

## Land Survey Preparation Checklist

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Everything you need to do before, during, and after a professional land survey

- ✓ Pre-survey preparation checklist (15 items)
- ✓ What to expect on survey day
- ✓ Understanding your survey deliverables
- ✓ Post-survey action items and how to protect your investment

# Pre-Survey Preparation Checklist

## Before Contacting a Surveyor

- Gather your property deed (legal description, lot/block number, or metes and bounds)
- Locate any existing survey plats from when you purchased the property
- Check county GIS/tax assessor website for your parcel map (free; provides preliminary reference)
- Identify the specific reason you need a survey (purchase, fence, dispute, construction, ALTA)
- Note any known boundary issues, encroachments, or disputes with neighbors

## After Booking the Survey

- Provide the surveyor with copies of your deed, prior surveys, and any title documentation
- Inform neighbors that surveyors will be working near the property line (courtesy, not required)
- Clear brush and debris from known or approximate boundary lines if possible
- Mark any known monuments (iron pins, pipes, concrete markers) with flagging tape
- Ensure the surveyor has access to all corners of the property (unlock gates, remove obstacles)
- If property is gated or has controlled access, arrange entry for the survey crew

## Day of Survey

- Be available by phone in case the surveyor has questions
- Ensure the survey crew can access the property (unlocked gates, driveway clear)
- Remove vehicles from areas where the crew needs to work
- Restrain pets — survey crews may be on the property for several hours
- Have any relevant documents handy (deed, prior surveys, neighbor agreements)

**The most valuable thing you can provide is existing documentation.**

A prior survey, original deed with legal description, and any title reports save the surveyor hours of research time — which directly reduces your cost.

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# What to Expect on Survey Day

## The Survey Process — Step by Step

### Step-by-step visual

- 1 Records research (before field visit):** Surveyor reviews deeds, prior surveys, county records, and adjacent property information. This happens before they arrive on-site and may take 1-5 days depending on complexity.
- 2 Field reconnaissance (30-60 min):** Crew walks the property, locates existing monuments (iron pins, concrete markers, stones), and identifies the property's physical features.
- 3 Measurement and data collection (1-4 hours):** Using total stations, RTK GPS, or robotic instruments, the crew measures distances, angles, and elevations to establish precise coordinates for all boundary points.
- 4 Monument search (30-60 min):** Crew searches for existing boundary markers set by prior surveys. Finding existing monuments is critical — they take priority over measurements when there's a conflict.
- 5 Monument setting (30-60 min):** New iron pins, pipes, or other permanent markers set at property corners where missing or disturbed. These are the physical markers that define your boundaries on the ground.
- 6 Office calculations and drafting (1-3 days):** Surveyor processes field data, reconciles measurements with legal descriptions, prepares the survey plat, and writes the legal description.
- 7 Quality review and certification (1-2 days):** Surveyor reviews the final plat, resolves any discrepancies, applies their professional seal and signature, and delivers the completed survey.

#### Total timeline

Typical residential boundary survey takes 2-4 weeks from order to delivery. Field work is usually 1 day (4-8 hours). The rest is research and office work. Rush service is available but costs 25-50% more.

# Understanding Your Survey Deliverables

## What You Should Receive — And What Each Document Means

### Deliverable checklist

Deliverable	What It Is	Why It Matters
Survey plat/map (signed and sealed)	Scale drawing showing boundaries, corners, dimensions, area, improvements, and easements	The legal document; recordable with the county; required for disputes, permits, and title
Written legal description	Metes and bounds or lot-and-block text describing boundaries in legal language	Used in deeds, title transfers, and legal documents
Physical monuments	Iron pins, pipes, or caps set at property corners	Physical markers on the ground that define your boundaries
Coordinate data	State Plane or GPS coordinates for each corner	Used by engineers, contractors, and future surveyors
Notes and certifications	Surveyor's notes on methods, discrepancies found, and professional certification statement	Legal standing and chain-of-custody documentation

### For ALTA/NSPS surveys, you should also receive

Additional Item	Description
Table A certification	Statement of which optional items were completed
Easement depiction	All recorded easements shown on the plat
Zoning information	Current zoning classification and setbacks
Flood zone determination	FEMA flood zone designation
Utility locations	Visible above-ground and marked underground utilities
Encroachment identification	Any structures or improvements crossing property lines

**Keep your survey plat forever.**

It's a legal document with permanent value. Store it with your deed and title insurance policy. If you ever sell the property, the next buyer's surveyor will reference your plat.

# Common Situations & What to Do

## Survey Found Something — Now What?

Situation	What It Means	What to Do
Neighbor's fence is on your property	Encroachment — their structure crosses your boundary	Discuss amicably first; consult attorney if unresolved; survey is your evidence
Your fence is on neighbor's property	You're encroaching on their land	Move the fence or negotiate an easement; don't ignore it
Building is closer to property line than expected	Potential setback violation	Check with municipal zoning; may need variance if building permit is affected
Prior survey disagrees with new survey	Normal — methods improve; monuments may have been disturbed	Newer survey with better technology generally takes precedence; discuss with surveyor
Deed description doesn't match field evidence	Gap or overlap in title	Notify title company and attorney; may need a quiet title action or boundary agreement
Easement crosses your planned building site	You can't build on an easement	Redesign plans to avoid the easement, or seek easement relocation (difficult)
Property is smaller than you thought	Deed area may be approximate; survey is the truth	Survey area is the legal area; may affect property value or development plans

### **Don't panic if the survey shows a discrepancy.**

Minor differences between deed descriptions and physical reality are common, especially with older properties. Your surveyor can explain the significance and whether legal action is needed.

# Protecting Your Survey Investment

## After the Survey — How to Preserve Your Boundaries

### Maintenance checklist

- Photograph all monument locations (with a reference object for scale)
- Record GPS coordinates of each monument (phone GPS is fine for relocation reference)
- Note monument locations relative to permanent features (e.g., "12 feet from corner of garage")
- Store the survey plat with your deed and title insurance policy
- Provide a copy of the plat to your title company and attorney
- Record the plat with the county recorder (if not already done by the surveyor)
- Build fences and improvements to the surveyed boundary — not where you "think" the line is

### Protecting monuments

DO	DON'T
Mark monuments with flagging tape during construction	Don't remove or disturb iron pins/pipes during landscaping
Inform contractors of monument locations	Don't bury monuments under fill, mulch, or concrete
Report disturbed monuments to your surveyor	Don't assume you can re-set a monument yourself (only a PLS can)
Photograph monuments before any ground work	Don't let neighbors remove or relocate boundary markers

#### **Disturbing a survey monument is illegal in most states.**

Intentionally removing, destroying, or relocating a boundary marker can result in fines, criminal charges, and civil liability. If construction disturbs a monument, contact your surveyor to reset it.

# Cost Comparison: Survey Types for Common Scenarios

## Side-by-side comparison

Scenario	Survey Type	Cost	What You Get	Legally Sufficient?
Buying a home (lender requires)	Mortgage/ location survey	\$300- \$600	Building location on lot; approximate boundaries	For mortgage only; not a legal boundary survey
Installing a fence	Boundary survey	\$500- \$1,200	Exact property lines; physical corner markers	Yes — protects you from encroachment claims
Neighbor dispute	Boundary survey + legal description	\$800- \$2,500	Legal evidence of boundary location	Yes — admissible in court
Commercial property purchase	ALTA/NSPS survey	\$2,500- \$10,000	Everything: boundaries, easements, zoning, utilities, flood	Yes — gold standard; required by lenders/ title
Building a new home	Boundary + topographic + staking	\$2,000- \$6,000	Site plan data + construction layout	Yes — needed for permits and building

**A \$500 boundary survey today can prevent a \$50,000 legal dispute tomorrow.**

The most common regret: "I wish I had gotten a survey before building that fence / pool / addition." Survey costs are a fraction of the cost of resolving encroachment claims after the fact.

# SurveySlate

## SurveySlate

1. **Printability matters.** Property owners, attorneys, and developers print these. Avoid large solid color areas on interior pages (waste ink). Reserve full-bleed backgrounds for cover and back cover only. 2. **Tables are the star.** These guides live or die on their reference tables. Make tables scannable, well-spaced, and easy to read at 100% zoom on screen AND when printed on letter paper. 3.

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