

2026 ALTA Survey Standards Updates: Potential Impacts on Real Estate Transactions

*Grace Winters and Kristen JoAnn Lyons**

In this article, the authors discuss changes to the Minimum Standard Detail Requirements for American Land Title Association/National Society of Professional Surveyors Land Title Surveys that recently took effect.

The American Land Title Association (ALTA) and National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) have revised the Minimum Standard Detail Requirements for ALTA/NSPS Land Title Surveys, with the changes taking effect on February 23, 2026. All prior versions of the standards are superseded by such updates, and the 2026 standards are applicable to all new ALTA/NSPS surveys requested since such date.

For background, every five years, a joint standards committee consisting of ALTA and NSPS members convenes to review and update the minimum standards of performance for ALTA/NSPS Land Title Surveys. These updates are meant to refine the mechanisms used in preparing surveys to best meet the evolving needs of landowners, borrowers, purchasers and all other consumers of ALTA surveys.

Though the 2026 revisions will not materially expand survey scope, cost or timing in

most real estate transactions, they do place a stronger emphasis on supporting documentation, transparency regarding encumbrances, and coordination between surveyors and title insurers. As a result of these revisions, borrowers, owners, lenders and legal counsel may notice changes in how surveys are conducted and rendered in the coming months.

CLARITY ON SURVEYOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The 2026 standards aim to enhance the general understanding of a surveyor's obligations with respect to records research in preparing an ALTA survey. Though the surveyor can typically rely upon the title company to provide the current record description of the underlying property and relevant documents depicting recorded covenants, easements and servitudes burdening such property, the onus is on the surveyor to research "non-public or quasi-public documents" (such as railroad or highway plans) that are otherwise required to

*The authors, attorneys with Holland & Knight LLP, may be contacted at grace.winters@hklaw.com and kristen.lyons@hklaw.com, respectively.

finalize the survey, as well as perform any additional research required pursuant to the statutory or administrative requirements of the jurisdiction where the property is located.

GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND CLEARER EXPLANATIONS

Surveyors are now required to provide more comprehensive notes on the face of the survey when discrepancies arise, such as between recorded information and practical use. This includes explanations for differences between recorded and measured distances, reasons for preparing new legal descriptions, limitations on access, parol statements by interested parties as to title or boundary issues, and observations that could affect survey conclusions. Such disclosures will enhance transparency regarding the establishment of boundaries and easements and can better inform discussions with respect to desired title coverage.

CLOSER ALIGNMENT BETWEEN SURVEYS AND TITLE COMMITMENTS

The new standards provide enhanced guidance on depicting easements, servitudes and appurtenant rights. Surveys must now clearly state whether easements are shown, cannot be located, are blanket easements, are illegible or do not affect the property. Surveyors must also notify the title insurer if they discover recorded easements not listed in the title materials, allowing the title insurer to determine whether such easement remains applicable to the property and should therefore be plotted on the survey.

TABLE A: REVISIONS AND CLEANUP

The optional Table A survey responsibilities

and specifications, which may be requested by a party, were largely unchanged but reflect certain clarifications to mirror other updates to the 2026 standards. Those clarifications include the following:

- *Item 11(b)*. A party can now directly coordinate private utility location requests.
- *Item 15*. This item, which addresses a surveyor's use of methods other than ground-based surveying to locate property features (such as rectified orthophotography, photogrammetric mapping, remote sensing and airborne/mobile laser scanning), was reworded to require that such methods be discussed prior to implementation to confirm such use is acceptable.

Additionally, a new Table A item (Item 20), when selected, requires the surveyor to summarize potential encroachments in a table on the face of the survey (rather than merely identifying the same or not in the survey depiction). Such table must identify the physical conditions with respect to such encroachments and provide a means by which the conditions can be readily located on the face of the survey by a reviewing party.

Finally, any negotiated or modified Table A items must be clearly explained in the survey.

PRESENTATION AND CERTIFICATION UPDATES

Certification language remains relatively unchanged by the update, but the standards now provide clearer rules for presentation details such as sheet numbering, captions and revision dates. Certification may also be

extended to successors and assigns of a lender, if requested.

IMPROVED PRECISION AND BOUNDARY REPORTING

The updated standards clarify how surveyors must address measurement precision and boundary resolution in survey preparation, including when and why relative positional precision exceeds the allowable threshold. These changes are intended to reduce ambiguity in the standards rather than change how boundaries are determined.

When a water feature forms a boundary, the survey must now include the date measured, specific feature located and a note acknowledging that water boundaries may change naturally over time.

WHAT THIS MEANS

For most transactions, these updates should not change whether an ALTA/NSPS survey is required or how it is negotiated. However, there will now be more detailed surveys, ad-

ditional explanatory notes, and closer coordination between surveyors and title companies. Early alignment among the parties will remain important, particularly when negotiating Table A items or addressing access, easements or boundary issues.

IN SUMMARY

- ALTA and NSPS made revisions to the Minimum Standard Detail Requirements for ALTA/NSPS Land Title Surveys, which took effect on February 23, 2026.
- These updates supersede all prior versions of the standards, and the 2026 standards are applicable to all new ALTA/NSPS surveys requested on and after the effective date.
- Though the 2026 revisions will not materially expand survey scope, cost or timing in most real estate transactions, they do place a stronger emphasis on supporting documentation, transparency regarding encumbrances, and coordination between surveyors and title insurers.