

How to Find the Perfect Lot for Your Custom Home in Virginia

You can change paint colors, you can renovate kitchens, and you can add extensions. But the one thing you can never change about your home is where it sits. For many of our clients at Sharpline Inc., the journey to **new construction homes in Virginia** begins not with a blueprint, but with a plot of dirt.

Finding buildable land in Virginia—whether it's a wooded acre in Prince William County or an infill lot in Arlington—is more complex than buying a finished house. It requires "looking underground." Here is the expert guide to evaluating land like a professional builder.

1. The "Perc Test" and Soil Quality Virginia is famous for its red clay soil. While beautiful, it presents engineering challenges. Before you fall in love with a scenic lot, you must verify the soil quality.

- **The Perc Test:** If public sewer isn't available (common in rural lots in Loudoun or Fauquier), you will need a septic system. A percolation (perc) test determines if the soil drains well enough to support one.
- **The Risk:** If a lot "fails perc," you cannot build a standard septic system. You might be forced to install an "alternative" engineered system, which can cost \$20,000–\$40,000 more than a traditional one. Always make your land offer contingent on a successful perc test.

2. Understanding Topography and "Sitework" Costs A lot might be priced low because it is steep. While a walk-out basement on a hill offers stunning views, building on a slope is expensive.

- **Grading:** Moving dirt is one of the hidden costs of new construction homes in Virginia. Requires heavy equipment to level the pad.
- **Retaining Walls:** If the slope is severe, you may need engineered retaining walls to prevent erosion, adding tens of thousands to your budget. At Sharpline Inc., we offer "Lot Feasibility Studies" where we walk the land with you *before* you buy, estimating the sitework costs so there are no surprises.

3. Zoning, Setbacks, and Easements

Just because you own the land doesn't mean you can build whatever you want.

- **Setbacks:** Every county has rules on how far the house must be from the road and property lines. On a narrow lot, these setbacks might limit the width of your home, forcing you to build "up" instead of "out."
- **Easements:** Check the plat for utility or conservation easements. You cannot build over a gas line or a protected watershed area.
- **HOA Restrictions:** Even if you buy a vacant lot, it might be part of an HOA that dictates the style, color, and size of the home.

4. Utility Access

"Utilities at the street" is a phrase that can be misleading.

- **Public Water/Sewer:** The "tap fee" to connect to the county system can range from \$5,000 to over \$20,000 depending on the jurisdiction.
- **Electricity/Internet:** If you are building down a long private driveway, bringing power lines to the house is charged by the foot. In 2025, high-speed internet is a utility, not a luxury. Verify that fiber or high-speed cable is accessible, or budget for Starlink.

Conclusion The perfect lot is out there, but you need trained eyes to spot the difference between a bargain and a money pit. Sharpline Inc. doesn't just build houses; we help you navigate the land. If you are eyeing a piece of property, call us first. We will help you ensure it's the solid foundation your dream home deserves.