avenues through which those properties can be marketed using existing site selection tools and resources, enabling a city to turn liabilities into economic opportunities.

Steve Jones, building and sites manager for the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC), works closely with cities all over the state to identify potential real estate that can be marketed for economic development purposes. Steve may advise on the highest and best use for a property and provide measurement and diagram services for buildings that are eligible for the state's site selection website, [www.arkansassiteselection.com](http://www.arkansassiteselection.com).



The site selection website is a partnership among Entergy, AEDC, and cities.

In order for property to be listed on the website it must be industrial, warehousing, commercial, or office related. A building must be 10,000 square feet or larger and must be available to be occupied within 90 days; sites must be 10 acres or larger. All property must have a set price.

If cities have available buildings or sites that can be marketed, but do not meet the minimum requirement to

be listed on the website, Steve still recommends tracking those properties through a local database so that the information is readily available if an opportunity should arise.

For the site selection website, there is one designated property manager that is responsible for uploading site and building information. The mayor or city manager designates a property manager for their city. The mayor will also designate an editor, whose role is to update the city's profile information, and an economic development point of contact will be assigned to work directly with AEDC when economic development prospects are interested in a property.

Sometimes cities go through periods of time where these roles are unfilled. It is very important that the property manager role be filled, because that individual will be contacted once a month to verify that all property information is up-to-date. If there is no contact from this person after a period of time, the property will become inactive on the website.

In addition to the Entergy/AEDC-supported statewide site selection website, Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas (ECA) has recently unveiled an economic development website, [www.WeAreArkansas.com](http://www.WeAreArkansas.com), that shows sites and buildings available in distribution cooperative territories. According to JD Lowery, community and economic development manager for ECA, this website is an effort to "provide rural communities within our territories with additional marketing opportunities that complement AEDC's website. Interested communities can contact their local distribution cooperative representative for more information." The minimum requirements are the same as those required to be listed on AEDC's statewide site selection tool, and ECA's website includes aerial videos of sites and buildings shot with unmanned aerial videos, otherwise known as drones. ECA hopes to have a video from each of its 17 territories within the next year and a half.

"A community with growth aspirations must have a strategy for marketing itself to business," explains Joe Bailey, senior project manager in business recruitment for Entergy Arkansas. "Without a strategy a lot of time, money and energy can be wasted."

So what should a city do to make the most efficient use of its resources and effectively market available sites and buildings?

Entergy offers a variety of services to the communities it serves, including site analysis and certification, GIS/mapping, strategic planning and marketing assistance. Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas is also an important economic development resource for the communities it serves. Make sure all your property information is maintained and updated, and that your city has a designated property manager, community editor, and economic development point of contact with the state.

Joe Bailey with Entergy recommends a city ask itself strategic questions so that it can better understand its competitive advantage in the global marketplace, and position itself to be most competitive for investment. How can my city find a niche in the changing energy market? What will happen if/when the price of natural gas goes back up? Are we an attractive community for millennials? Do we have a natural resource that is currently underutilized? Can we take advantage of our location to eliminate business costs for a particular industry sector? It may be helpful to have a target industry analysis.

If your city has a site or building listed on the site selection website, consider AEDC's Prospect Readiness Education Program (PREP). This training will help local leaders improve their interactions with prospects and respond to RFIs through the site selection process. Make sure your sites are 'shovel-ready' and that the site is clean, mowed, and visible.

While attracting outside investors to fill empty land or buildings is not the only strategy a city should pursue, it should be part of a balanced approach to economic development at the local level. If you have available sites and buildings that can be marketed to site selectors and businesses, contact your utility provider or AEDC to find out how to get these properties appropriately listed through all available avenues.



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