

Site Evaluation Framework

How to Score Housing Development Sites in Santa Clara County

Introduction

Not all sites are equally suitable for housing development. Location, infrastructure, environmental factors, and equity implications all matter. This framework explains the four scoring dimensions used by the Housing Site Suitability Scorer and how to interpret scores to prioritize sites for housing.

Four Scoring Dimensions

1. Transit Access (Default 30% Weight)

What it measures: Distance to nearest high-frequency transit stop (rail, BRT, or local bus).

How it scores: Rail and BRT stations score higher than bus stops. Sites within 0.25 miles of high-frequency transit score highest.

Why it matters: Reduces car dependency, supports walkable neighborhoods, reaches service workers.

2. Services & Amenities (Default 20% Weight)

What it measures: Proximity to essential services: grocery stores, pharmacies, schools, parks, libraries, medical clinics.

How it scores: Count of services within 0.5-mile walk. More services = higher score.

Why it matters: Improves quality of life and reduces need for car travel.

3. Environmental Safety (Default 20% Weight)

What it measures: Absence of natural hazards: fire zones, flood risk, liquefaction zones.

How it scores: Sites in fire zones or flood-prone areas score lower. Safe sites score highest.

Why it matters: Protects residents and avoids costly mitigation measures.

4. Equity / Fair Housing (Default 20% Weight)

What it measures: TCAC/HCD Opportunity Area status and CalEnviroScreen pollution burden indicators.

How it scores: Sites in high-opportunity areas or in disadvantaged communities with overburdened populations score higher.

Why it matters: Advancing Fair Housing Act goals by placing housing in opportunity-rich areas and reducing concentrated poverty.

How to Use Site Scores

Score Range: 0–100

- **80–100:** Ideal site for housing. Transit-rich, services nearby, safe, in opportunity area.
- **60–79:** Strong site. Some constraints but solvable.
- **40–59:** Moderate site. Tradeoffs between location and safety, or isolated from services.
- **Below 40:** Challenging site. Requires mitigation (shuttle bus, new services, environmental remediation).

Common Use Cases

- Prioritize your vacant and underutilized land inventory for housing development.
- Evaluate proposals from developers—does the site location make sense?
- Identify sites that need targeted investment (new transit, street improvements, service expansion).
- Make data-driven arguments for zoning changes—high-opportunity sites get priority.
- Track if your housing is distributing across equity zones or concentrating in low-opportunity areas.

Use the Housing Site Suitability Scorer to interactively score Santa Clara County sites and customize scoring weights based on your planning priorities.