


West, Middle Tennessee promote 'deal ready' sites

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Since 2008, two of Tennessee's three megasites have become home to major corporations.

But those projects, which total \$2.2 billion in investment, aren't indicative of the majority of firms typically looking to move to Tennessee.

It's a void that economic development officials in middle and west Tennessee have been trying to fill. Their program, called Deal Ready, was launched in 2005 as a way to attract smaller industrial properties. Since then, about 10 percent of the 1,800 acres of tagged properties in Middle Tennessee have been used.

But now, officials believe a combination of factors could put more Middle Tennessee locations on the short list for site-selectors, an integral component for communities looking to land new firms.

Namely, the recession could give the remainder of Deal Ready properties a leg up as pre-certified sites have become increasingly popular for companies considering relocation. The group also is expanding the program to target rural areas, which historically have been neglected because they lack basic site-selection needs.

Currently, there are 19 pre-certified sites in the Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Association's 38-county area — including those in Lebanon, Gallatin and Murfreesboro. Only properties owned or controlled by a city, county or industrial commission are eligible for



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Bill Shuff, executive director of the Middle Tennessee Industrial Development Association, said the recession has limited the program's success but that certified sites have gone further in the location review process.

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the program.

In Gallatin, officials believe the Deal Ready certification will help propel its 207-acre park expansion into an economic driver.

"Having this independent validation ... removes a company's risk of making a bad selection," said **Clay Walker**, executive director of the [Gallatin Economic Development Agency](#).

The validation also speaks to the commitment a community has to expansion, said **James Chavez**, president and CEO of the Clarksville-Montgomery County Economic Development Council.

"You have to commit to spend time, money and resources to meet that criteria," he said.

Clarksville has two Deal Ready sites: a 500-acre and a 40-acre portion of its corporate business park.

Mark Williams, president of Strategic Development Group Inc., said about 20 percent of pre-certified sites in a typical program are bought. Williams' South Carolina-based company offers site location, negotiation and economic development services and was involved in developing the criteria for properties in the Deal Ready program.

The importance of having third-party validation has grown in recent years, as the economy has forced companies to cut expenses.

Williams said sometimes when a company flies to a community to check out a site it ends up being "a waste of time" as the land is not what the locale promised. Pre-certification eliminates that uncertainty.

Bill Shuff, executive director of the industrial development association, said the recession has limited the program's success, but certified sites have gone further in the location review process.

Doug Brandon, managing principal of Cassidy Turley's Nashville office, said pre-certification can be risky and pricey but is vital for competitive reasons.

"It's an expensive investment on the front end, but it's a huge payoff on the back end," Brandon said. Companies want to "get a physical and mental lock-in on something instead of just sitting there looking at a set of rocks."

Shuff said it costs about \$1,850 to certify a site, though that can vary depending on the size of the property. And while the service is free to communities, putting the infrastructure in to get the approval can be pricey.

For example, in Clarksville an 880-acre expansion of the corporate business park cost about \$30 million, which included buying the land, putting in a four-lane road and other infrastructure.

Site Criteria Requirements for Deal Ready Sites 50 Acres and Above

- Clear ownership and control

- Type of sale or lease transaction known
- Minimum of 50 contiguous acres
- Transportation access
- Four-lane truck route
- Within two hours of commercial airport
- Zoned for industrial use
- Outside of the 100-year flood plain
- Free of environmental issues, Phase I Study complete
- Availability of utilities

Minimums:

- 7,500 KVA Electricity
- Natural Gas
- 250,000 GPD Water and Sewer
- T1 Telecommunications
- Site and topography maps prepared
- All relevant information available

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