



Land Survey “To Scale” FAQ

1) What is a land or property survey?

In the simplest terms, a land survey is a graphic depiction of a property, much like a map, outlining its legal boundaries and other features. Land surveys are typically required during real estate transactions and are an extremely useful tool to best understand a property and its improvements at the time of the survey. While not always the case, surveys are typically ordered and paid for by the property owner during the property purchase process.

Topography Surveys:

Different from a common land survey and not required at the closing of a real estate transaction, a topographic survey gathers data about the elevation of points on a piece of land and presents them as contour lines on a plot. The purpose of a topographic survey is to collect survey data about the natural and man-made features of the property, as well as its elevations. Topographic maps are used to show elevations and grading features for architects, engineers, and building contractors in addition to the land survey.

2) Who owns the survey?

Property owners are responsible for purchasing and storing a property survey. It is not a municipal document and therefore the City of Summit neither generates nor is required to keep a current copy of a property survey on file. It is ordered by, paid for, and kept by the property owner.

3) How are land surveys created?

Only a licensed surveyor can produce an official land survey. Professional land surveyors lay out the exact dimensions of a property and its improvements by using a deed for the property and a site visit to properly measure and document it. If you do not have a current survey or order one as a part of a real estate closing, you can retain a licensed professional to conduct one. The city does not recommend surveyors. Seek referrals from neighbors, a realtor, real estate attorney, or from a professional association (www.plsanj.org or www.njspls.com).

4) How much does a land survey cost?

While the cost of a land survey varies by the size and complexity of the plot, in general the price can range from as low as \$200 for a simple one-side boundary marking to over several thousand dollars for a full property survey.

5) What does a land survey depict?

- Property boundaries
- Locations of any improvements such as buildings, patios, driveways, sheds, fences, or A/C units
- Any easements, building setbacks, or other restrictions on the property, which will affect use and future development of the site
- Verification of boundary descriptions for all adjacent properties to ensure that property lines are defined exactly the same on all documents. Occasionally with older adjacent parcels, there may be a discrepancy over property lines; in such cases a surveyor can be retained to settle the dispute.

(Over)

6) What does it mean to have a land survey “to scale” and why is that necessary?

All exterior improvements made on a property typically require approval from the city’s Zoning Officer. The city’s zoning ordinances (Chapter 35 of the city ordinances also known as the Development Regulations Ordinance or DRO) and the zone where a property exists dictates certain specific measurements and conditions including:

- How close to a property line improvements can be made (setbacks)
- How wide or high certain improvements area allowed to be (signs, building heights)
- How much lot coverage can exist before a maximum is exceeded (e.g. driveways, patios, etc.)

The Zoning Officer uses a property survey to measure existing conditions related to the improvements to approve a permit or improvement request.

To be most useful, a land survey must show locations and distances precisely and accurately on a single sheet of paper. The proportion chosen for a particular land survey is its scale. Simply defined, scale is the relationship between the distance on the survey and the distance on the ground (e.g. one inch on the survey equals 10 feet on the actual property). The copy in your possession that is to scale is the survey that is signed and stamped with a raised seal. All other copies may or may not be to scale depending, on how they were duplicated.

7) How is my survey not “to scale”?

Unfortunately when property owners make copies of a survey or print from an electronic file (e.g. PDF), the scale becomes distorted by the setting of the copier or printer and alters the scale in a way that renders the survey invalid for zoning review. Again, the copy in your possession that will always be to scale is the one that is signed with a raised seal. All other copies may or may not be to scale, depending on how they were duplicated.

8) What can I do if my survey is “not to scale?”

You will need to locate the original “to scale” survey that will need to be copied without maximizing or minimizing its size. Do not fax or print an emailed/electronic version as the printer will distort the survey and render it invalid. If you have an original survey “to scale”, it can be copied without minimizing or maximizing the copy size to ensure it retains the proper scale. If you have a copy that is not to scale, you might also try to contact the company listed on the survey for an original copy. If you cannot locate an original or “to scale” copy of your land survey, you may need to conduct a new survey.

Additional questions?

Our planning/zoning and construction staff are available to answer any questions you have that will make your project a success. Please call us at (908) 273-6407 during regular business hours.

Department of Community Services – Planning & Zoning Division

● Regular Hours

Monday – Friday
8:30am – 4:30pm

● Summer Hours (Memorial Day - Labor Day)

Monday – Thursday | Friday
8am – 4:30pm | 8am – 1pm

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