

## Preparing a Survey Report Part 5: Administrative Information

**T**his is the fifth and last article in a series of articles suggesting formats and contents of a survey report. Previous articles dealt with

opinions on the location of corners and boundaries [Feb. 2008]; encroachments, gaps and overlaps [Mar. 2008]; limitations of the surveying services [June 2008]; and frequently asked questions [Aug. 2008]. This article will discuss the administrative parts of a survey report.

Administrative information is provided, in part, for the client's benefit. More important is the need to refresh the surveyor's memory (or educate another surveyor) years or decades later. The administrative parts of the survey report are generally placed in the first part of the report and the last part of the report.

The first part of the report that covers administration matters is the cover of the survey report. The cover should include the type of surveying services (*e.g.*, Retracement Survey), the client's name, property location (*i.e.*, street, municipality, county, and state), project number (*e.g.*, 08-3-232), date or period when the services were performed (*e.g.*, June - July 2008), a statement of confidentiality if appropriate, edition number (*e.g.*, Edition 1), copy number and total number of copies (*e.g.*, Copy 1 of 4), and notice of copyright (*e.g.*, © 2008 Knud E. Hermansen). The surveyor's seal and signature can be placed on the cover, the last page, or both. Many of these items of information can be very important.

The statement of confidentiality should be used sparingly—only when and if the client demands confidentiality or

the practitioner can reasonably assume the client would want information to remain confidential.

**Some or all the information in this report is CONFIDENTIAL and may not be disclosed without the client's permission or proper legal demand.**

The surveyor has no common law privilege of client confidentiality such as doctors enjoy with patients or lawyers enjoy with their clients. Confidentiality is limited and ordinarily established by contract with the client. In some cases demands for confidentiality from the client may prevent the surveyor from working for the neighbor or successors in interest. Designation of the report as confidential may limit or prevent the flow or sharing of information between surveyors that many surveyors enjoy.

On the other hand, a survey report is seldom recorded and can be used to notify and explain problems that the client may not want disclosed to third parties. For example, notice and details of a damaging problem can be moved from the plat to the report in order to protect sensitive information. Where important or sensitive information is placed in the survey report rather than on the plat, a note should be placed on the plat to couple the report to the plat.

**Important and relevant information can be found in the survey report. Do not use or rely on this plat without reading the survey report.**

Placing a note on the plat that refers to the survey report for important information does not require the surveyor disclose the survey report to individuals that have or obtain a copy of the plat.

The edition number is used to track changes made to published reports. If the surveyor has published the report and later makes changes and republishes the report, the edition number can be changed to identify the earlier from the later publications. Some surveyors prefer to use a date of publication rather than an edition number.

The surveyor can keep track of the copies by assigning a sequential number to each copy made of the report. Identifying the number of copies made and who received a particular copy is used to track the source of unauthorized copies. Since a surveyor derives a fee from the opinion he or she provides, unauthorized copies deprive the surveyor of a revenue stream the surveyor has a right to demand under copyright laws.

A copyright statement should be included on the front of the report. While a copyright notice is not required for copyright protection, it is wise to place a copyright notice on the face of the report since most people assume incorrectly that a document without a copyright notice can be copied without permission.

Finally, the surveyor may want to include his or her name and business address on the report cover. Opportunities for self-promotion should not be overlooked.

In the first section of the report after the cover, additional administrative information can be listed. This information is used to refresh the surveyor's memory years and decades later. Within

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this section the following information can be included:

- **Client contact information** The client's address, telephone number, e-mail address, and other contact information should be listed.
- **Property location** If the property location is different from the client's address, the property location should be stated. Specific directions to reach the property can be provided.
- **Equipment and software** Given the rapid advance in technology, it is wise to list the equipment and software that were used during the surveying services.
- **Tax information** The tax parcel number of the client's parcel can be listed along with the zoning of the property.

- the copy they received can be listed. This information will help identify the source of unauthorized copies.
- **Actions taken** A brief statement of the actions taken by the surveyor can be listed along with the time or date the acts occurred. This information can be helpful to show due diligence or refresh the surveyor's memory decades later.
- **Relevant documents** A list of documents relevant to the survey can be listed. The list can include the NGS quad sheet, deeds, field book or data file, and flood plain map.
- **Relevant datums** The relevant datums that were used during the surveying services should be listed. This would include the basis of the direction (*e.g.*, true, 2008 magnetic), distance datum

- **List of survey data** Preserving a list of coordinates, traverse measurements, solar observations, calculations, list of station descriptions, and other survey data in written form is helpful if there is subsequent work on or near the client's property some time in the future. Destruction of digital data or the obsolescence of digital reading software may make the survey report the only source for this data years later. It also provides a quick method for transferring survey data to another surveyor.
- **Unrecorded documents** Important letters, affidavits, unrecorded plats, historical field notes and other documents that were relevant to the surveying services performed can be included in the appendix. This arrangement makes it convenient if the survey has to be reviewed at a later date.
- **Records examined** A list of the recorded records that were examined can be very helpful years later. In some cases a flow chart can be included as an appendix to show the sequence of conveyances. Extracts of key parts of relevant descriptions can also be included.
- **Photographs** Small icons and a list of photographs can be included in the appendices. This can be helpful if the survey results have to be reviewed some time later.

## “The surveyor has no common law privilege of client confidentiality...”

- **Standards** Mandatory standards often change over time. The mandatory standards enforced at the time the surveying services were performed can be listed.
- **Personnel and titles** Personnel who helped perform the surveying services along with their title and responsibility should be listed. These individuals may have to help with recalling information that is required decades later. It also helps the individual support their claim of experience on the project when compiling their experience for licensure.
- **Contacts** People or firms that were contacted during the surveying services should be listed. This list could include neighbors, utility companies, municipal or state agencies, etc. In some cases, other surveyors that provided information can be listed and their contribution acknowledged. This could help show due diligence and remind the surveyor what efforts were undertaken to obtain relevant information.
- **Report distribution** The people who have received copies of the report and plat along with the number of

- (*e.g.*, geoid, grid), and coordinate datum (*e.g.*, geocentric, WGS-84).
- **Adjustment technique** Any adjustment techniques that were used should be listed such as the compass rule, least squares, etc.
- **Survey procedure & precision of measurements** The survey procedure should be noted and the precision of the measurements provided. This would include kinematic GPS, map grade GPS, traverse, radial survey, etc.
- **Declination** The declination should be stated. This would be helpful if the client wants to follow the boundary with a compass or help orient another surveyor to the historical direction.

Other administrative information is often included in the appendices. Consider the following appendices that can be included in the survey report:

- **Notice to adjoining** A sample of the letter sent to neighbors, utilities, etc., can be included as an appendix. This could show compliance with surveyor right of entry requirements and due diligence.

With the completion of the administrative parts of the survey report, the report can be printed, copies made, bound, and distributed. It is usually wise to keep one copy for the office bookshelf. It may be kind to give a copy to the employee who was in responsible charge of portions of the surveying services so the employee can have access to the information and evidence of his or her involvement in the surveying services.

In closing, I hope these articles on preparing survey reports will provide some insight and aid in preparing reports. Do not be afraid to experiment and develop a style that fits your needs. 

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