

## MY PROPERTY LINE; HOW DO I FIND IT?

You would like to build a fence, a structure, or would just like to know where your property line is. There are several ways to do this, ranging from having an accurate survey done to using existing features to get a rough approximation of the line.

While having a survey will cost some money, it will allow you to complete your project with confidence that you have not built on your neighbor's property. The other choices may not create this level of confidence and can create conflict with your neighbors and result in significant costs to you. Property line disputes between neighbors often require the services of both a Professional Land Surveyor and an attorney to resolve.

**The city strongly recommends that you hire a professional land surveyor to locate your property line before commencing with any construction. Most building and fence permits require you to show the property line on the site plan.**

**BEST CHOICE.** Hire a professional land surveyor, capable of accurately locating and “pinning” or marking the edges of your property. The Yellow Pages maintains a listing of local licensed professional land surveyors that provide this service. In addition to surveying, a professional land surveyor is able to identify easements and other features that affect your property lines.

**GOOD CHOICE.** Obtain a copy of the surveyed plat or Certificate of Survey (COS) that created the parcel and utilize it to find your existing property pins. Property pins are typically some type of metal stake (rebar, iron pipe, steel rod, etc.) in the ground and may have a (yellow plastic or aluminum) cap on it. These plats and COS are filed with the Missoula County Clerk and Recorder's Office. They are the official record showing the dimensions of the parcel in relation to the streets, alleys and other parcels surrounding it. Plats are filed alphabetically by subdivision name (such as Sunnyside Addition comes before William's Addition) and COS are filed by number.

In addition, the Clerk and Recorder's Office maintains easement records and other documents that might affect your property line. Missoula County has a website for researching property records for:

Plats and COS at <http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/research/>

Easements and other documents at <http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/Owner/Default.aspx>

Some parcels are described by metes and bounds descriptions and are not shown on a subdivision plat or a certificate of survey. These descriptions describe the parcel by “courses” and distances from a starting point and are normally shown on the warranty deed or other documents that transfer ownership of the parcel. Sometimes these descriptions are quite complicated and you will need to hire a professional surveyor.

**LAST RESORT.** You may be able to get a “ball park” and much less reliable idea of where your property line might be by taking the following steps yourself:

1. Get a copy of the plat or the COS that describes your lot from the Missoula County website at <http://www.co.missoula.mt.us/research/>. You may also get a copy by visiting the Missoula County Clerk and Recorder's Office at 200 West Broadway. These plats

and COS show the widths and lengths of lots, street right-of-ways, some easements and other features affecting your property. Plats are filed alphabetically by subdivision name (such as Sunnyside Addition comes before William's Addition) and COS are filed by number; AND

2. Ask the Clerk and Recorder's Office staff to help you research easements, street and alley vacations, and other documents that may affect your property line. You will need to go to the County Courthouse at 200 West Broadway to do this research; THEN
3. Try to find one of the corner property pins that mark your property boundary. Property pins are usually some type of metal stake (rebar, iron pipe, steel rod, etc.) in the ground and may have a (yellow plastic or aluminum) cap on it. This will give you a point from which you can measure, following the dimensions on your plat or COS; OR
4. Try to find one of the corner property pins of a neighbor's property. This will give you another point from which you can measure, following the dimensions on your plat or COS; OR
5. Use a copy of the Peterson's Maps which are available on-line at <ftp://ftp.ci.missoula.mt.us/Maps%20and%20Graphics/Peterson%20Road%20Index/> or get a copy from the City Engineering Office at 435 Ryman Street in Missoula. The Peterson's Maps have surveyed drawings of streets as they existed in 1965, for the older parts of town, block by block including centerlines, pavement widths, location of sidewalk and other features. Determine the scale (typically 1" = 50') of the map by using the dimensions shown and scale the distance from the back of the sidewalk, back of curb or edge of pavement to the front property line; OR
6. Find the centerline of your street using the right-of-way width from your plat or COS. Locate the centerline of the street by measuring from back of sidewalk, back of curb or edge of pavement and measuring 1/2 the right-of-way width to find the approximate location of your front yard property line. WARNING: some streets are NOT centered within the right-of-way. Then, using your plat or COS dimensions, measure from the approximate front property line to the alley behind your parcel. If the dimensions are matching up fairly closely, you will have found a general location for your property line; BUT
7. BEWARE! THIS METHOD IS NOT VERY ACCURATE; consider hiring a professional land surveyor for locating existing property pins. Older neighborhoods are particularly difficult, especially where property and street dimensions may have been changed by street or alley vacations and street improvements.

**Disclaimer; Due to possible inaccuracy of this method, the property owner is the sole responsible party for the approximate property line location. The City or any past land surveyors shall not be held liable for property line conflicts that may result from this activity.**