



amy green design

Why a Feasibility Study is Your First Step Towards a Successful Building Project


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01 What is a Feasibility Study

A feasibility study is a report that shows you what is possible for your building project based on the site, existing conditions, zoning, building codes, local regulations and other legal restrictions.

How Zoning Effects Feasibility

Many regulations affect what you can build on a site. To get really specific, your site falls into a specific block and lot number on file with your local building department. It's even possible for different parts of your lot to fall under different zoning regulations which yes, actually means that you have to build differently on different parts of your site based on its zoning across your site.

What zoning district(s) your building project lies in affects what you're allowed to build there and how large it can be. Your site might also fall in an overlay district, which will put further restrictions on the site, or it might be in a special district which will add special requirements to what you can build on site.

Zoning regulations also determine how tall your building can be, how close it can be built to the property lines, how much open space you need on the site, and more. Certain uses also put further restrictions on the spaces you're building. For example, if you want to build a bedroom in a residential building there are numerous requirements the space has to meet in order to legally be a bedroom such as that it must be a minimum of 8'-0" x 10'-0", it must be at least 8'-0" tall, it cannot be located in a cellar, and must meet specific requirements for access to light and air --- and that's just a few of the requirements.

There are unique legal strategies you can employ to make the most of your building project that many people aren't aware are available to them. Zoning lot mergers, Landmarks transfers, purchasing air rights, and easements are all examples of these little known "secrets" of the pros they can reveal and share with you in a Feasibility Study.



Some zoning allows you benefits; referred to in NYC as “Incentive Zoning”. For example, there are Floor Area bonuses for providing what is viewed as benefits to the surrounding community such as providing a public plaza on-site, public arcade through your building, or building affordable housing.

How Development Rights Effect Feasibility

There are also unique legal strategies you can employ to make the most of your building project that many people aren’t aware are available to them. Zoning lot mergers, Landmarks transfers, purchasing air rights, and easements are all examples of these little known “secrets” of the pros.

A **zoning lot merger** would allow you to merge your site with an adjacent under-built site in order to build more in total on the combined lot.

Landmark transfers allows you to purchase under-built floor area from historically landmarked property that were under-built, allowing you to purchase and then build all the additional floor area on your site that is currently under-built on a neighboring historical site.

An **easement** allows you to enter or use the property of another owner for the benefit of both owners. An example of this I’ve often used is an easement for a driveway between two homes where both owners agree to an easement that will allow for half of the total driveway to be on each of their properties so they can both use the shared driveway while giving up less space to the overall driveway on each of their individual properties. Through a Feasibility Study, Amy green design can help identify and recommend unique solutions to you so you can take your building project to the next level.

How Building Code Effects Feasibility

The Building Code also puts restrictions on what and how you build, in order to protect life safety. They require that an elevator be included if your building is above four stories, for example. They require a certain amount of stairs and exits in your building based on the number of people in your building and how the spaces in the building will be used. All of those affect the cost of your project, time of your construction schedule, and take space in your building that you could otherwise be leasing to a tenant. It’s important to realize space in your building will be taken up by these exits, egress, stairs, halls, corridors, and equipment rooms. These spaces often take 15-30% of the square footage in your building on average and this ratio of space is often referred to as “efficiency”.

Through a Feasibility Study, amy green design can help identify and recommend unique solutions to you so you can take your building project to the next level. Learn more at amygreendesign.com

An aerial photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with a large body of water (Hudson River) on the left and a prominent skyscraper (Empire State Building) on the far left. The foreground shows a green, hilly area with trees.

How Existing Conditions Affect Feasibility

Existing conditions of buildings or structures on a site also limit what you're able to build on-site and how you're able to renovate it. NYC has gone through multiple iterations of Zoning Resolutions and various versions of Building Codes over the last one hundred years, so that unfortunately, an existing building often is not built up to current codes, and depending on how you want to renovate, reuse, or demolish it, will determine what you're able to rebuild on-site.

Meeting Your Project Goals Through a Feasibility Study

When any green design performs a Feasibility Study for you, they will review all of the information mentioned above and more --- to help you get the most out of your building project while working with your desired building type, use, budget, schedule, goals and priorities.

The Building Code puts restrictions on what and how you build in order to protect life safety. Any green design can help you navigate those codes while showing you through a Feasibility Study proposed building solutions that meet code while also meeting your project goals.



02 When to Perform a Feasibility Study

Performing a building study when you're considering purchasing a site, leasing a space, or renovating an existing building will help you determine what is possible for that building. Amy Green Design can even perform numerous Feasibility Studies for you across numerous sites you're interested in, to help you select the site or existing building that could be most advantageous for you to take ownership of or start renovating.

03 Why Perform a Feasibility Study

Amy Green Design can perform a Feasibility Study for you to show you the potential of the site and building, and can do so at a fraction of the cost and time to contract and retain firms for full Architectural & Engineering design.

If the Feasibility Study shows the building site will meet your goals, you can then go ahead and make a much more informed decision to then contract with your Architectural, Engineering, and Construction team for the full design and construction of the building.

With firms such as Amy Green Design having expert knowledge of the local regulations, they can also help you tap the greatest potential for your building project through a thorough Feasibility Study that can show you hidden possibilities you might not have even known the site had.

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04 What a Feasibility Study Entails

A well-prepared Feasibility Study, such as those Amy Green Design performs, will look at all the regulations and restrictions that will affect your project and provide you with a report and drawings of what would be required and what you'd be allowed to build on your specific site or in your specific building space --- that will best meet your goals for the project.

Amy Green Design performs two types of Feasibility Studies for our clients, depending on their unique site, building, and needs at the time of the Feasibility Study. Our Feasibility Study is sufficient for most clients in order to determine how and if the site can meet their needs. For more complex building projects or projects where perhaps you need to present your desired building to investors or shareholders, then our Feasibility Study Plus is utilized to service their needs and provides them with everything in our typical Feasibility Study plus additional services. A summary of what is typically included in the Feasibility Studies is shown below.

Feasibility Study

- Zoning District Summary for your District(s)
- Floor Area Ratio (FAR) Which is the Maximum Area You're Able to Build On Site
- Setbacks Required
- Lot coverage & Open Space Required
- Building height & Number of Floors Allowed
- Rough square footage of spaces for the development
- Egress & Circulation Requirements Such as How Many Stairs, Elevators & Exits are needed
- Approximate number of tenants that could be accommodated (residential or commercial)
- Parking Requirements
- Schematic Typical Floorplans
- Schematic Front Elevation
- Fee Estimates from Consultants & Contractors Required for Your project
- Scope of Work Summary Required for Your Project
- List of Consultants Required for Your Project

Feasibility Study Plus – Provides Everything Listed Above Plus Everything Listed Below

- Existing Conditions Survey
- Lease Review
- Air Rights Summary
- Easement Summary
- Recommendations of the Building Systems, Materials & Structure for your project
- Street Tree & Planting Requirements
- 3d Renderings of Proposed Development



05 Summary

In summary, there are many rules, regulations, laws, codes, jurisdictions and variables that affect what you're able to build on your site or within your leased space. Those limit what you can use the spaces in the building for i.e., could it be used for a restaurant, residence, office building, or other use. They also limit how tall the building can be, how close it can be built to property lines, how windows and doors are located in the building, and other factors that will affect the size and shape of the building. It also determines how many people can be in the space, how many separate tenants or residences you can have on the site, how many stairs or elevators will be required, and more.

Given all the factors that affect the potential of a building project, it's in your best interest to perform a Feasibility Study as the first step in your project when looking at leasing or purchasing a site or contracting and retaining an Architecture & Engineering team for the full scope of work to complete the project from design through construction. Feasibility Studies also allow time in the project to thoroughly evaluate all the options and solutions available to you for the building project and present those options to you so you can move forward with a strategy that is best for your unique project and goals.

Contact amy green design today to discuss how we can assist you as the Architect on your building project, kicking it off with a Feasibility Study to help you determine the full potential of your project.

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