



## vantage point

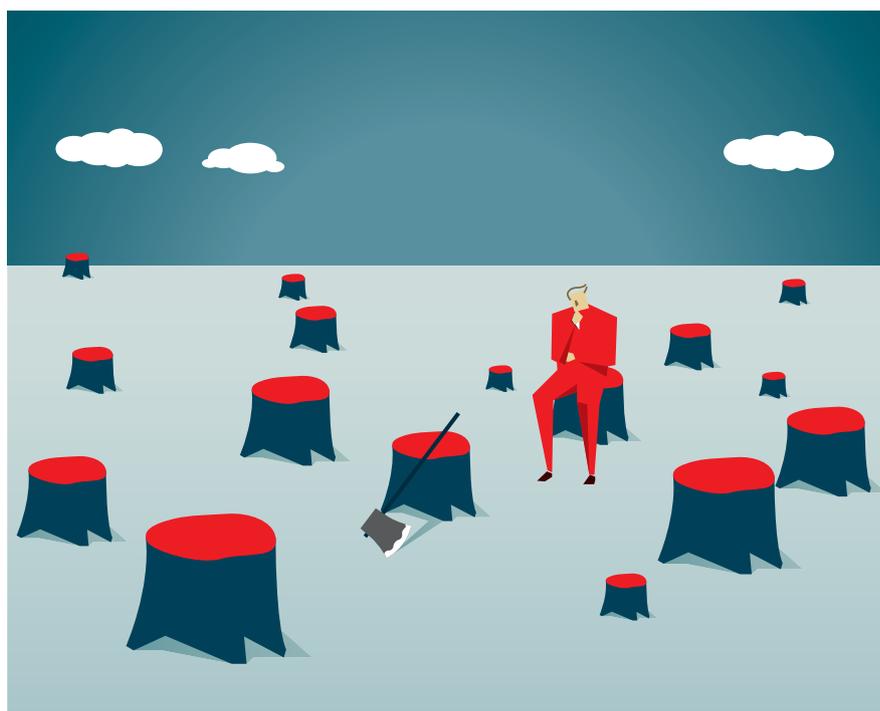
# “I Should Have Hired a Surveyor...”

**I**t isn't often that we see a line like that in the news, so it certainly grabbed my attention. More frequently I hear moaning about surveying being a dying profession. Here is just one (expensive) example of why I disagree.

Solebury Township in southeastern Pennsylvania still boasts a number of old hardwood trees, and the miscreant in this instance was a property owner who simply wanted a better view from the deck of the country home he had just bought but not yet moved into. He hired an arborist to clear some trees that he thought were on his property. 22 trees later, the landowner (a retired lawyer) realized that he was the one responsible for his neighbors' dismay at destruction within a posted conservation easement (protecting said trees), and turned himself in.

Recently the landowner paid \$261,211.07 to cover restitution and costs for replanting, although it will take a long time for new trees to replace the majesty of the felled 75- to 150-year-old originals, some 100 feet tall. He was charged with 22 felony counts of agricultural vandalism and 22 misdemeanor counts of agricultural trespassing and given five years of probation. (As a side note, I'm not sure if those five years of good behavior mean not being allowed to hire another arborist or perhaps prohibition from touching an axe or chainsaw.)

Here is someone who relied on an arborist who ignored the “No Trespassing” signs posted every 30 feet; hence the quote above. This instance of blind faith and reliance on a non-surveyor to honor property lines is not an isolated situation. I once had someone call for an emergency



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survey because “the surveyors from Sears” had assured him that they were installing his new fence on his land, but his neighbors vehemently disagreed.

Another distraught couple realized too late that their closing attorney had steered them wrong in convincing them to save money through an Affidavit of No Change from the sellers of their new home. (For the uninitiated, this seller's affidavit states there have been no changes affecting the property or property lines since the last survey, no time limit.) The new owners were confused when the municipality rejected the old survey, showing the house as “proposed,” as unsuitable for planning an expansion to the existing physical structure.

I can't forget the developer who decided to stake a parking lot himself after the initial survey control was set, but spent a lot more than he saved when the whole thing had to be torn out due to wrong configuration and surface “bird baths” that failed municipal inspection.

No need for licensed professional surveyors? I heartily support an opposing view.

Many years ago, as president of my state surveying society, I made the rounds to meet with each chapter. We were in another economic downturn, and surveyors who had limited their practices to small lot surveys were suffering. I was confounded by how many times I was asked what I was going to do to get surveyors back to work—

not the state organization of which they were members, but me as their new leader. While discouraged that this sounded like asking for a Fairy Godmother to wave her magic wand to create more work of the kind they were used to without any effort of their own, I applied a strong filter between brain and mouth, refraining from saying anything of the sort. But suggestions about applying their skills in new ways and working together on public awareness of what surveying is and our versatile values were not always well received.

In the intervening decades, technology has changed our practices dramatically and made it possible for surveyors to fill greater roles in imaging, machine control, control for subsurface and surface construction, and more. We have increased our value to numerous fields and practices, a tiny sampling including archaeology, historic preservation, community planning, agriculture, post-disaster verification of flood hazard mapping, and infrastructure maintenance. My own practice has expanded into some interesting arenas I never expected but am excited to be drawn into and learn more about. It was the variety of work and constant opportunity for expanding my horizons that fascinated me about surveying in the first place.

There are many things that can't be determined by GIS and mathematics. Surveying takes education, and it takes experience to know how to apply that education in creative problem solving. It also takes familiarity with local practices and conditions. Furthermore, it requires actual physical presence to inspect the premises. Whether involved in control surveys, route surveys, construction surveys, hydrographic, boundary, historic, or judicial surveys, the expert must investigate documents here and measure, assess, and document ground conditions. Aside perhaps from some limited research, none of this can be outsourced overseas. ■

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