



LUXURY HOMES OF TEXAS

Before You Buy the Lot

A Texas Custom Home Site Due-Diligence Guide

Better Homes Begin With Better Decisions.

Built on Integrity. Guided by Vision. Inspired by Dreams.

A Note From Tim

The lot can be one of the most exciting parts of planning a custom home. It is easy to stand on a property, see the trees, the view, the neighborhood, or the open space and immediately begin imagining the house.

But the property is more than the backdrop for the home. It is one of the largest design, engineering, construction, and budget variables in the entire project. A beautiful site can create extraordinary opportunities. It can also carry constraints that are expensive to solve if they are discovered too late.

I created this guide to help homeowners slow the lot decision down just enough to ask better questions. Before you fall in love with a view, understand the drainage. Before you assume the house will sit in a certain location, understand the setbacks and easements. Before you compare lot prices, understand what it may take to make each site buildable.

The goal is not to make every property feel risky. It is to help you understand the property as part of the home—not as a separate decision that happens before the “real” project begins.

The right lot is not simply the one you like most. It is the one that supports the home you want to build.

— **Tim Lansford**

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Use this guide before purchasing land whenever possible. It is not a substitute for a survey, title review, geotechnical investigation, engineering, legal advice, or other professional due diligence. It is a framework for knowing what to investigate and which questions deserve answers before the design depends on the property.

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01 Start With the Home You Want to Build

The lot should be evaluated against the home you want—not in isolation.

Before comparing properties, define the major characteristics of the project. Approximate size, number of stories, garage configuration, outdoor living, pool, detached structures, privacy needs, views, accessibility, and architectural character can all influence whether a particular lot works well.

A property that is ideal for a compact two-story home may be a poor fit for a wide one-story residence with a five-car garage, pool, motor court, and significant outdoor living. The lot may still be buildable, but forcing the wrong program onto the site can create compromises and cost.

Think in Terms of Fit

The question is not simply, “Can a house be built here?” The better question is, “Can the house we want be built here in a way that makes sense?” That distinction can save months of redesign and significant expense later.

START WITH THE PROGRAM

Before getting emotionally committed to a property, write down the major spaces and site features you expect the finished estate to include. Use that list as part of the lot evaluation.

BUILD INFORMED™ GUIDE

02 Read the Survey Before You Read the View

A survey can reveal limitations that are almost invisible when you are standing on the property.

Property boundaries, easements, setbacks, utility locations, encroachments, access points, existing improvements, and other recorded conditions can affect where the home can sit and how the site can be used. On larger or irregular properties, the difference between total acreage and usable building area can be significant.

Whenever available, obtain and review a current survey early. If the available survey is old, incomplete, or does not reflect current conditions, discuss whether an updated survey is appropriate before relying on it for design decisions.

Do Not Assume the Property Line Is the Building Line

Even when the parcel is large, recorded restrictions and required setbacks can compress the practical building envelope. Utility, drainage, access, or other easements can further affect the location of structures, pools, drives, walls, or landscaping.

THE VIEW CAN DISTRACT YOU

A remarkable view or impressive frontage can make a lot feel immediately right. The survey is where you begin verifying whether the site actually supports the way you want to use it.

03 Setbacks, Easements and Buildable Area

The total size of the property and the buildable area are not the same thing.

Setbacks establish how far structures may need to remain from property lines, streets, or other features. Easements reserve areas for utilities, drainage, access, or other purposes. Deed restrictions or private-community requirements can add additional limitations beyond the basic property boundaries.

These conditions matter because the home is only one part of the site plan. Garages, driveways, pools, outdoor kitchens, retaining walls, accessory structures, septic components, generators, mechanical equipment, gates, and landscape features all need room too.

Test the Entire Site Plan

A concept plan or preliminary site study can be extremely useful before purchase. It does not need to be a finished architectural design. Its purpose is to test whether the major components of the project can reasonably fit within the usable portion of the property.

LOOK BEYOND THE HOUSE FOOTPRINT

A home may fit on paper while the driveway geometry, pool, outdoor living, grading, equipment areas, or required setbacks make the overall plan awkward. Evaluate the property as a complete estate, not a rectangle for the house.

04 Soils and Foundation Conditions

In Texas, what is under the house can matter as much as what is above it.

Soil conditions influence foundation design, excavation, drainage strategy, paving, retaining systems, and site preparation. North Texas properties can vary considerably, sometimes even within the same neighborhood or parcel.

A geotechnical investigation is typically used by the design and engineering team to understand subsurface conditions and make foundation recommendations. The timing and scope should be determined with the appropriate professionals, but the important point for the homeowner is simple: foundation assumptions should not be based only on what was built next door.

Watch for Signs That Deserve More Attention

Large grade changes, previous fill, nearby retaining walls, visible erosion, cracking in existing structures, unusual drainage patterns, ponds, creek corridors, or evidence of prior earthwork are all reasons to ask more questions. None automatically disqualify a property, but they may affect engineering and budget.

DO NOT PRICE THE FOUNDATION BY NEIGHBORHOOD

Two nearby properties can require different foundation or site strategies. The project team should rely on information specific to the site rather than assumptions based only on nearby homes.

05 Drainage, Topography and Water

Water will move across the property whether the site plan accounts for it or not.

Drainage is one of the most important site issues to understand early. Look at where water enters the property, where it naturally wants to go, where it collects, and how proposed construction may change those patterns. Building pads, driveways, pools, patios, walls, and landscape work can all alter runoff.

Topography can also be an asset. Grade changes may create opportunities for views, terracing, dramatic architecture, walk-out spaces, or layered outdoor environments. The same grade changes can require additional excavation, retaining, drainage infrastructure, stairs, walls, or structural solutions.

Walk the Property After Rain If You Can

A dry-day visit shows one version of the site. A visit after significant rain may reveal ponding, erosion, concentrated flow, soft areas, or neighboring runoff that would otherwise be easy to miss.

WATER IS A SITE-WIDE ISSUE

Drainage should be considered for the house, landscape, driveways, pool, neighboring properties, and the final grading plan together. Solving one area while creating a problem somewhere else is not a solution.

06 Utilities and Service Availability

A lot is not truly ready for a home until you understand how the home will be served.

Confirm the availability and practical location of electric service, water, sanitary sewer, gas where desired, communications, and any other services important to the project. “Available in the area” is not the same as “available at the building location without significant work.”

On properties outside conventional municipal service areas, the project may require a well, septic system, propane, private utility extensions, or other site-specific infrastructure. Those systems can influence lot layout and should be considered alongside the house, pool, drives, and landscape plan.

Ask About Distance and Capacity

The location of the connection point matters. Long utility runs, required road crossings, transformer placement, upgrades, easements, or capacity limitations can affect cost and schedule. For larger homes, it is also worth confirming that anticipated service demands can be supported.

VERIFY—DO NOT ASSUME

Utility availability should be confirmed with the appropriate providers and project professionals. A listing description or neighboring service connection is not enough information for a final budget.

07 Access, Construction Logistics and Site Constraints

The finished driveway and the construction access are not always the same problem.

Custom homes require repeated deliveries of concrete, steel, framing materials, windows, stone, cabinetry, equipment, and dozens of trade vehicles. A site that is easy to reach in a passenger car may be difficult for large trucks, cranes, pumps, trailers, or delivery equipment.

Narrow roads, low branches, sharp turns, steep grades, limited staging areas, gated access, restricted work hours, or neighboring properties can all influence logistics. On constrained sites, temporary access or staging solutions may need to become part of the construction plan.

Think About Where Everything Goes During Construction

Materials need storage. Dumpsters need space. Trades need parking. Excavated soil may need to be stockpiled or hauled away. Existing trees or improvements may need protection. Understanding these logistics early helps prevent the site from becoming an avoidable bottleneck.

ACCESS HAS A PRICE

Difficult construction access does not mean a property should be rejected. It means the logistical consequences should be understood before the budget assumes a simple site.

08 Trees, Orientation, Views and Privacy

The strongest site plans work with the property rather than simply placing a house on it.

Mature trees, solar orientation, prevailing views, neighboring homes, street exposure, and topography can all influence where the home should sit and how the rooms should be organized. These are not merely aesthetic considerations. They affect comfort, privacy, glazing, shading, outdoor living, landscape design, and the daily experience of the home.

Decide What Deserves to Be Protected

A significant tree canopy, view corridor, or private portion of the site may be one of the reasons you are buying the property. Identify those priorities before design begins so the team can consider them alongside grading, utilities, construction access, and the building footprint.

Tree preservation also needs to be realistic. Root zones, grade changes, excavation, utility trenches, paving, and construction traffic can affect trees even when the trunks remain untouched. When important trees are part of the design intent, involve the appropriate landscape or arboricultural expertise early.

DESIGN FOR THE SITE YOU ACTUALLY HAVE

The best property decisions often come from balancing what you want to see, what you want to screen, how the sun moves, and how the house connects to outdoor spaces throughout the day.

09 HOA, Architectural Control and Local Requirements

Private-community standards can shape the design before the architect draws the first elevation.

Many luxury communities have architectural control requirements covering minimum size, setbacks, materials, roof forms, landscape standards, fencing, construction procedures, review submissions, and other design criteria. Municipal or county requirements may add separate permitting and development considerations.

Review applicable restrictions and design standards before assuming that a particular architectural concept, material palette, accessory structure, or site plan will be permitted. If the property is subject to architectural review, understand the submission process and how it may affect the design schedule.

Separate Preference From Permission

A homeowner may have a clear vision for the project, but the property may carry private or public constraints that limit certain elements. Discovering those limits after design is substantially complete creates unnecessary redesign and frustration.

GET THE DOCUMENTS EARLY

Ask for the current recorded restrictions, architectural guidelines, review procedures, and any other documents that may affect construction. Have the appropriate professionals review them when the implications are unclear.

10 Demolition, Existing Improvements and Hidden Conditions

An “improved” property may carry as many questions as a vacant one.

Existing homes, slabs, pools, wells, septic systems, retaining walls, drives, utilities, landscape structures, or other improvements may need to be removed, reused, abandoned, or incorporated into the new project. Each option can affect cost and sequencing.

Demolition is more than knocking a structure down. Utility disconnects, hazardous or regulated materials, disposal, foundation removal, pool removal, site restoration, trees, access, and existing underground conditions can all influence the scope.

Do Not Assume Existing Infrastructure Is Reusable

An existing driveway, utility line, septic system, foundation, well, or retaining wall may look valuable, but its location, condition, capacity, or documentation may make reuse impractical. Treat existing improvements as potential assets only after they have been evaluated.

OLD WORK CAN HIDE NEW COST

A property with an existing structure may appear to save money because utilities and improvements already exist. Sometimes it does. Sometimes removal, relocation, upgrades, and unknown conditions cost more than expected.

11 How the Lot Changes the Budget

The least expensive lot is not always the least expensive place to build.

Lot price is only one part of the property decision. Site development can include demolition, clearing, excavation, grading, retaining, foundation adjustments, drainage systems, utility extensions, driveways, walls, gates, tree protection, temporary access, soil export or import, erosion control, and landscape restoration.

A higher-priced property with straightforward conditions may produce a more predictable total project cost than a lower-priced lot that requires substantial infrastructure or engineering. That is why lot comparisons should include an estimate of what it may take to make each property ready for the home.

Separate Land Cost From Site-Development Cost

Keeping these categories distinct makes the economics easier to understand. The purchase price tells you what the land costs to acquire. The site-development budget tells you what may be required before and around the house so the property can support the project.

COMPARE TOTAL OPPORTUNITY, NOT JUST PURCHASE PRICE

When two lots are under consideration, compare the likely home fit, site-development requirements, design opportunities, restrictions, and total investment—not only the listing prices.

12 Who Should Review the Property

The best lot decisions usually involve more than the buyer and the real estate agent.

Depending on the property and stage of the project, useful input may come from the builder, architect, civil engineer, structural engineer, geotechnical consultant, surveyor, landscape architect, arborist, pool designer, utility providers, title professionals, or other specialists.

You do not need to assemble the entire construction team before making every land decision. You do need enough expertise to investigate the issues that could materially change the feasibility, design, or cost of the project.

The Builder Can Help Connect the Questions

An experienced custom builder looks at the property through a construction lens: access, grading, foundations, utilities, logistics, budget, schedule, and how all of those pieces interact with the intended design. Bringing that

perspective in before purchase can be particularly valuable when the lot has unusual conditions or an ambitious building program.

ASK FOR A SITE REVIEW BEFORE YOU ARE COMMITTED

When practical, allow the project team to walk the property, review available documents, and identify obvious questions while there is still time to investigate them.

13 Questions to Ask Before You Buy

A good lot conversation is less about finding reasons not to buy and more about understanding what you are buying.

- What is the actual buildable area after setbacks, easements, and restrictions?
- Does the property reasonably support the size and type of home we want?
- What do we know about the soils and likely foundation considerations?
- How does water move across and around the property?
- Are there floodplain, creek, drainage, or significant grade issues that need investigation?
- Where are electric, water, sewer, gas, and communications services located?
- Will any utilities need to be extended, upgraded, relocated, or privately provided?
- Can construction equipment and large deliveries access the building area?
- Which trees, views, or site features should the design protect?
- What HOA, deed restriction, architectural-review, or local requirements affect the property?
- Are there existing structures or improvements that must be demolished or evaluated?
- What site-development costs are likely beyond the house itself?
- Which unanswered questions could materially change the budget or design?
- Who should investigate those questions before the purchase becomes final?

YOU DO NOT NEED ZERO RISK

No property comes with perfect information. The objective is to identify the material unknowns, investigate the ones that matter, and make the purchase with a clearer understanding of the opportunities and obligations attached to the site.

14 Lot Due-Diligence Checklist

Use this as a working list when evaluating a potential custom-home site.

Property Documents

- ☐ Current survey obtained or need for updated survey identified.
- ☐ Title, easements, restrictions, and relevant property documents reviewed.
- ☐ HOA or architectural-control requirements obtained, if applicable.

Site and Building Fit

- ☐ Preliminary home program is defined well enough to test the lot.
- ☐ Approximate building envelope and major site features have been considered.
- ☐ Driveway, garage, pool, outdoor living, accessory structures, and service areas have room to work together.

Physical Conditions

- ☐ Drainage patterns and topography have been reviewed.
- ☐ Soil and foundation questions have been identified for professional investigation.
- ☐ Important trees, views, privacy concerns, and orientation have been considered.
- ☐ Existing structures or site improvements have been evaluated for removal or reuse.

Utilities and Access

- ☐ Electric, water, sewer/septic, gas, and communication needs have been investigated.
- ☐ Connection locations, distance, capacity, and potential extension costs are understood at a preliminary level.
- ☐ Construction access, delivery access, staging, and parking limitations have been considered.

Budget and Team

- ☐ Likely site-development costs have been separated from the land purchase price.
- ☐ Builder and/or design team has reviewed the property when appropriate.
- ☐ Material unanswered questions have been assigned to the right professional before purchase.

Where Do You Go From Here?

If you have found a property you are seriously considering, the next step is to move from attraction to verification. Gather the available documents, walk the site with the right professionals, identify the major unknowns, and test the property against the home you actually want to build.

You do not need a finished set of plans to have a productive site conversation. A clear description of the project, an available survey, and an experienced team can reveal a great deal before the design becomes committed to assumptions.

The right property does more than provide an address. It gives the architecture, site plan, outdoor environment, and construction process a strong place to begin.

Buy the property with the home in mind—not just the view in front of you.

BEGIN A CONVERSATION

If you are evaluating land for a custom home, Luxury Homes of Texas can help you look at the property through a builder's lens before important assumptions become part of the project.

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