

Small Cell Site Selection Checklist

10 Critical Red Flags to Identify BEFORE Spending \$35K

With average small cell deployment costs exceeding \$35,000 per site and permitting timelines stretching 18-24 months in many jurisdictions, identifying fatal flaws early can save hundreds of thousands of dollars and prevent catastrophic project delays. Use this checklist during initial site evaluation to avoid the most common—and costly—mistakes.

■ RED FLAG #1: Municipal Permitting Moratorium

- Check: Has the municipality enacted a small cell moratorium or temporary ban?

Why it matters: Some cities have paused all small cell permits while updating ordinances. Deploying in these areas can delay your project 12-24+ months.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** Project timeline extends by 12-24 months | No workarounds available

■ RED FLAG #2: Insufficient Power Access Within 100 Feet

- Check: Is there existing power infrastructure within 100 feet of proposed site?
- Check: If not, what is the cost estimate for trenching and new service installation?

Why it matters: Running new electrical service can add \$15,000-\$50,000 per site depending on distance and municipal requirements.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** Additional \$15K-50K per site | 3-6 month delay for utility coordination

■ RED FLAG #3: No Fiber Backhaul Within 500 Feet

- Check: Is fiber infrastructure available within 500 feet?
- Check: Who owns the fiber (carrier-owned, third-party, municipality)?
- Check: What are monthly recurring costs for fiber lease/dark fiber?

Why it matters: Fiber extension costs \$50-\$150 per foot. A 1,000-foot extension could add \$50,000-\$150,000 to your project.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** Additional \$50K-150K+ | 6-12 month delay | Recurring monthly costs

■ RED FLAG #4: Historic District or Design Review Requirements

- Check: Is the site located in a historic district or architectural preservation zone?
- Check: Does the municipality require design review board approval?

Why it matters: Historic preservation boards can require expensive concealment solutions, reject installations entirely, or add 6-18 months to approval timelines.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** 6-18 month delay | Concealment costs \$5K-25K+ | Possible rejection

■ RED FLAG #5: Incompatible Zoning Classification

- Check: What is the current zoning classification?
- Check: Are small cells permitted 'by right' or require special use permit/variance?
- Check: Are there height restrictions that conflict with RF requirements?

Why it matters: Zoning variances require public hearings, community opposition management, and can add 9-18 months to your timeline—with no guarantee of approval.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** 9-18 month delay | \$5K-15K variance application costs | Approval not guaranteed

■ RED FLAG #6: Problematic Landlord/Property Owner

- Check: Is the property owner responsive and cooperative?
- Check: Are there existing telecom leases? (Indicates landlord understanding)
- Check: Is the property in foreclosure, litigation, or bankruptcy?

Why it matters: Difficult landlords can stall negotiations for months. Properties in legal trouble may not be able to execute valid lease agreements.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** 3-12 month negotiation delays | Potential lease invalidation mid-project

■ RED FLAG #7: Structural Load Capacity Issues

- Check: For rooftop/building mounts, has structural engineering analysis been completed?
- Check: For pole mounts, is the existing pole rated for additional equipment weight?

Why it matters: Structural reinforcement can add \$10,000-\$50,000 per site. Pole replacement can cost \$15,000-\$30,000.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** Additional \$10K-50K | 2-6 month delay for engineering/construction

■ RED FLAG #8: Conflicting Utility Pole Ownership/Agreements

- Check: Who owns the utility pole? (Electric company, telecom, municipality)
- Check: Are there existing joint-use agreements in place?
- Check: What are the pole attachment fees and application timelines?

Why it matters: Utility pole attachment applications can take 90-180 days. Some utilities reject wireless attachments entirely or require expensive make-ready work.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** 3-6 month utility coordination delay | \$2K-10K make-ready costs possible

■ RED FLAG #9: Community Opposition Risk Factors

- Check: Is the site near schools, parks, or residential areas with active HOAs?
- Check: Has there been previous community opposition to telecom installations?
- Check: Are there organized anti-wireless advocacy groups in the area?

Why it matters: Community opposition can trigger additional public hearings, require expensive aesthetic concealments, or force site relocation entirely.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** 6-12 month delay | \$10K-30K additional concealment costs | Possible rejection

■ RED FLAG #10: Environmental or Archaeological Sensitivity

■ Check: Is the site in a wetland, floodplain, or protected environmental area?

■ Check: Are there endangered species habitat designations?

■ Check: Is the area subject to archaeological/cultural resource review?

Why it matters: Environmental reviews can require expensive studies (\$5,000-\$25,000) and add 6-12 months to permitting timelines. Some sites may be permanently unbuildable.

■ **CRITICAL IMPACT:** \$5K-25K study costs | 6-12 month delay | Possible site rejection

■ Immediate Action Items

- **Before Site Selection:** Use this checklist to score potential sites. Sites with 3+ red flags should be reconsidered.
- **During Initial Evaluation:** Assign a team member to verify each item. Document findings in your site database.
- **For Flagged Sites:** Develop mitigation strategies or calculate extended timelines and costs before proceeding.
- **Ongoing:** Update this checklist based on your market-specific learnings and municipal policy changes.

■ Potential Cost Impact Summary

Red Flag	Typical Additional Cost	Typical Delay
Municipal Moratorium	\$0 (but project halted)	12-24 months
Insufficient Power	\$15,000-\$50,000	3-6 months
No Fiber Backhaul	\$50,000-\$150,000+	6-12 months
Historic District	\$5,000-\$25,000	6-18 months
Zoning Issues	\$5,000-\$15,000	9-18 months
Difficult Landlord	Variable	3-12 months
Structural Issues	\$10,000-\$50,000	2-6 months
Utility Conflicts	\$2,000-\$10,000	3-6 months

Community Opposition	\$10,000-\$30,000	6-12 months
Environmental Review	\$5,000-\$25,000	6-12 months

Need Expert Help Navigating These Challenges?

Southline Development Services specializes in identifying these red flags early, developing mitigation strategies, and navigating complex municipal approval processes. We've helped carriers cut deployment timelines in half and avoid millions in unnecessary costs.

Get a free site evaluation:

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