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One of the most distressing aspects of property ownership can be the occurrence of a boundary dispute. Most often, a dispute ends up with one or both parties dismayed with the outcome, and resultant hard feelings, which may or may not ease with time.

While all property disputes can not be resolved, for reasons which are too numerous to be covered here, precautions can be taken to lessen their occurrence or to deal with a potential dispute in a manner which is as straightforward and forthright as possible.

The first and best precaution you can take is to either require that the property you are buying has an up to date completed survey with property markers set before you take title to the property, or to have a survey done with property markers set, as soon as possible, after taking title to the property.

Of course, the best option is the first one, because there should be no surprises to you with a completed survey before you buy. Remember - Caveat Emptor! Buyer Beware! If you don't like the property lines, you can back out of the deal. In this first situation, the neighbor(s) may not like where the property lines fall, but at least they are marked going in, and you're on record with them as knowing and defending your property rights from the start.

If the neighbor(s) are not convinced that the property lines are correct, they can retain their own surveyor to perform a survey of their property. Should a discrepancy arise between the surveys, either a resolution of the discrepancy should be arrived at by the surveyors involved, or possibly a property line agreement would have to be negotiated.

A common concern of many property owners is that of adverse possession. Adverse possession is the situation where another party takes title to property by occupying that property for a certain period of time - sort of "homesteading". While this can occur in some cases, it's not as easy to do, as some people believe. There are laws that protect property owners from losing rights to their property too easily.

The laws may vary in some jurisdictions, but two conditions are almost universal. First, the possession of the property must be "open and notorious", meaning that the owner of the property knows it's being occupied and that the party occupying the property is willful about the occupation. Second, the occupation must be continuous for the full statutory period, which in Connecticut is fifteen years. That means that there can be no break in the occupation period, or the clock starts over again from the beginning. There are a hundred of other conditions, which also must be fulfilled before a court would find for the adverse possessor. Also, note that adverse possession cannot take place against a utility, a municipality or a government.

If you become involved in a property dispute, it is wise to consult with a surveyor and your attorney to determine the best course of action. Always remember to respect your neighbor's rights while protecting your own rights. As much as possible, keep the lines of communication open with the party whose property lines are in dispute, and try to resolve any differences amicably. Bad relations with neighbors can be a constant source of frustration, at a place where we need the most comfort and sense of well-being, our home.