

## ***THE VALUE OF PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS***

*By*

*Thomas F. Giovannetti, P. Eng., NSLS*

*CIVTECH ENGINEERING & SURVEYING LIMITED*

How often have we asked ourselves if work to be done at our home or cottage is necessary and/or mandatory? This can be determined from asking a qualified person for an opinion regarding the work to be undertaken. Without the knowledge and advice of others it is often difficult to determine the cost and if the work is necessary.

Should you wish to have your property re-surveyed an estimate of fee would be prepared by the Surveyor. The term “estimate” is used when a fix cost is unable to be determined. Therefore an estimate is provided to cover for any variation of fee should difficulties be encountered that are unknown to the surveyor at the time the estimate is given. The estimate of fee is an indication of what the most probable cost would be to complete the work.

You should expect that when asking for a fee for Land Surveying and/or Engineering services that an estimate of cost be prepared for your consideration. It would be prudent to obtain a written cost estimate in order to determine what level of service and scope of work is being offered for the intended work. To often we rush out and obtain three quotes and more than likely pick the company with the lowest estimate and later realise that you get what you pay for. In some cases you may pay more than the initial estimate for the work should unknown problems arise in the process of doing the work.

If the accuracy of an estimate of fee was a crucial factor in determining if the work is to be done, a preliminary investigation should be conducted. The preliminary study at the onset would determine if there are obvious problems for the completion of the work and/or if the work to be undertaken by you is feasible and/or required.

For example, imagine owning a lot or parcel of land without knowing the correct location of the boundaries. In requesting the cost to have the survey done the estimates acquired from Surveyors in the region appeared be more expensive than anticipated. From your perspective you may have some hesitation in determining if there is some urgency to have the work done now or at a later time. Should you choose not to undertake the survey on the basis of the fee for the work, it is possible that you now have equated the cost of the survey to be in relation to the need for the survey. This for the most part could be dangerous as the justification not to have the survey done due to cost avoids your initial concern and/or need to have the boundary survey done. Instead of putting the survey off until a later date, for future generations and/or after all your trees are cut down etc, call your Surveyor and ask for a preliminary boundary investigation

The cost for the preliminary boundary investigation could be capped at some determined fee from just a few hours of work to one or two days by the surveyor. The study could involve initial registry research reviewing deeds for the property and a site visit. The site visit would determine the abundance and/or lack of boundary evidence such as existing survey markers fences and/rock walls. A hand-held GPS should be used in the preliminary survey to assist in the preparation of a preliminary sketch showing the location of found evidence and preliminary boundary locations. Following the investigation an office consultation would

bring you up to speed on the results of the study.

Most of this work could be done for an initial fixed fee ranging approximately from \$200 to \$800.00, depending on the size of the property. Following the completion of the preliminary study the Surveyor would be in a better position to provide a more accurate estimate or fixed cost for the survey that could be less than the initial estimate. You might also decide to do the survey in parts allowing you to spread out the cost of the work over time. This option would be known and available to you upon completion of the preliminary survey investigation.

Preliminary investigations can be provided for a wide range of your requirements and needs. In my article “Building Style and Lot Grading Considerations”, a few hours with an engineer could be very beneficial in determining the right lot for the preferred building style. Furthermore imagine the importance of obtaining a preliminary engineering opinion on the suitability of the lot for on-site sewage in conjunction with you preferred building style.

Armed with this preliminary study you will be able to sharpen you pencil and achieve a better grasp of how much you septic system should cost etc. You will also have some comfort in knowing that you won't have to build your lot up and spend thousands of dollars on fill and rock of which could have been unknown to you at the time of the initial lot purchase. Furthermore, the preliminary study will help you wade through the building permit process by having an informed opinion by an engineer/surveyor prior to making application for same.

Imagine having an additional \$2500 +/- to spend in your kitchen/bathroom rather than your septic system. This can be achieved by a preliminary study that would determine the difference of cost between a QP2 contractor selected septic system and/or a QP1 engineered designed system. It is possible that there could be as much as a 25% cost saving in an engineered designed septic system as opposed to a system selected by a QP2. You won't know this unless you ask a Professional Engineer. The cost for this determination would be somewhere between \$200 to \$500 of which could in some cases could provide as much as a \$3500 savings over and above the engineers fees, especially if a septic pump and pump chamber are eliminated.

The intention of this article is to inform the general public that the process of providing preliminary engineering and land surveying investigations is a very beneficial way to obtain bird eye view of the work to be undertaken. This process will enable a client to determine if the work to be undertaken is feasible and/or required. The value of the preliminary study will provide a realistic estimate of cost on the basis of the information found. In many cases the fee paid for the study would not be redundant and/or cause extra work in the completion of the project. In fact the information obtained may be beneficial enough to substantially lower any initial estimate of fee as the preliminary study could/would eliminate unknowns and be able to provide a more accurate and lower estimate of fee. In some cases the work to be undertaken may not be required as sufficient information in the preliminary study could satisfy your initial needs. This may be the true benefit of a preliminary investigation.

Tom Giovannetti, P. Eng., NSLS provides Land Surveying, Engineering and Environmental Approvals for Subdivisions and Septic Fields in many areas of Nova Scotia from offices located in Dartmouth and Tatamagouche. Should you need any assistance and or consultation, please feel free to inquire about our No charge initial consultation at 434-4600, 657-3456 or toll free 1-800-210-1227, or e-mail [civtech@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:civtech@ns.sympatico.ca)