



 **P.L. LYONS**
Architectural Builders Since 1974

6 Steps to Buying Land

FOR YOUR CUSTOM HOME

A clear, step-by-step guide that helps you confidently evaluate land, uncover hidden costs, and determine whether a property is truly ready for your custom home.

Buying land is one of the most exciting and complex steps in building a custom home. Before you fall in love with a piece of property, it's critical to understand whether the land is truly buildable for your project, what it will cost to prepare, and how it will impact your overall home budget.

This guide walks you through some essential steps every buyer should take before purchasing land, helping you avoid costly surprises and make confident, informed decisions.

The Land-Buying Process: What You Must Do *Before* You Buy

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Identify the Land and Confirm It's Buildable

Not every piece of land is suitable for building, even if it looks perfect at first glance.

The first question isn't "Do I like it?" — it's "Can I build on it?" Key questions to ask:

- Is the land legally buildable?
- Are there zoning or local government restrictions?
- Is it buildable at a cost you can afford?

This is where bringing in a builder early can help make your project cost-effective.





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Get a Survey

A professional land survey is non-negotiable. A survey helps confirm:

- Property boundaries
- Easements or shared access points
- Setbacks and buildable areas
- Road frontage and access
- Reveal possible encumbrances

Without a survey, you may not know where, or if, you're actually allowed to build.

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Evaluate Zoning, Regulations & Restrictions

Zoning requirements and building regulations vary by location and can significantly impact your project. Be sure to research:

- Local zoning classifications
- County or municipal building regulations
- HOA requirements (if applicable)
- Minimum square footage or architectural standards

Just because land is for sale doesn't mean your home plans will be approved.



When “Build-Ready” Land Isn’t Build-Ready

“A client purchased land they believed was build-ready, only to discover it was located in an overlay district. That designation triggered extensive requirements, including zoning and sewer reviews, environmental and archaeological studies, detailed landscape documentation, and coordination with multiple agencies. Review fees alone totaled \$50,000, with overall compliance adding roughly \$250,000 at the time—costs that could exceed \$500,000 today. The process was both time-consuming and expensive, delaying construction before it even began.

According to the NAHB, regulatory costs have increased 28% over the last decade, making early due diligence essential for your project.”

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Understand Utilities & Infrastructure

Utilities can make or break your budget.

Confirm availability and cost for:

- Electric
- Water and sewage (or septic systems)
- Road access and driveway approvals (a nearby road doesn't always mean easy or legal access)
- Ground clearance and grading requirements

Extending utilities can add substantial, unexpected costs.

When Utility Requirements Change the Entire Project

Fire protection and utility requirements can significantly impact a project's cost and feasibility and are often identified later than expected. Depending on location, projects may need to meet hydrant distance standards, include standpipes, install oversized water lines, and provide full access for fire equipment.

In one case, a utility provider required a 4-inch water line instead of a standard 2-inch, increasing costs. In another, a home was lost because a bridge couldn't support a fire truck. These requirements vary by jurisdiction but are non-negotiable, making early evaluation critical.

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Identify Environmental & Land Constraints

Certain factors can severely limit buildability or increase construction costs, including:

- Flood zones
- Tree clearing requirements
- Soil conditions
- Ground stability and drainage
- Timber rights or land-use limitations

These details matter long before design begins.

Pro Tip: "Just because land is available doesn't mean it's buildable for your plans. Access requirements alone can involve several agencies and significantly impact feasibility, cost, and timeline." – Perry Lyons

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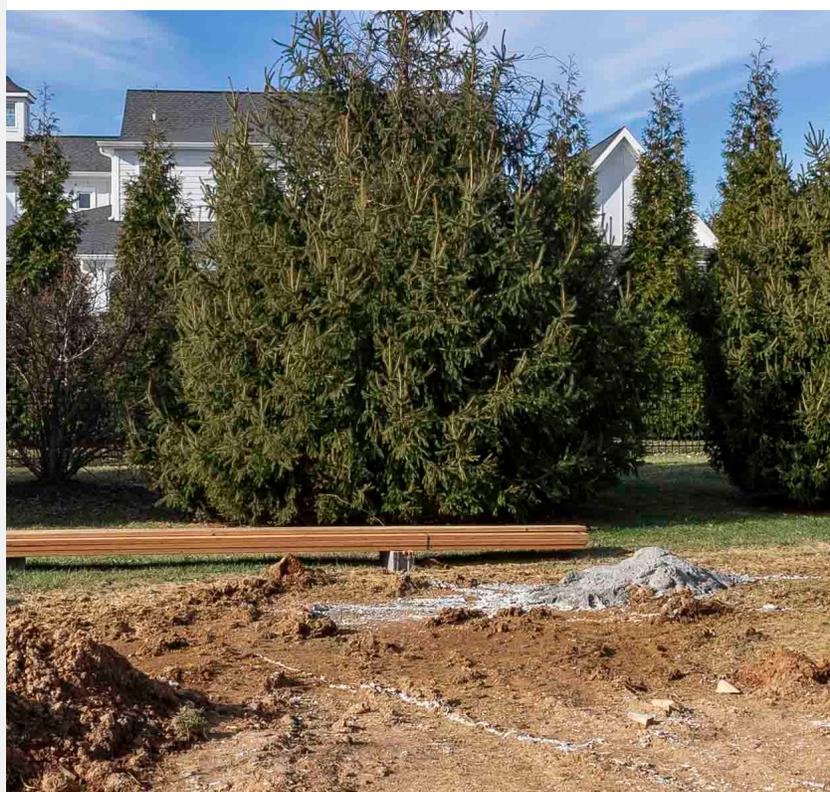
Bring a Builder to the Land

One of the smartest steps you can take is involving a builder before you purchase.

An experienced builder can:

- Evaluate true buildability
- Identify hidden challenges
- Estimate site preparation costs
- Flag issues that could impact design or budget

This step often reveals issues that aren't obvious to buyers or real estate agents.



Pro-Tip: Use a Contingency

“Including a contingency gives buyers time to complete surveys, evaluations, and builder consultations before fully committing. It’s a smart way to reduce risk and move forward with greater confidence.” - **Adam Gallagher**

Next Steps

Buying land is about more than location. It’s about feasibility, cost, and long-term success. With the right planning and professional guidance, you can move forward with confidence and clarity.