

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
STATE OF GEORGIA**

GUIDELINES FOR WORK ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

There are few things which are more important to most people than their home or their property. This is very apparent at town meetings sitting face to face with irate property owners. We need to put ourselves in the property owner's shoes. A clear understanding of what is expected for coordination with property owners will benefit all parties involved.

The number of manhours required to manage and implement the process is surprising.

It is important to establish who is responsible for providing accurate property owner information prior to beginning the project. An accurate list of property owners with names, addresses, phone numbers and an aerial alignment plan with affected property owners identified on it is essential.

Personal experience has led to the following observations:

- At the beginning of the project the information appears to be sufficient.
- Many names do not appear on the plans.
- Actual property owner names do not appear on the plans.
- Information is outdated.
- Business names appear on plans while others own the property.
- Determining who is appropriate contact is very time consuming.
- No ownership contact on site for rental property (door-to-door contact not feasible.)
- Some property owners live in other states.
- Extensive research is required at the courthouse.
- Extensive use of phone company services may be required.
- Many homeowners are not home during the day, requiring night time calls
- Interviewing neighbors may be of limited value.

Recon-coordination is highly dependent on the quality and format of the information provided to the Geotechnical Engineer at the beginning of the project. Without quality information, "notifying the property owners" becomes identifying, locating, and then notifying property owners. This process can double or triple the required manhours.

Some of the information that is needed prior to beginning contact with owners includes:

- A plat or plan identifying property boundaries, owner's name, or contact name if the owner is a business or other entity.
- A list of property owners with corresponding parcel i.d. numbers, home addresses, and, most preferably, accurate phone numbers. Make sure you have the latest property owner list from the appropriate district DOT right-of-way or design office.

The information, provided by consultants to the property owners should be standardized. The standard GDOT form letter, from Prime Professional, does not adequately inform property owners of the nature of the work to be performed, particularly if clearing or dozer work is required. If only drilling is required, then the Prime Professional GDOT letter may suffice. The GDOT Geotechnical Bureau letter should be the standard letter for mailing, with return receipt requested, when clearing and/or dozing is required.

It is imperative when geotechnical investigations are to be performed on private property; either by consultants or GDOT forces, property owners shall be notified in writing by the Survey Party Chief prior to geotechnical crews entering onto the private property. If GDOT is to perform the soil surveys, GDOT is responsible for the notifications. If consultants are to perform the soil surveys, the consultant is responsible for the notifications. When it is difficult to reach an owner, a note should be left on the door explaining the work to be done, and giving the owner a name, address and phone number for them to contact for further information. Note that some meetings may have to take place after normal working hours when the property owner is more likely to be home. When meeting with the property owner, a detailed explanation should be presented about what kind of work will be conducted on their property. Conversations with property owners should be documented and copies of the notes mailed to them. Documentation should be recorded in a field book and include name, date, time, log of telephone conversation or face-to-face meeting. A standardized form may be used.

When a property owner refuses to grant access to the property immediately notify the Client verbally and in writing. Remobilization may be necessary. Documentation is essential. When a property owner cannot be located, notify the Client, both verbally and in writing of the difficulties. Document the date and time of the attempts to reach the person.

Other important issues regarding working on private property include:

- Some property owners may want to negotiate deals for property access, e.g., being provided a new gate, having their driveway re-graded, having wood from downed trees cut and stacked, etc. When working on DOT projects, these things cannot be provided to the property owner, and consultants cannot be reimbursed if they elect to do so. Notify the Client and await instructions. Remobilization may be necessary.

- Getting keys to locked gates can be a coordination nightmare, especially with farmland where cattle, horses, etc., may be located. Leaving a gate open is as serious as leaving a borehole uncovered with an animal stepping in the hole and breaking a leg. Make sure you closely follow the owners' instructions to close gates, lock gates, etc.
- The property should be kept free from empty lunch bags, soda cans, newspapers, and other trash after the drillers, surveyors, traffic control personnel and others have finished work at the site. Remember that the work of your subcontractors reflects on you, and your work reflects on the Department.
- Make sure that all borings are filled after completion, or covered if groundwater checks will be made later.
- When working on the right-of-way, but near someone's residence, as a courtesy, consider informing the property owner that work will be performed near their home.
- It is advisable to take photographs of the property prior to your field work to document the existing conditions in the event of a later dispute with the property owner.
- For sedimentation, erosion control, and site restoration, utilize the "Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia" put out by the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission.