

# DUE DILIGENCE CHECKLIST FOR BUYING VACANT LAND

- ZONING:** Understand the [highest and best use](#) for your vacant lot.
- TOPOGRAPHY:** Irregular elevations, cliffs, mountains, valleys, and ravines can significantly impact a property's usability.
- PROPERTY TAXES:** Beware of an unreasonably high tax bill relative to the property's actual value.
- PUBLIC UTILITIES:** Properties without access to water, sewer, electricity, gas, or phone may not be ideal for building a dwelling.
- BUILDING SETBACK REQUIREMENTS:** Building setback requirements are commonly imposed to give order and consistency to the buildings in an area. Take time to understand the setbacks for your property and verify that there is enough space to use it as you see fit.
- USAGE RESTRICTIONS:** Most vacant lots have some kind of usage restrictions in place. Especially if your lot is situated in a [Homeowner's Association](#), get familiar with what restrictions are in place.
- FLOOD ZONE:** Land situated in a [flood zone](#) can be extremely expensive to insure and could limit the options of what can realistically be constructed there.
- PERC TEST:** A soil evaluation that tests the rate at which water drains through the soil. In areas where public sewers are not available, the [perc tests](#) will help determine whether a septic system can be installed, which directly affects the usability of the property and whether a dwelling can be built there.
- ROAD ACCESS:** There are thousands of properties all over the country with no road access. When a property is [landlocked](#), it's usefulness and value will be severely limited. As such, this is an important detail to know before you purchase a vacant lot.
- PHYSICAL ACCESS:** Some properties may not have road access but they still have physical access through a common area. This is another important detail to understand, as it impacts the practical uses of a vacant lot.
- SIZE, SHAPE, DIMENSIONS AND LOCATION:** Some properties are virtually useless due to the odd size and/or shape. This can be seen quickly in most cases by looking at a parcel map online.
- WATER ACCESS:** Many properties don't have access to a municipal water supply (i.e., city water), which means a well must be drilled or additional costs will be involved to bring a water source to the property. This can be a significant cost when the property is developed, which makes it an important detail to understand from the outset.
- WETLANDS:** Federal and state laws prohibit landowners from developing their land in any way that will adversely affect [wetland](#) areas.
- CONTAMINANTS:** Occasionally, vacant lots are used by their owners or neighbors as a makeshift landfill or dumping ground, which can require an expensive cleanup. The only way to know the current situation is to send a local person to the property to get pictures and visually inspect the property.
- PREVIOUS USES:** If you're considering a vacant lot zoned for commercial development, ensure you're not inheriting any [environmental](#) contamination with the property.
- SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD:** Surrounding properties can have major implications for the perceived value of a parcel of land.
- TITLE SEARCH:** Order a [title search](#) to verify you are buying the property from the actual owner, and that no other owners or lienholders have a claim to the property.