

What Can a Professional Land Surveyor Do For Me?

Who can perform a Land Survey?

In the State of Washington, only a Professional Land Surveyor (PLS) can legally assume the responsibility for a land survey. The Professional Land Surveyor is a highly specialized individual, whose education, experience, and competence have been rigorously examined by the Washington Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors. This Board issues license certificates to qualified individuals to practice land surveying. As a professional, each Land Surveyor's conduct and quality of work is subject to a stringent code of ethics.

Professional Land Surveyors possess broad ranging skills in field surveying, office calculations, and State subdivision law and local platting ordinances. The landowner should only seek and rely on the services of licensed Professional Land Surveyors.

How Do I Locate a Professional Land Surveyor?

Most survey work is acquired through the personal recommendation of satisfied clients or through attorneys, real estate agents, contractors, engineers and title company officers that frequently handle real estate transactions.

Probably the most direct way to locate a Professional Land Surveyor is by checking listings under "Surveyors - Land" in the classified section of the telephone directory. According to Washington law, only licensed Professional Land Surveyors may advertise land surveying services.

A third method for locating a Surveyor would be to contact the Washington Council of County Surveyors (through their local representative), or by contacting the state office of the Land Surveyors Association of Washington.

Finally, the State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors maintains a list of all Land Surveyors licensed in the State of Washington.

Can Engineers perform Land Surveys?

An Engineer cannot perform land survey work unless that individual is also licensed as a Professional Land Surveyor.

Can a Contractor do Land Survey Work?

A contractor cannot perform land survey work unless the contractor is further licensed as a Professional Land Surveyor. Also, beware of land survey technicians or other industry workers who may possess skills in land surveying but are not licensed as Professional Land Surveyors.

Can Surveyors from Other States Perform Surveys in Washington?

A Professional Land Surveyor from another state cannot normally perform land surveying in Washington unless that individual is ALSO licensed in the State of Washington. The exception to this may involve surveys performed by the Federal Government on federal lands.

Why Should a Land Survey be done?

A Land Survey should be performed anytime landowners must know the physical location of their title boundaries. A Land Surveyor can then install monuments that mark the corners of the title boundary.

A Land Survey should be performed anytime a landowner builds a structure near one or more of their title boundaries. Such survey will insure that the structure does not encroach on other parcels of land and can indicate that the structure meets the requirements of local setback rules.

A Land Survey should be performed anytime a landowner desires to subdivide their land into two or more parcels. Such subdivisions require highly specialized maps prepared by a Professional Land Surveyor (Subdivisions may also require the services of a Professional Engineer).

A Land Survey should be performed anytime a landowner must know the range of topography or existing improvements across their property. Other professionals providing planning, engineering or other services to the landowner may use such work.

A Land Survey should be performed anytime a landowner is selling or purchasing property and such purchase requires an American Land Title Association (ALTA) title insurance endorsement. Such surveys are a common requirement for the sale or purchase of large commercial or multi-residential properties.

The examples above are just a few reasons to seek the advice and services of a Professional Land Surveyor.

Can a Surveyor perform Engineering Surveys?

Most engineering surveys are performed by Professional Land Surveyors. They possess the knowledgeable and are equipped to prepare topographic surveys, to supply control for aerial photography, to layout construction projects, to survey right-of-way for power lines and roadways, and other engineering-related tasks.

Can a Surveyor Design Public Improvement Systems for My Subdivision?

A Professional Land Surveyor, by themselves, cannot perform engineering design. The Surveyor can and should recommend an engineer to design streets, water supply systems, sewer systems, and other engineering services that might be required. A Professional Land Surveyor will not attempt any aspects of engineering design that he or she is not qualified to perform.

Can the Surveyor Aid in Subdividing My Land?

Yes. A Professional Land Surveyor is the only one qualified to prepare a description for a newly created parcel of land. The Professional Land Surveyor may prepare an individual description or, if several lots are

being created simultaneously, the Surveyor may prepare a subdivision plat with lot or parcel numbers for recording. Platting rules vary county to county or within local city boundaries. A qualified Surveyor will be familiar with any local or state laws and procedures.

Can the Land Surveyor Show Me What I Own?

A land survey does not show the landowner what he or she "owns". A land survey is the Professional Land Surveyor's opinion of the physical location of the landowner's title boundary (a title boundary is the boundary of such real property as defined in the recorded grant deed). A landowner's perception of their physical occupation of real property is deemed their ownership.

A Professional Land Surveyor will rely on numerous records, maps and other data to provide his opinion of the location of a real property title boundary. Under most circumstances this opinion is satisfactory. However, most land disputes stem from landowner's differing opinions on what they perceive they own. In such cases, only a court of law can determine ownership more decisively than a qualified Land Surveyor.

Is a Written Contract with the Surveyor Required?

Traditionally, professional services for land surveys were performed through oral agreements. However, in recent years, written professional services contracts have become much more important. Such contracts spell out the responsibilities of both parties to the contract and help protect the interests of all parties involved. Professional services contracts should be thoroughly read and understood by the landowner. If the landowner has any questions or comments regarding terms within the contract, the landowner has the right to negotiate such terms with the Professional Land Surveyor.

Can I Determine in Advance What the Charge for Services Will Be?

In most cases, the final cost of a survey is dependent upon the actual amount of work expended to complete the service provided. Many Surveyors provide clients with a written estimate of cost as part of the contract process. This estimate is based upon the amount of work that is perceived by the Surveyor as necessary to complete the requested services. Thus most Surveyors' final charge for a project is based upon the total hours spent on the various tasks that make up the project. A competent Surveyor will provide a client with a complete listing of all services provided and the hourly charges for such services.

Some land surveying projects are better suited to lump sum-based contracts. A competent Land Surveyor will inform the client as to which method of computing charges best suits the subject project during contract negotiations. The client should always ask a Land Surveyor about this option.

Should I Employ a Surveyor on the Basis of Price?

Low cost and high quality are frequently incompatible partners. Overall competency is a better overall judgment factor when choosing the services of a Professional Land Surveyor.

A prospective client might ask the following questions:

How long has the Surveyor practiced in the profession and how long has the Surveyor practiced in the particular geographic area of the proposed survey?

Can the Surveyor provide references pertaining to the type of survey being contemplated?

Does the Surveyor have a history of complaints with the local Better Business Bureau or the state Board of Registration?

Did the prospective Land Surveyor present his or her proposal in a timely and professional manner?

Is the proposed cost estimate consistent with other proposals obtained from other prospective Surveyors?

In the end, the prospective client must feel secure and confident in the Land Surveyor they choose to perform their survey. Most landowners obtain the services of a Land Surveyor only once during their lifetime, so the decision should not be made without a thorough examination of the Surveyor's qualifications.

What Information Should I Furnish to the Surveyor?

The landowner can provide several key pieces of information to the chosen Surveyor.

First, provide the Land Surveyor with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the survey desired. The final price of a survey depends entirely on the scope of work to be performed.

Second, obtain a copy of your grant deed that was provided to you at the time of sale. Also, provide the Surveyor with a full copy of your title insurance policy, if one was issued at the time of sale. These documents are invaluable to the Surveyor as he or she begins the process of researching the subject land boundary.

Third, provide the Surveyor with any photographs, plans, maps, surveys or other documents in your possession that might pertain to the survey project. It is best to bring all items related to the subject property to the Surveyor's office and let the Surveyor decide which documents will aid them during the survey.

Finally, relay any knowledge you might have about existing survey monuments, stakes, or other property boundary markings that you have seen or located on your property boundary. This knowledge will shorten the amount of time the Land Surveyor takes to find and verify the corners of the subject property.

During contract discussions, the Land Surveyor should discuss with you the need for further documents or information beyond that which you first provide.

What Will the Land Surveyor Provide to Me?

The Land Surveyor's final product will vary with each survey and with the services that are called for during the project. For example, if the contract calls for a boundary survey with monumentation, the Surveyor will provide the client with a copy of the final, *recorded* survey. Such a map will show the control monuments the Surveyor used to justify the subject boundary, all of the subject boundary corners set and the dimensions of all property boundary lines and supporting lines. The map will also contain statements certifying that the map was prepared by a Professional Land Surveyor and a statement by the County Auditor that the map was recorded in the County records. The client should be fully aware of what products are being provided by the Land Surveyor and such should be fully explained in any written contract.

Beginning in 1973, Washington state law required that all surveys of land be recorded in the Auditor's office of the county in which the survey was performed. Such a recording is called a "Record of Survey". A Record of Survey is recorded when new monuments or parcel lines, not shown on any previously recorded map, are established by a Professional Land Surveyor. The only exception to this law occurs when a Land Surveyor *resets* a corner monument that did appear on a previously recorded map. The Land Surveyor would, in this case, record a "Land Corner Record" in the office of the County Auditor.

Final Remarks

Land Surveying is a learned profession that requires precision, facility with applied mathematics, technical knowledge, logical thinking and judicious judgment. A Land Surveyor, during the execution of a project, may be required to work with lawyers, engineers, architects, planners, building officials, agents of local government and the general public. Determining property boundaries is a very important service, one that Professional Land Surveyors in Washington State are eager and eminently qualified to provide.

LAND SURVEYING

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING THE PROFESSION



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