



## Why County Surveyors Matter

*Summary Submitted By:*

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### **PREAMBLE**

County Surveyors, as professionals, have an understanding of the noteworthy benefits and advantages a County Surveyor's Office provides to our counties and the public's well-being. While statutory responsibility, funding, and functionality vary from county to county, the County Surveyor's role in government remains as critical today as ever. The right to own and "quietly enjoy" property is one of the basic founding principles of our country. County Surveyors perform a prominent role in the protection of these rights. Additionally, County Surveyors are key partners in emergency response, GIS mapping, construction, public real estate transactions, litigation, and a host of other important public services.

***We must ask – without a funded, functioning County Surveyor, what does the public and county government really lose?***

In Utah, the origins of the office of the County Surveyor can be traced back to 1852, as one of the four original elected offices of County Government. Elected offices were established to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. In those days and before, the location and protection of property boundaries along with water rights, law enforcement, and recording functions were an essential part of everyday life and survival. Those same rights and protections are no less important in today's world.

To this day in Utah, one of the key statutory duties of the County Surveyor is to protect and perpetuate the original Public Land Survey System (PLSS). In a PLSS state such as Utah, the original PLSS is not only the basis for the establishment and protection of property ownership and the other rights, it is also the very foundation and heart of the County's ability to assess and collect the property taxes that fund many County services. We also know the PLSS is threatened on a daily basis by development and construction, and consequently, many of the public rights and functions of government are also at risk. For this reason alone, it is imperative for County executives and the public to understand the critical nature of the functions of a County Surveyor, the PLSS, and why it is essential to fund a County Surveyor program.

Some counties within Utah do not fund a County Surveyor function and are experiencing growth and development not seen before. Boundary disputes and other development related issues in these counties have arisen due to the lack of investment in the very infrastructure that County Surveyors are responsible to protect. It is a case of "you don't know you have a problem until you have one." Current County Surveyors are often called upon to assist some of these counties with locating and documenting the position of their respective PLSS, to help facilitate resolution of the resultant legal problems.

In counties where funds are allocated for a County Surveyor's Office, the citizens and County government in general have fewer boundary disputes and other related development issues due to the long-standing efforts of County Surveyors, both past and present. Additionally, we benefit from an accurate base for all mapping to support emergency response, tax revenue, and other county services.

For more information, visit: [CountySurveyors.org](http://CountySurveyors.org)

## **SUMMARY OUTLINE: WHAT DOES THE COUNTY SURVEYOR DO?**

### **A. Public Land Survey System (PLSS) - Identification, Protection, and Maintenance**

1. All properties (parcels) are measured and described from the PLSS. Therefore, it is the foundation for protecting the integrity of property rights, both public and private. This includes all public and private rights of way (including RS 2477 roads).
2. The PLSS is the foundation basis for tax collection, which ties to the Counties' ability to provide services.
3. The PLSS is the basis for accurate mapping, GIS, and aerial photography, which are all utilized for purposes of emergency response, land use and open space planning, engineering design, facilities management, and recreation.

### **B. Support of County Services and Departments**

1. Boundary and jurisdictional conflict resolution - utilized by emergency responders, voters, planning and zoning offices, and various federal and state departments.
2. Real Estate Transaction Support – review and prepare legal descriptions, property research, resolve boundary and encroachment disputes, survey all public property including parks, facilities golf courses, rights of way and open space.
3. County design projects – provide and /or manage all survey work in support of roadway, flood control, and other design/ construction projects.
4. Provide maps and exhibits for Commissioners, Councilpersons, Mayors, County Attorneys, and various departments.
5. Expert witness and support in related litigation i.e., real estate, right of way, encroachment, and other disputes.
6. Mapping and Dispatch support for emergency responders (Sheriff and Fire Dept)

### **C. Tax System Support**

1. Review of tax sales.
2. Review and approve Final Local Entity Plats (formerly known as Annexation Plats) to ensure County needs are met for proper taxation, recording, and boundary depiction. See Utah Code 67-1A-6.5 & 17-23-20.
3. Protect the PLSS, the foundation of tax collection, the Recorders parcel maps, and property rights.

### **D. Records Information for Various Government Entities and the Public**

1. Historical and current survey information and access to records of survey filed with the County Surveyor. See Utah Code 17-23-17.
2. Aerial photography.
3. Right of way, elevation, and survey control information and documentation.
4. General and public service information.