

DID YOU KNOW?

AN EDUCATIONAL ARTICLE PRESENTED BY THE DNR SURVEY ADVISORY BOARD

COUNTY ENGINEER'S OFFICE = OFFICE OF RECORD

What do they have of record?

Did you know that Washington State law has long established the Office of the County Engineer (AKA County Road Engineer) as an office of record for this state, and has entrusted these offices with the duty of filing survey and deed information.

Per RCW 36.80.040 - "The office of county engineer shall be an office of record; the county road engineer shall record and file in his or her office, all matters concerning the public roads, highways, bridges, ditches, or other surveys of the county, with the original papers, documents, petitions, surveys, repairs, and other papers, in order to have the complete history of any such road, highway, bridge, ditch, or other survey;..."

What this has meant over the years, from a practical standpoint, is that these offices are sometimes the only places that you will find certain documents, especially those pertaining to road rights of way and county properties. This could mean Surveys, Plats, Waivers, Deeds, and Easements, for the majority of county roads and county properties, many of which were dedicated and/or established via commissioners hearing prior to the survey recording act. Also, depending on the county, the original right of way waivers (which contained easement language) or a separate right of way dedication may not have been recorded in the Auditor's Office. Sometimes a copy was given to the Auditor, but was "filed" rather than "recorded" into the public record. Many of these "files" were later transferred to state archives, and are not really accessible any longer. This means that those waivers and easements only exist in the Office of the County Engineer. They won't show up on a title report, and aren't currently accessible at the Auditor's Office. Not that most right of way dedications will show up in a title report, since many (if not most) of these were done prior to 40 years ago (as far back as title companies are typically required to have records for).

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As an example of what one can find at the County Engineer's Office that most likely won't be found anywhere else: One County Engineer's Office has approximately 130 years of survey field notes that contain record of thousands of road reference monuments, as well as ties to property corners, DLC Corners, Section Corners, and anything else that the County Crews tied when executing roadway surveys. Many of these monuments are tied to the waivers/dedications by language in the original waivers, so should be considered original monuments to the location of the roadway. Since many of the County Engineers were also surveyors, they also did surveys for many county properties, and/or private ownerships, which are available in these field

notes. Furthermore, there are records of Viewer's Reports and Surveyor's Reports, with actual survey data from roadway surveys that go back all the way to 1855. The original establishments, and/or commissioners' journal pages showing when/how the road was officially established by the County Commissioners can be found in this office. There are also a large number of unrecorded surveys available (approximately 2000) which were completed by the county and various private surveyors. The private survey files of a previous County Engineer/Surveyor are also available in said office. Again, this is similar to what will be found in many County Engineer's Offices around the state, though their particular records will vary.

What this all goes to say is that, when doing a survey of a property up against a County Road, past County Road, or a County owned property, that a trip to the County Engineer's Office will serve you well on your way to doing a full records search.

Article written by WCCS Liaison to the SAB – Paul Galli, PLS (Cowlitz County) and reviewed by the SAB members.