

Ordering a land survey and what you should know, a surveyor's perspective.

I remember the movie "Groundhog Day" with Bill Murray when he keeps reliving the same events day after day. I've been through my own sort of "Groundhog Day" for the last 35 years with calls for surveying fee estimates. The calls always start the same way, Caller - "how much for a survey?" Me - "Well Ma'am or Sir, I need some information." Caller - "Can't you just give me the basic price? All I want is one corner" Well stop and think, if your car didn't start one morning, do you think you could call a mechanic and ask "my car won't start how much to fix it?" Of course not, the mechanic needs to know what kind of car and they need to check it out to see what is wrong – just like surveyors need to know, the following: 1.) What kind of survey, and for what purpose, do you have a boundary dispute; 2.) Where is the property located, its acreage, terrain, and site conditions; 3.) The availability of survey data and site survey history, and that of the adjoining's. Remember your boundary is also your neighbor's. All those things require a conversation with the user of the survey information and research of the public records, often including a site visit. Seldom are the circumstances of any two surveys the same.

Once that information is examined the surveyor can give you an estimate of what they expect their fee and any related outside costs or public fees may entail. Items that affect the fee (besides the three above) are: 4.) the estimated time involved to perform required or requested services, including document preparation; 5.) Incurred costs; 6.) special needs in equipment or sub consultants; 7.) special individual needs or requests of the Client; 8.) an estimate of the surveyor's liability. Even though the surveyor, through their own work experience, can give a good feel for the costs, no one really knows what the actual time requirements will be until the surveyor starts the work and determines what problems exist on the ground. A written contract, outlining certain details, is required by law and most surveyors require a retainer or up-front payment.

On the other hand there are things the caller should ask. The most important being; is the surveyor licensed to practice land surveying in California? You can get the license number from the surveyor and check it at the website of the California Board for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors to see if it is current or if there are any actions taken against the surveyor. Also, some engineers (not all) are able to practice land surveying under their engineering license. Other questions would be, does the surveyor know the particular area and its intrinsic problems, and does she/he have experience doing the particular work required? Surveying is a broad field, and it is becoming harder to be an expert at it all, especially where advancing technology is involved. At the above "Board" website you can check the "Professional Land Surveyor's Act" for a definition of what requires a land survey license. And, finally you can contact

the El Dorado County Surveyor's office if you have a question about what is defined as surveying and if a license is required. All boundary work requires a license.

Lastly, having someone show up with a compass and a roll of flagging is not a boundary survey; and, may do more damage than good. Stakes set marking approximate corners are unacceptable as boundary markers. Remember from above, your boundary is also your neighbor's boundary and may be relied upon by your neighbor or a third party or may be disputed. Surveyor's only render opinions as to where that particular licensed surveyor believes the boundary is located, however it is based on years of proven experience, knowledge and understanding of the law and local customs. Surveys require research, exact measurements and various lateral line checks to verify or establish either corners or the lines between corners. Similar actions need to be taken whether it's one corner needing to be established or an entire property. In a sectional survey an entire square mile may need to be surveyed to establish one corner. Senior rights, occupation, acquiescence, etc. all play an additional part of an accurate and complete survey. Also just because there is a pipe or post in the ground does not mean that it is an actual property corner or that it has not been moved or disturbed. The very act of the Surveyor in setting or recognizing monuments at corners and other circumstance can mandate by law the filing of certain maps. These maps record the efforts of the surveyor for posterity and are not an option one can legally ignore. Then there is the matter of easements and the need for a title report but they are issues for another discussion at another time.

Unfortunately, surveying can be a bit pricy because of the time and equipment required to perform the work properly. Personally, I invest nearly \$100,000 in outfitting one field crew and a similar amount in the office. On the other hand a home is the largest investment most people make in their lives. What value is knowing your home is termite free, if it is across the property line – and yes unfortunately we find that very thing. However, I am proud to work in an area where there are many excellent licensed surveyors available to the public. So be patient when you call, have your property information available and we will help you through the process.

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