Settlement Site Evaluation Framework

Site selection is where the philosophy first encounters physical reality.

And we should **not** evaluate a site primarily as conventional development does—price, access, utilities, entitlement, marketability. Those matter, but our first question is different:

> **Does this place already contain—or have the realistic capacity to develop—the conditions necessary for a capable, connected, resilient human settlement?**

I would use a **four-level hierarchy** rather than simply essential/beneficial:

E — Essential: Failure may eliminate the site.
C — Critical: Strongly preferred; weakness requires a credible solution.
V — Valuable: Significantly strengthens the settlement.
O — Opportunity: Not required, but could become a distinctive asset.

And importantly, **Essentials should not be averaged away**. A spectacular site with poor water security is still a poor site.

1. Water — E

This would be my first filter.

Evaluate:

- Reliable year-round water source
- Quantity relative to projected population and agriculture
- Water quality
- Legal access/water rights
- Groundwater or spring recharge
- Drought vulnerability
- Ability to capture rainwater
- Watershed condition
- Storage potential
- Gravity-fed distribution potential
- Ability to treat and reuse wastewater
- Flood risk

The deeper question isn't simply **“Is there water?”**

It is:

> **Can this settlement understand, protect, manage, replenish, and remain connected to its water system?**

A site dependent entirely upon an externally controlled water system would score substantially lower even if water is currently plentiful.

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2. Capacity to Produce Food — E

Not necessarily complete food self-sufficiency. Our idea of **Connected Resilience** is much better.

Evaluate:

- Productive soils
- Rainfall and growing season
- Agricultural suitability
- Existing agriculture nearby
- Local farmers
- Livestock potential
- Orchards/perennial crops
- Community and household garden potential
- Irrigation availability
- Local food markets
- Food-processing capability
- Regional agricultural diversity

I would explicitly evaluate the **surrounding agricultural community as part of the site's assets**.

A 50-hectare property surrounded by productive farms may have greater food resilience than a 500-hectare isolated property trying to produce everything internally.

Think:

Home + Settlement + Local Producers + Regional Markets + Conventional Supply Chains

The more layers available, the greater the resilience.

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3. Appropriate Land-to-Human Capacity — E

This is fundamental to our thinking and often ignored.

Ask:

> **Can this land support the intended population without forcing the systems we value off-site?**

Not merely:

> How many lots can we fit?

Evaluate land needed for:

- Housing
- Food production
- Water systems
- Productive activities
- Enterprise
- Education
- Public life
- Recreation
- Ecological protection
- Waste/resource cycling
- Infrastructure
- Future adaptation

This should ultimately produce one of our own metrics: a **functional land-to-human ratio**, adjusted for climate and context rather than a universal density number.

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4. Ecological Capacity & Environmental Fit — E

The settlement should work *with* the site's ecological reality.

Evaluate:

- Topography
- Soil stability
- Watersheds
- Existing vegetation
- Biodiversity
- Wildlife corridors
- Erosion
- Fire risk
- Flooding
- Landslide risk

- Hurricanes/severe weather
- Heat
- Drought
- Climate-change exposure
- Areas that should simply not be developed

Some land should tell you **no**.

That's part of responsible development.

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5. Existing Human Community — C

This one is especially important to our model.

I would generally prefer a site **near an existing healthy town or village rather than an isolated piece of beautiful land**.

Look for:

- Existing community
- Local families
- Farmers
- Tradespeople
- Craftspeople
- Small businesses
- Markets
- Schools
- Clinics
- Churches/social institutions
- Local knowledge
- Local traditions
- Existing economic activity

The surrounding town isn't something the settlement needs to protect itself from.

It can be one of the settlement's greatest assets.

This also helps prevent our model from becoming an expatriate enclave or artificial intentional community disconnected from the culture around it.

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6. Productive Economic Potential — C

Ask:

> **What can people actually do here?**

Look beyond employment.

Evaluate potential for:

- Agriculture
- Food processing
- Workshops
- Trades
- Construction
- Professional work
- Remote work
- Cottage industries
- Manufacturing
- Hospitality where appropriate
- Education
- Research
- Healthcare
- Services
- Artisan production
- Regional commerce
- Exportable goods/services

A settlement needs **economic metabolism**.

Money should enter, circulate, create value, and support meaningful livelihoods.

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7. Energy Potential — C

Evaluate:

- Solar resource
- Micro-hydro where appropriate
- Wind where genuinely viable
- Biomass/waste opportunities
- Grid availability
- Grid reliability
- Backup possibilities
- Storage
- Microgrid potential

- Passive climatic design

Again, resilience through **layers**, not necessarily independence:

Efficiency + Passive Design + Local Generation + Storage + Grid Connection + Backup

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8. Regional Connection Without Dependency — C

Isolation isn't resilience.

Evaluate access to:

- Nearby town
- Regional city
- Hospitals
- Universities
- Airports
- Major markets
- Suppliers
- Government services
- Transportation networks
- Telecommunications

But also ask:

> **If one of these connections were interrupted temporarily, would ordinary life immediately become impossible?**

That's a very different accessibility metric.

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9. Human Scale & Walkability Potential — C

Some land naturally lends itself to human-scale settlement; some fights it.

Look for:

- Terrain conducive to walking
- Ability to cluster development
- Short everyday distances
- Natural centers/gathering areas
- Comfortable microclimate

- Shade potential
- Mixed-use possibilities
- Limited need for internal automobile travel
- Topography capable of creating interesting spatial relationships

A beautiful property that forces everyone into a vehicle for every activity contradicts an important part of the model.

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10. Health-Supporting Environment — C

This is where our Blue Zone influence becomes useful without turning the development into a "Blue Zone project."

Evaluate whether the place naturally supports:

- Everyday movement
- Walking
- Nature contact
- Social interaction
- Fresh food
- Purposeful activity
- Intergenerational contact
- Low environmental pollution
- Rest
- Community participation
- Meaningful work

The question is:

> **Does healthy behavior emerge naturally from ordinary life here, or must it constantly be added artificially?**

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11. Climate & Human Comfort — C

Climate has enormous consequences for both quality of life and resource demand.

Evaluate:

- Temperature
- Humidity
- Diurnal temperature variation

- Rainfall
- Seasonal extremes
- Natural ventilation potential
- Solar exposure
- Shade
- Heating/cooling requirements
- Outdoor comfort
- Mosquito/vector pressure
- Ability to live outside comfortably for much of the year

A benign climate is effectively a **natural infrastructure asset**.

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12. Legal & Governance Environment — E/C

Some otherwise wonderful sites simply shouldn't be pursued.

Evaluate:

- Clear title
- Land-use rights
- Water rights
- Development permissions
- Environmental restrictions
- Agricultural restrictions
- Subdivision/condominium regimes
- Building requirements
- Tax structure
- Foreign ownership restrictions
- Political stability
- Local government competence
- Corruption/institutional risk
- Ability to establish the intended governance structure

I would make **clear title and legal feasibility Essential**; broader governance quality is Critical.

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13. Infrastructure — C

But with an important distinction.

Existing infrastructure isn't automatically better.

Evaluate:

- Roads
- Electricity
- Internet
- Water
- Wastewater
- Drainage
- Solid waste
- Communications

Then ask:

Which should we connect to?

Which should we supplement?

Which should we create locally?

Which could be decentralized?

The objective is not maximum infrastructure.

It is **appropriate infrastructure**.

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14. Education & Knowledge Ecosystem — V

Look beyond existing schools.

Look for:

- Skilled local people
- Farmers
- Builders
- craftspeople
- elders
- universities
- technical schools
- researchers
- ecological organizations
- apprenticeships
- businesses willing to teach
- traditional knowledge

You're really assessing:

> **What can this place teach?**

That's a fascinating site-selection criterion that almost no conventional developer would consider.

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15. Cultural Compatibility & Local Receptiveness — C

I would take this very seriously.

Ask:

- Will the surrounding community welcome the project?
- Can the development create genuine reciprocal value?
- Are local people likely to participate?
- Will it create employment without displacement?
- Can newcomers integrate rather than colonize socially?
- Are there existing cultural practices worth reinforcing?
- Is there potential for trust?
- Could rising land values damage the community you're hoping to strengthen?

A technically perfect site with strong local hostility could be fundamentally wrong.

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16. Beauty, Identity & Sense of Place — V

This shouldn't be dismissed as subjective.

Look for:

- Views
- Water
- Forest
- Mountains
- Agricultural landscape
- Mature trees
- Topographic character
- Historic structures
- Local building traditions
- Distinctive materials
- Seasonal change

- Sounds
- Natural landmarks

People protect places they love.

Beauty can become an asset for stewardship.

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17. Adaptability & Expansion — V

Ask whether the site allows the settlement to **become** rather than merely be built.

- Phased growth
- Changing uses
- New enterprises
- Additional food production
- Evolving infrastructure
- Experimental projects
- Future technologies
- Demographic changes
- Expansion without destroying the original human scale

I would strongly prefer a site that permits **organic evolution**.

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18. Affordability & Economic Feasibility — E

This belongs near the end philosophically but is obviously essential commercially.

Evaluate:

- Land cost
- Infrastructure cost
- Site preparation
- Water development
- Energy
- Roads
- permitting
- Construction costs
- Carrying costs
- Financing
- Market affordability

- Revenue opportunities
- Phasing
- Long-term operating costs

But there's an important distinction:

> **Cheap land is not necessarily affordable land.**

A cheap remote property requiring enormous infrastructure and lifelong transportation dependence may ultimately be extremely expensive.

I'd evaluate **total settlement cost**, not merely acquisition price.

One category that is different from all the others

19. The Unmeasurable Quality — V

After all the analysis, I would deliberately leave room for something that doesn't fit neatly into a spreadsheet:

> **Does this place have the potential to become somewhere people genuinely want to belong?**

There are sites where the landscape, existing town, climate, agriculture, people, scale, history, and feeling of the place somehow work together.

You walk it and begin seeing possibilities.

That shouldn't override water, legal feasibility, economics, or ecology.

But it shouldn't be ignored either.

A settlement isn't ultimately a collection of optimized systems. It becomes a place.

I would then score sites in two stages

Stage One — Non-Negotiable Screen

Before spending substantial money or design effort, I would require:

✓ Secure water
✓ Legal feasibility / clear title
✓ Ecologically appropriate land
✓ Sufficient functional land capacity
✓ Food-production potential locally or regionally
✓ Economically achievable acquisition/development
✓ No unacceptable natural hazard

Failure of one of these is potentially a **No-Go**, regardless of total score.

Then:

Stage Two — Settlement Potential

Score each major category perhaps **1–5**:

1 — Fundamentally weak
2 — Significant limitation
3 — Workable
4 — Strong
5 — Exceptional

But I would also score one additional dimension:

Existing / Developable

For example, a site might have:

Local economy: 2 existing / 5 developable

That's much more informative than simply giving it a 2. Some weaknesses represent **opportunity**; others represent fundamental constraints.

And that distinction fits our philosophy extremely well:

> **We are not merely looking for the best land.**
>
> **We are looking for places where the right conditions already exist—or where they can responsibly be developed.**

This should become our **SANYC/Investor Developments Site Assessment tool**, perhaps 4–6 pages, with weighted scoring and a final **Settlement Potential Profile** rather than one simplistic numerical score.

And there is one criterion we should keep prominent:

We are not asking, “How much development can this land support?”

We are asking, “What kind of human life can this land and its surrounding community responsibly support?”