Josh Dwyer
REAL ESTATE · COLDWELL BANKER GRASS ROOTS REALTY

Land-buyer checklist: perc tests, wells & septic

Use this checklist before and during escrow to investigate whether a rural property can support your intended home, improvements, budget, and timeline.

Start with the parcel, not a rule of thumb. Records, soils, water, access, setbacks, system design, and costs vary by property. Confirm requirements with Nevada County and qualified professionals.

1 Before you make an offer

- [ ] Ask the seller for existing OSSE / soils reports, county Findings Reports, well completion reports, septic permits, as-built drawings, and maintenance records.
- [ ] Request available septic and permit records through Nevada County's public-records process.
- [ ] Share your intended bedroom count, buildings, and site uses with a qualified soils consultant.
- [ ] Identify a well tester, water-quality laboratory, septic inspector, and backhoe provider as needed.
- [ ] Walk the site for creeks, NID ditches, slopes, large trees, roads, easements, and likely setback constraints.
- [ ] Confirm zoning, jurisdiction, legal access, utilities, fire requirements, and whether the intended use needs additional review.

2 Build the investigation into your offer

- [ ] Address OSSE / perc testing for raw land or proposed wastewater changes.
- [ ] Address well flow, storage, and water-quality testing when the property uses or needs a private well.
- [ ] Address pumping and septic inspection when an existing system serves the property.
- [ ] Allow enough time for consultant, backhoe, laboratory, contractor, and county scheduling.
- [ ] Review contingency language and deadlines with the appropriate real estate and legal professionals.

3 During escrow or the investigation period

- [ ] Review the completed OSSE and county Findings Report; confirm the allowed system type and evaluated area.
- [ ] Complete the well flow test and ask the county how current standards apply to the specific project.
- [ ] Review water-quality results and any additional panels recommended for the property.
- [ ] Have the septic system pumped and inspected; review the written scope, findings, and limitations.
- [ ] Confirm well-to-septic separation and other site setbacks using current county requirements.
- [ ] Obtain written estimates for design, permits, installation, repairs, monitoring, storage, and drilling as applicable.
- [ ] Decide from the written findings: proceed, renegotiate, revise the plan, or cancel when the contract allows.

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Budget guide & questions to ask

These figures are for early planning only. Replace every estimate with current written fees, bids, and property-specific findings before making a decision.

ITEM	EARLY PLANNING FIGURE
OSSE / perc test Consultant, backhoe, and county fee	$2,500–$3,500 observed local range
FY 2024/25 county OSSE fee One site; historical fee only	$464.30
Well flow test Four-hour pump test with basic potability testing	About $450; confirm provider and scope
Additional water-quality panels	Varies by laboratory package
Septic pumping	About $450 observed locally
Septic inspection and report	About $400 observed locally
Standard septic installation	Roughly $15,000–$30,000 depending on design and site
Engineered / alternative system	Can cost substantially more; obtain a design-specific quote
New well drilling	Varies widely with depth, geology, access, casing, equipment, and yield

Estimates only—not quotes. Costs vary by property, soil, depth, access, design, provider, and timing. County figures shown are from Nevada County Environmental Health's FY 2024/25 fee schedule and may no longer be current. Confirm all current fees directly with the county.

Ask the soils consultant

- ☐ What area and project will the OSSE evaluate?
- ☐ What is included in the quote?
- ☐ Who coordinates the backhoe and county?
- ☐ What system types appear possible?
- ☐ Does an older report need recertification?

Ask the well tester

- ☐ What does the flow test include?
- ☐ Which water-quality analyses are included?
- ☐ How are storage and low yield evaluated?
- ☐ Does the well log match visible equipment?
- ☐ What limitations belong in the report?

Ask the septic inspector

- ☐ Are pumping and inspection separate?
- ☐ Will the system be located and mapped?
- ☐ Which components can be observed?
- ☐ What is excluded from the inspection?
- ☐ Does the approval fit the intended use?

Ask Nevada County

- ☐ Which current fees and forms apply?
- ☐ Which well-yield standard applies now?
- ☐ What setbacks affect this parcel?
- ☐ What permits and monitoring are required?
- ☐ Which records are available for the site?

Questions about a Nevada County property?

Josh can help organize the transaction, records, referrals, and contingency timeline. Technical conclusions belong with the county and qualified professionals.

PLAN A CONVERSATION

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