

Doing your Research:

Registry of Deeds

Search the county where the property is located + deeds to find the registry of deeds website. For example: in Massachusetts, it's called MassLandRecords.com/county name

Some have a cover page where you have to indicate that you want to search the database

When you get to the search page, first search by the property address.

When you have the owner's name, do a name search

In both cases look for:

1. any type of lien on the property
2. a foreclosure deed
3. instrument of taking
4. notices
5. certificates

Acquaint yourself with all documents associated with the property. Most counties only have document from the last 30 years or so online. You may have to visit the registry in person to request older documents if one entity has owned it for a long time. Read over the last deed to see if there are any easements or right-of-ways or any anomalies on the property.

- Go to the city or town and request the jacket from Inspectional Services, Building Inspector and/or Department of Building and Safety. Make sure that all work done in the past 20 years has been permitted.

- Either search online or go in person to the Tax Assessor for that city or town. Make sure that all parts of the local government agree on the status of the property. For example, it's quite common for people to start using a single-family home as a two-family without actually changing the property type with the city. This can cause problems with financing and later selling the property.

- In some areas, you may have to go to the public library to find owner and other data

- It's worth searching through a real estate site like Trulia's Property Sitemap for old photos of the home. You can sometimes make interesting discoveries there.

- For commercial properties, you can run an Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) that can tell you such things as whether there has ever been toxic waste or other environmental contaminants on or near the premises - for example a dry cleaner or gas station.