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Land Development 101: How do I develop my land?

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If you are a private landowner, you probably have many questions about how to develop your land. The process may seem daunting, and for good reason: the complex rules and regulations that apply to land development require artful navigation, and they're not getting any simpler. Partnering with the right team and understanding the steps of development is critical to your success.

Although not all agencies will have **regulatory authority** over every development, awareness of who has jurisdiction on your land is essential for ensuring compliance from the outset. The list starts with local entities – some familiar (e.g., county, city, or township, which may have zoning and subdivision ordinances and comprehensive plans that guide land use) and some less familiar (e.g., soil and water conservation district or watershed district). The list expands to include state and federal agencies, replete with a bewildering array of acronyms (MDH, DNR, BWSR, SHPO, MnDOT, MPCA, and USACE, to name a few).

The first step in project development is to obtain a valid legal description and boundary **survey**. While both items may be on file, most agencies require they be updated to within the last year or two. Another survey document, the title commitment, may also be required and need updating.

Once the legal limits of the property are established, a **site analysis** is needed. The review of a site's potential typically addresses natural resources and physical features (wetlands, woodlands, endangered species, slopes, soils), cultural resources (historic buildings and archaeological sites), encumbrances (easements, rights-of-way), and infrastructure (wells, roads, septic fields).

With a clear understanding of the site's opportunities and constraints, **site design** can begin. Site planning should strive to match your vision and goals – which may include economic gain, environmental sensitivity, family heritage, or an innovative affordable community – with the property's context. Once a concept plan has been agreed upon, formal site plans are prepared.



The land development process basically involves 6 steps:

- Regulatory Authority – determining who has jurisdiction on your land
- Survey – obtaining valid legal description
- Site Analysis – reviewing the site's opportunities and constraints
- Site Design – carrying out your vision and goals
- Platting Process – acquiring necessary approvals and filing the plat
- Construction – executing the project consistent with its design

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The **platting process** involves acquiring all necessary approvals and filing the plat to allow the construction phase to begin. This is an important opportunity to resolve any stumbling blocks that were not addressed earlier, since changes made during final design and construction become much more expensive.

Finally, it is time for **construction**. Construction plans need to consider the full intent of the project design while also understanding “value engineering” and the importance of your bottom line.

This brief overview only hints at the potential complexities of land development today. Development can be relatively simple and straightforward for some projects, and extremely challenging for others.

While partnering with a team that includes surveyors, environmental scientists, planners, landscape architects, engineers, and construction managers is an up-front investment, the expertise of this multi-disciplinary team can help protect and maximize your investment in the long run. Engaging well-qualified assistance through the development process will turn your vision into success.

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