



*How to Locate
Land for Your
Wood Home*



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Zoning & Density

Start by visiting the local building department, either on the city or county level. Research the zoning and density requirements that surround your potential building site. Understand how your building site and the community as a whole will be impacted by nearby development.

Soil, Terrain and Perc Tests

How deep is the topsoil? If your site is on the side of a mountain, the views can be dramatic, but if it only has a thin coating of topsoil, contractors will have to blast bedrock to excavate. This will quickly increase foundation construction costs. Also, if you are installing a septic system you will have to discover if the site will pass a “perc” or percolation test.

Planned Growth

Has the state you want to live in passed any kind of growth management act? A few states have. Typically these plans delineate where growth will be channeled over the next 25 to 50 years, including community density, building plans, transportation growth and more. If there isn't a statewide law on growth, the local city or county council could determine where growth will be allowed. Either way, you must make some judgment on whether you trust a community's intentions with the property you will be spending your money on.

Community Covenants

Covenant-controlled communities limits what you can do with your own property. This seems intrusive at first glance, but it's the only way for developers to tread lightly on the land and preserve their clients' investments in the process. If there are no land use rules, your neighbors may invite every cousin to park an RV in their front yard—forever. Neighbors can be more than an annoyance; they can detract from the value of your investment.

Local Economy & Taxes

The health of the local economy will influence your land decision. Grinding poverty can have just as dramatic impact on the landscape as an influx of billionaires. Which way is your community headed? Research the current tax rate. A community needs some taxes to support infrastructure such as police, fire protection and water and sewer. However, tax rates in some resort areas have been known to dramatically increase, which can be a serious threat if you are on a fixed income in your retirement years.

Transportation and Access

Analyze the access to your building site (is there more than one road in?) and the community. Ideally, you'll want well-maintained roads and highways with a regional airport within an hour or two drive. But you don't want so much traffic congestion that it affects pollution levels and noise.

Federal & State Lands

If you're shopping for pristine land, look for areas that fall under federally protected land and wildlife rules. Even if land is privately owned, it will be subject to certain restrictions to protect endangered species. Critical habitats, including migration routes for eagles, spotted owls or bats are typically exempt from large-scale developments, large power lines or highways.

Quality of Life

Getting a great deal on price is only one factor to be considered. Do you like the view? How far away are markets, medical and emergency services and other necessities? Will weather affect access?

Contingency Agreement

After finding a lot you are seriously considering purchasing, work out a contingency agreement with the seller. These agreements indicate to the seller that you are serious enough to put a deposit down (usually nonrefundable) while giving you enough time to determine if the property is a buildable lot. These contracts usually run from 30 to 90 days. If the seller does not agree to grant such a contingency, then there may be something wrong with the property that he or she is reluctant to share.

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Adapted from The National Association of Homebuilders Timber and Log Homes Council