Lot Survey FAQs

Homeowners and contractors need to know where property lines and lot corners are located before installing a shed, fence, retaining wall, swimming pool, etc. Development Services is frequently asked whether the City of Cedar Rapids will mark property boundaries for its residents. The short answer is no, as the City does not have qualified staff to do this. Surveying involves professional and legal responsibilities which are explained below.

**Who does lot surveys and what is involved?**

Lot surveys are completed by a Professional Land Surveyor licensed in the State of Iowa or a survey crew directly under the professional’s supervision. The surveyor begins by researching plats, deeds and other land records for the property. The surveyor then locates existing monuments, also called lot pins, onsite. Field work may include the subject property and adjacent lots. The surveyor will find as many lot pins as necessary to retrace the lot boundary, even if that means surveying across the street or the next street over. Then the surveyor uses the record and survey evidence to reconstruct and retrace the boundary. A retracement plat of survey is drawn and recorded, and any missing lot pins for the subject property are replaced.

**Why can’t the surveyor just find pins on my lot or mark the approximate location of any missing pins?**

For legal reasons, most surveyors will not mark lot corners without retracing the lot boundary and setting missing pins. If a fence or other structure is discovered over a disputed property line and the boundary was not properly retraced, this can be problematic for both the surveyor and property owners.

**How much does a lot survey cost?**

Costs vary widely from several hundred to several thousand dollars. The survey includes research, field work, platting and setting lot pins by professionals who typically charge an hourly rate. The size and terrain of the lot, quality and availability of land records, and availability of existing lot pins influence the cost. Obtain quotes from more than one surveyor if possible.
What issues can arise with a lot survey?

Most surveys happen without issues, but sometimes there are unexpected outcomes. A property boundary may not be where you thought it was. A neighbor’s fence is partly in your yard. If you have concerns with your property line, you will need to work this out with your neighbor or be prepared to go to court if necessary. If you want your surveyor to do further surveys, reports or testimony for a dispute, there will likely be an extra cost in addition to the services already provided.

What if I don’t agree with the boundary determined by a surveyor?

You will need to hire another licensed surveyor who can independently review the boundary. The surveyor’s retraced boundary is an expert opinion, which can be used as evidence in court. When you hire a surveyor, they will render an impartial opinion, meaning it’s not their job to agree with you even though you are paying them. In fact, their opinion may not support your claim.

Can I find my own lot pins?

It’s possible. You will need a metal detector (can be rented), tape measure and an ability to read and interpret deeds and plats. Never use a measuring wheel, when they travel over uneven ground they lose accuracy. Be aware that your measurements may not agree with the recorded plat and rear lot pins may not be shared by all adjoining lots. If you’re not getting the expected results, it may be a good time to contact a professional. If there is a property line dispute, your boundary measurements will not hold up in court, unless you’re a licensed land surveyor.