

Wisconsin taxpayers benefit from having a County Surveyor in each County:

As one of the original Wisconsin County offices, the County Surveyor played a key role in the formation of County government. Today in Wisconsin, each County may appoint, elect or leave vacant the office of County Surveyor. Currently Wisconsin has 61 County Surveyors – 31 serving on a full time basis, 30 serving on a part time basis. The benefits of having a County Surveyor in your County are as follows:

- 1) **THE PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM (PLSS):** The County Surveyor acts as the custodian of the corner monuments marking the Public Land Survey System. These monuments represent Wisconsin's very first infrastructure and are the very framework for nearly every property description in Wisconsin. Having these corner markers in place can reduce conflict and allows for fair taxation for Wisconsin taxpayers. The PLSS in Wisconsin can and should be fully re-established to protect Wisconsin land owners. But the work will require the expertise of a Professional Land Surveyor and funding. Each of Wisconsin's 72 Counties should have a County Surveyor on staff to oversee the re-monumentation of these vital corner locations. Once re-established, the monuments at these corner locations will need to be maintained.
- 2) **COUNTY SURVEYOR FILES:** The County Surveyor maintains survey files containing thousands of survey maps. Any time a Wisconsin Professional Land Surveyor performs a survey in our state, he or she is required to draft and place on file a survey map of the property surveyed in which County the survey was completed. These maps are utilized by attorneys, title people, assessors, land surveyors, appraisers, realtors and others.
- 3) **SURVEY MAP REVIEW:** In Counties where a subdivision ordinance is in place, a County Surveyor can oversee the review of Certified Survey Maps and Subdivision plats. These survey maps have stringent requirements set forth in state statutes and administrative codes. Survey maps have intricate detail and a quality review by a qualified Professional can assist in eliminating violations and minor mapping errors.
- 4) **SURVEY WORK FOR OTHER AGENCIES:** The County Surveyor can provide great assistance to other County departments. A County Surveyor can work with the real Property Lister, Geographic Information System (GIS) mappers, Corporation Counsel and others to assist in interpreting deed verbiage and to provide a check of legal descriptions. A full-time County Surveyor can, with the right equipment and transportation, can be of assistance to other County Departments such as the highway department, facilities department or land conservation department. Having a Professional Surveyor on staff, along with necessary equipment, can make getting necessary field work accomplished more efficiently.
- 5) **RESPOND TO CHALLENGING LAND SURVEYING AND LAND OWNERSHIP QUESTIONS:** The County Surveyor's Office can regularly respond to customers by assisting them with surveying and land ownership questions. These interactions can take place via e-mail, telephone and face-to-face visits and can illustrate some very unique situations and raise some interesting and complex land ownership and title questions. For most people, a land transaction is a rare occurrence. The County Surveyor can often serve as a resource to help taxpayers understand how title to land is held and how the land transaction process works. A County Surveyor can also serve as a mediator when conflict and misunderstandings occur between adjoining owners, between surveyors and between landowners and surveyors.

The Wisconsin County Surveyors Association (WCSA) stands ready to assist Wisconsin Counties in moving forward with establishing a County Surveyor position within their County. WCSA can also assist in retaining a County Surveyor position in your County. If you would like assistance, please contact WCSA President Bryan Meyer at bmeyer@lacrossecounty.org or 608-785-9626; or WCSA Secretary Brenda Hemstead at hemsteadb@gmail.com; 608-263-4371

Reasons for a County Surveyor Position in Your County

Maintenance of the physical monuments marking the Public Land Survey System positions does not go away. There is constant activity that threatens Public Land Survey Corners – placement of underground cables and other utility work, road maintenance and construction, residential, commercial and industrial development are some examples of “corner danger”.

Land ownership and the laws related thereto are complex. Most land owners do not have a basic understanding of land issues and so they often need advice. Many attorneys are not well versed in land law. The County Surveyor answers a good share of the hard questions.

When County Departments or other governmental bodies such as Town Boards, Cities, etc., have complex land issues to deal with, they have a dependable source of consistent information and guidance.

When survey records are properly maintained, it saves time and multiplies efficiency for all surveyors. This, again, saves constituents money. Remember, people that need surveys done are taxpayers, too.

In developing a GIS, A County Surveyor can assist in minimizing the misuse of data by working with the staff and the land owners that “know just enough to be dangerous.” Awareness of the limitations of mixing and matching digital data of varying accuracies is essential to guard your county’s liability. For example, a “cartoon type” parcel map is overlaid on an orthophoto and a barn appears to be over the boundary line. When in reality, the barn is well within the boundaries, the appearance of an encroachment can cause un-necessary grief for both land owners.

The trend in Wisconsin, for counties, has been to expand the County Surveyor position because of the growing land information needs. As the population grows and urban sprawl becomes more of a problem, more people are going to subdivide their land. Whether surveying is done to create new parcels or just to locate a line from existing parcels, the County Surveyor is there to make certain that land laws pertaining to surveying are being completely followed.

If contracting is a desired way of handling the statutory requirements of County Surveyor, a County Surveyor is needed to manage these contracts. Most people do not understand the complexities that are involved in the County Surveyor's duties. Only someone who is familiar with these duties and has a good working relationship with the private sector can accurately depict the costs and benefits for this type of work. Planning for a specific county's needs, efficiency, and good judgment for work practices are necessary to maximize value while minimizing cost and liability.

Highly precise coordinates, whether gathered by traditional survey methods or GPS, are NO GOOD if they are on the wrong monument. Whether it is in record keeping or actual field work, a County Surveyor's guidance is needed to make sure that the information received is both precise and accurate.

The Public Land Survey System is the foundation of land ownership and the County Surveyor organizes this system. Original descriptions have been based on this system since the early 1830's. If the system fails then everything that is based on this system fails too. Could we imagine a state or county without planning, zoning, mapping or GIS?