CLIENT ALERTS & INSIGHTS

ALTA/NSPS Key Changes and Updates in the 2026 Standards

MARCH 2, 2026

Featured Industries: Real Estate

Key Takeaways

- The 2026 ALTA/NSPS Land Title Survey standards, effective February 23, 2026, introduce new requirements for how land title surveys are conducted, with expanded definitions, clarified documentation standards and updated procedures for both fieldwork and reporting.
- These changes increase the compliance burden and risk for commercial real estate transactions, making it essential for buyers, lenders and title insurers to understand and address the new standards. Failing to comply could result in survey delays, missed issues or complications in closing and insuring deals.
- Clients should specify “2026 ALTA/NSPS LAND TITLE SURVEY” in all survey requests, gather and provide current title commitments and property documents early, and proactively discuss optional Table A items and unique property features with their surveyor and lender to ensure a smooth transaction.

The American Land Title Association (ALTA) and the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) have jointly adopted updated Minimum Standard Detail Requirements for ALTA/NSPS Land Title Surveys, effective February 23, 2026. These standards govern the way land title surveys are conducted across the United States and directly affect commercial real estate transactions, acquisitions, financings and development projects.

1. **Effective Date and Supersession**

- The new standards took effect on February 23, 2026, and explicitly supersede all previous versions as of that date. Any new agreements to prepare ALTA/NSPS Surveys on or after February 23, 2026 must follow the 2026 standards.

2. **Measurement Standards**

- The definition and explanation of “Relative Positional Precision” have been expanded and clarified. The updated definition now measures the uncertainty of the line connecting monuments or witnesses marking adjacent boundary corners, rather than measuring one corner relative to an adjacent corner. The standards also clarify that Relative Positional Precision is "most commonly" estimated by at least squares adjustment of the survey, rather than stating it "can be" estimated that way. The maximum allowable Relative Positional Precision remains unchanged at 2 cm (0.07 feet) plus 50 parts per million.

3. **Records Research**

- The 2026 standards reorganize and clarify what documentation the surveyor must receive before beginning work. Most notably, the standards clarify that complete copies of the most recent title commitment must be provided to the surveyor-but also includes what happens if a title commitment is not available, including the surveyor’s responsibility to conduct additional research as required by law or contract.
- Surveyors are no longer able to rely on title insurers to provide adjoining property deeds and are now responsible for obtaining those records themselves, while still requiring a title commitment or equivalent title evidence to complete the survey.

4. **Fieldwork and Documentation**

- The fieldwork must now be performed "using practices generally recognized as acceptable by the surveying profession" for purposes of an ALTA/NSPS Land Title Survey, replacing the prior requirement that the survey be performed "on the ground". This gives more flexibility and allows surveys to be performed using both traditional “on the ground” surveying techniques as well as utilizing aerial imagery and other tools.
- The requirements for documenting and noting physical access restrictions, encroachments and discrepancies have been expanded. Previously, it fell to the discretion of the surveyor in terms of whether they were willing to document these encroachments or not, and in many instances required counsel (or title) to read the survey and flag those encroachments. It will be interesting to see if this causes lengthier lists of encroachments on surveys (and in turn, on title policies), but overall it seems to be a good development to require standardization across surveys and surveyors, effectively helping to evaluate risk.

5. **Plat or Map Requirements**

- The standards provide more specific requirements for what must be shown on the plat or map, including clarifying that easements may terminate through various legal mechanisms, not just from a recorded release instrument, and provide structured expectations for reporting easements shown in title commitments.

- A new requirement has been added for the surveyor to include notation of any parol (verbal) statements by interested landowners or occupants regarding title or boundary issues. If such statements appear on the face of a survey, it is critical to run down the facts, as they may signal unrecorded claims or disputes.

6. **Certification**

- The certification language is specified and must remain unaltered except as required by law. There is clarification on extending certification to successors and assigns.

7. **Deliverables**

- The standards clarify the requirements for hard and digital copies, as well as recording or filing the plat or map when required by law.

8. **Table A Optional Items**

- The process for negotiating and documenting optional Table A items is clarified, including the need for written agreements and explanations for any modifications or additional items.
- New optional Table A, Item 20 (replaces the old Item 20 “write in” option, which is now shifted to Item 21) allows surveyors to provide a summary of significant observed conditions, including potential encroachments across boundary lines, into easements or rights-of-way, or into setback areas. The standards also encourage documentation of observed third-party use without recorded easements and access dependent on common ownership. The new optional Table A item makes it clear that the surveyor is not required to express any statement of legal opinion or an opinion of ownership.
    - It is prudent to add this to the list of survey requirements, as previously, it was up to the discretion of the surveyor in terms of whether they were willing to document these encroachments or not, and in many instances required counsel (or title) to read the survey and flag those encroachments.
    - This is designed to give buyers, lenders and title insurers a centralized, easy-to-reference snapshot of potential survey issues. Time will tell if this causes lengthier lists of encroachments on surveys (and in turn, on title policies), but overall it seems a good development to require standardization across surveys and surveyors to effectively help evaluate risk.

- Revised Table A, Item 15 clarifies the use of aerial/remote imagery rather than ground surveying as the basis for showing some features on the survey. It remains to be seen how surveyors will approach this language, as it requires the client to agree in writing on imagery being utilized. The noticeable benefit is that the use of remote imagery versus conventional survey practice is identified and agreed to up front and not discovered after the fact, so everyone is on the same page from the outset.

What This Means for Real Estate Clients

- **More upfront planning and documentation** will be required, especially for properties with unique features or non-standard interests.
- **Greater precision and transparency** in survey measurements and reporting, with clear documentation of any limitations or discrepancies.
- **Enhanced communication** between clients, surveyors, lenders, and title insurers to ensure all requirements and optional items are addressed in writing before work begins.