
GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS USED IN SURVEYING

Reference: Black's Law Dictionary by Henry Campbell Black, M.A. Fifth Edition by Joseph R. Nolan and M.J. Connolly 1979

Acre

A quantity of land containing 160 square rods, 4,840 square yards, or 43,560 square feet of land, in whatever shape.

Adjoiner Parcel [Adjoining]

A parcel that is touching or contiguous as distinguished from line near to or adjacent.

Bearing

The angle between north or south and a direction, for example, N 47°18'27" E also often being expressed as (North 47 degrees, 18 minutes, and 27 seconds East).

Bench Mark

A mark on a fixed and enduring object, indicating a particular elevation and used as a reference in topographical surveys and tidal observations.

Boundary

Every separation, natural or artificial, which marks the confines or line of division of two contiguous properties. Limits or marks of enclosures if possession be without title, or the boundaries or limits stated in title deed if possession be under a title.

Certificate of Survey

A statement signed by the surveyor regarding the work they performed. Each type of survey has its own unique certification.

Condominium

A system of co-ownership where individuals own portions of a larger property and share joint ownership of common areas. The larger property is referred to as the Condominium Development; the individual parcels are called Condominium Units. Condominium Units may be unimproved land, space in an existing or proposed building, marina slips, etc. Condominiums in Michigan are regulated by the Condominium Act.

Corner

An angle made by two boundary lines; the common end of two boundary lines, which run at an angle with each other.

Deed

A conveyance of realty; a writing signed by grantor, whereby title to realty is transferred from one to another.

Easement

The right of someone other than the property owner to use a piece of private property for a specific purpose (for example, the right of the public to use a trail that crosses private property, the right of a utility company to install power lines on private property, etc.). Easements are often used to create a narrow passage across a property. An easement restricts the owner's rights to that piece of property but doesn't take them away; the details vary depending on the easement and situation.

Elevation Certificate

It is used to certify building elevations if the building is located in a Special Flood Hazard Area in order to: Determine the proper flood insurance premium rate for the building.

Encroachment

A structure or object that is located (wholly or in part) on property not owned by the occupant.

Encumbrance

Any right to, or interest in, land which may subsist in another to diminution of its value, but consistent with the passing of the fee.

Exception

An exception withdraws from operation of deed part of thing granted which would otherwise pass to grantee. Also being defined as withholds from grant title some part of property that would otherwise pass.

FEMA

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, which plans for, mitigates against, and responds to man-made and natural disasters. A part of the Department of Homeland Security.

Gap

An area of land between two neighboring properties that is not included in the legal description of either property, the ownership of which is uncertain.

Government Land Office (GLO)

The federal agency that conducted Government Surveys in Michigan prior to 1946, when it was combined with other federal agencies to create the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Government Survey

General mapping out by government of towns, sections, quarter sections, Etc.; sometimes known as congressional survey.

GPS (Global Positioning System)

A network of satellites that can be used to determine the location of points on the ground. Also refers to the instruments that receive and process the satellite signals.

Hundredth

A unit of length equal to 1/100 of a foot (0.12 inch or 1/8 inch).

Improvements

A valuable addition made to property (usually real estate) or an amelioration in its condition, amounting to more than mere repairs or replacement, costing labor or capital, and intended to enhance its value, beauty or utility or to adapt it for new or further purposes. Generally buildings, but may also include any permanent structure or other development, such as a street, sidewalks, sewers, utilities, Etc. Structures that can be easily removed from the property (such as detached decks or sheds with no foundation) are not normally considered improvements for the purposes of a survey.

Iron

A general term for monuments that are made of metal.

Legal Description

A description of real property by government survey, metes and bounds, or lot numbers of a recorded plat including a description of any portion thereof subject to an easement or reservation, if any. Such must be completed enough that a particular parcel of land can be located and identified.

Link

A unit of land measurement equal to 1/100 of a chain, or 0.66 feet (7.92 inches).

Lot

A lot is commonly one of several other contiguous parcels of land that making up a block. Real property is typically described by references to lot and block numbers on recorded maps and plats. Local zoning laws commonly require minimum lot sizes for residential and commercial building.

Monument

Any physical object on ground which helps to establish location of line called for; it may be either natural or artificial, and may be a tree, stone, stake, pipe, or the like.

Overlap

An area of land between two neighboring properties that is included in the legal description of both properties, the ownership of which is uncertain.

Parcel

A contiguous quantity of land in the possession of an owner.

Parent Parcel

The original portion of land from which a parcel has been taken; also any parcel that has the potential to be divided. According to Michigan's Land Division Act, parcels that existed on March 31, 1997, or have been in existence for at least 10 years, are eligible to be parent parcels.

Plat

A map of a town, sections, or subdivision showing the location and boundaries of individual parcels of land subdivided into lots, with streets, alleys, easements, Etc., usually drawn to a scale.

Quit Claim Deed

A deed of conveyance operating by way of release; that is, intended to pass any title, interest, or claim which the grantor may have in the premises, but not professing that such title is valid, nor containing any warranty or covenants for title. Under the law of some states the grantor warrants in such deed that neither he nor anyone claiming under him has encumbered the property and that he will defend the title against defects arising under and through him, but as to no others.

Right-Of-Way

As used with reference to right to pass over another's land, it is only an easement; and grantee acquires only right to a reasonable and usual enjoyment thereof with owner of soil retaining rights and benefits of ownership consistent with the easement.

Riparian

Belonging or relating to the bank of a river or stream; of or on the bank. Land lying beyond the natural watershed of a stream is not "riparian."

Riparian Rights

The rights of the owners of lands on the banks of watercourses, relating to the water, its use, ownership of soil under the stream, accretions, Etc. Term is generally defined as the right which every person through whose land a natural watercourse runs has to benefit of stream as it passes through his land for all useful purposes to which it may be applied..

Rod

A lineal measure of 5½ yards or 16½ feet; otherwise called a "perch."

Section

A division or parcel of land, on the Government Survey, comprising one square mile or 640 acres. Each "township" (six miles square) is divided by straight lines into thirty-six sections, and these are again divided into half-sections and quarter-sections.

Section Corner

An angle made by two boundary lines; the common end of two boundary lines, which run at an angle with each other.

Subdivision

The division of a lot, tract or parcel of land into two or more lots, tracts, parcels or other divisions of land for sale or development.

Tenth

A unit of length equal to 1/10 of a foot (1.2 inches or 1 3/16 inches)

Title

The legal evidence of the right of ownership in a piece of property. Can also refer to the formal documents that serve as proof of these rights.

Tract

A lot, piece or parcel of land, of greater or less size, the term not importing, in itself, any precise dimension, though term generally refers to a large piece of land.

Warrantee Deed

Deed in which grantor warrants good clear title.
The usual covenants of title are warranties of
seisin, quiet enjoyment, right to convey,
freedom from encumbrances and defense of title
as to all claims.