



State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS REGULATION
Division of Building, Design and Fire Professionals

Rhode Island Board of Registration for Professional Land Surveyors

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
For PLS, the Public and Municipal Officials

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1. What constitutes the practice of land surveying?

The “Practice of Land Surveying” is defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-8.1-2(11) as follows:

"Practice of land surveying" means any service or work, the adequate performance of which involves the application of special knowledge of the principles of mathematics, the related physical and applied sciences and the relevant requirements of law for adequate evidence to perform the act of measuring and locating lines, angles, elevations, natural and manmade features in the air, on the surface of the earth, within underground workings, and on the beds of bodies of water for the purpose of determining areas and volumes, for the monumenting of property boundaries and for the platting and layout of lands and their subdivisions, including the topography, alignment, and grades of streets and for the preparation of maps, record plats, field note records and property descriptions that represent these surveys.

Only a professional land surveyor (“PLS”) is authorized to perform these activities and execute certifications as to their precision. All work that falls under the definition of land surveying must be completed by a professional land surveyor. Unlike the practice of architecture, there is no residential exception for land surveying work done on a single-family or two-family residence. For more information on which tasks are authorized to be performed by a PLS and/or an Professional Engineer (“PE”), please consult the [PE/PLS Joint Informational Bulletin](#).

To ensure adherence to the law as well as prevent unnecessary complications with recorded instruments, all maps, record plats, and property descriptions which contain the statutory elements of land surveying shall be prepared by a professional land surveyor licensed and authorized to practice in the State of Rhode Island.

2. Is every firm required to have a Certificate of Authorization (COA)?

Yes. R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-8.1-13(b) requires all firms that intend to practice or offer to practice land surveying within the State of Rhode Island shall first obtain a Certificate of Authorization” from the Board of Registration for Professional Land Surveyors (“PLS Board”) at the Department of Business regulation prior to practicing or offering to practice land surveying in this State.

3. I received an individual land surveyor license in Rhode Island, do I still need to get COA?

Yes. If you are practicing land surveying you will need a COA, either for yourself or for your firm.

4. Do I need to hire a professional land surveyor to as part of my application for an administrative subdivision?

Yes. The identification of property lines and any changes to existing property lines can only be done by a PLS.

5. Does an individual or municipality need to engage a professional land surveyor to prepare road/street abandonment maps?

Yes. Requirements for Abandoned Street Map Preparation.

- Constitutes a Subdivision pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 45-23 because of the creation of new parcels of land.
- Subsequently, the abandonment causes an Administrative Subdivision under R.I. Gen. Laws § 45-23-37, by the merging of the newly created parcels with abutting lots.
- Pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 5-8.1, the preparation of the subdivision maps shall be prepared, stamped, signed, and dated by a duly registered professional land surveyor. In addition, when easements are created because of a road abandonment, metes and bounds descriptions must be prepared by a duly registered professional land surveyor.
- In accordance with the PLS Board’s [Rules and Regulations](#), a Professional Land Surveyor shall perform an appropriate boundary survey of the road when preparing road abandonments because portions of the abandoned road will be conveyed.

6. What is the role of a Professional Land Surveyor in the construction process?

Here is a non-exhaustive list for guidance regarding the role of a PLS in construction depending on the conditions of each project:

- a. The PLS may conduct the boundary survey of the property to be developed.
- b. The PLS may establish control lines on the ground for the location of the improvements as designed and approved (permitted).
- c. Where applicable, the PLS may establish one or more column lines along both axes of the building.
- d. The PLS may establish additional control lines for the building as needed, based on the size and/or complexity of the project.
- e. The PLS may establish vertical control reference monuments (benchmarks) for the project.
- f. The PLS may perform such other horizontal and vertical control work necessary to ensure that the building and other improvements or fixed works are placed in accordance with regulatory approvals and permits.
- g. The PLS may conduct such activities as relate to or are to be used for the certification or declaration of the positional accuracy of the building (“as-builts”) and other improvements or fixed works.
- h. The PLS may be responsible for the layout of improvements or the collection of data which is customarily depicted in or reported by any surveying activity referred to in R.I. Gen. Laws Chapter 5-8.1.

For further information see PLS Regulation § 1.9.4 Construction Surveys and the [PE/PLS Joint Informational Bulletin](#).

7. Who can prepare site plans for submission to the local building official?

Any plan containing elements of land surveying as defined by R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-8.1-2(11), including but not limited to property lines and easements must be accompanied by a current stamped survey plan in the plan set.

8. How many Professional Development Hour (“PDH”) credits from online courses may I apply to my required 20 PDH’s for each 2-year renewal cycle?

No more than 10 PDHs may be from online courses in any given 2-year renewal cycle. See § 1.7 of the PLS Board’s [Rules and Regulations](#).

Note: As of August 11, 2020, the Board has begun to review this requirement to determine if changes need to be made due to the Covid-19 Pandemic for the June 30, 2021 registration renewal. PLS registrants will be notified of any changes to this requirement by email and information will be posted on our website.

9. Where can I find a list of course that I can take to complete my PDH requirements?

Please contact your state's surveying society to see if they offer PDH courses. The Board will accept any course approved by another Colonial State Board of Registration of Surveyors.

10. What do I do if I find evidence of unregistered land surveying activity?

You can file a complaint with the Board. Here is a link to our complaint form: <http://www.bdp.ri.gov/surveyors/enforcement.php>.

11. To what extent may you utilize an existing survey plan on file with a municipality?

You may use another surveyor's plan as a reference in your survey, but you may not manipulate, change or alter another land surveyor's plan. Fellow design professionals must seek permission to use another surveyor's plan in their design package. Any survey plan being utilized must be referenced on the other design plans. Note that a survey plan is valid as of the date of issue and may be out of date.

12. What does a survey plan depict?

A survey plan is valid as of the date of issue for the purpose it was produced. A survey plan may not be altered by anyone other than the author once stamped and certified. Note that conditions may change over time and future field work must be performed to verify whether the information is still accurate. Note that a survey plan is valid as of the date of issue and may be out of date.

13. Is a survey done at present still valid in the future? Do future changes to state and local statutes, regulations and ordinance have any bearing on the survey's validity over time?

A survey plan is valid as of the date of issue. Future changes in applicable laws would not change the validity of the of the survey at the date of issue but may change the validity of the survey at a later date. Each question is subject to a case by case review. However, if a new project is being proposed, a new recertified plan will be required.

14. What happens if the adjoining property owner challenges the boundary determined by the surveyor either after the survey is complete or when the surveyor is physically marking the boundary on the subject property?

The surveyor has the right to physically mark the property/boundary line that he/she has determined by applying boundary law and the PLS Board Regulations. If the neighbor disagrees with the boundary line, their recourse would be to engage another Licensed Professional land surveyor to dispute or verify the findings. This PLS Board does not adjudicate boundary disputes. Such disputes would be handled as a private civil matter and persons with questions should consult with an attorney.