



7 Steps to Maximising Subdivision Value

An Essential Guide for New Zealand Property Owners



Table of contents

Introduction 03

Step 1: Finding the Right Guide 04

Step 2: The Groundwork Begins 05

Step 3: Telling the Story to Council 07

Step 4: Council Responds 08

Step 5: From Plans to Physical Works 09

Step 6: Defining the New Boundaries 10

Step 7: Frequently Asked Questions 11

The TSC Approach 14



Introduction

Subdividing land is one of the most effective ways to unlock the hidden value in your property. Whether you're looking to develop, invest, or simply explore what's possible on your section, understanding the process is the first—and most important—step. In today's environment, the path to a successful subdivision has changed. It's faster, more transparent, and better supported by digital tools than it was a decade ago.

Across New Zealand, landowners are discovering new opportunities through subdivision. What follows is a story of how the process unfolds: from that first conversation to holding new titles in your hand.

Step 1: Finding the Right Guide



Every successful subdivision starts with a conversation. For many property owners, that first step begins with a simple question: Can I subdivide? It's not just a technical query—it's a financial, legal, and emotional one too. The role of your surveyor is to be your guide and advocate. They should listen to what you hope to achieve and explore whether subdivision is the right path for your site.

This isn't just about measurements and maps. It's about understanding your goals and honestly assessing whether the project will generate meaningful value. A reputable surveyor will be upfront if they don't believe subdivision is worthwhile. But if the project shows promise, they'll help you understand the steps ahead—what's involved, what it might cost, and how long it could take

Clear, staged pricing helps ensure there are no surprises. Transparency from the outset builds confidence and sets the foundation for a successful project.

Depending on the complexity of your site and the proposed development, you may also need input from other professionals. Planners can assist with interpreting zoning rules and preparing more complex applications. Civil engineers may be involved if your project requires earthworks, retaining walls, or advanced stormwater design. And a solicitor will be essential toward the end of the process to manage legal matters, including the creation of new titles. A good surveyor will help coordinate this team and advise when additional expertise is needed.

Step 2: The Groundwork Begins

Before diving into design or paperwork, it helps to understand that not all subdivisions are structured the same way. In New Zealand, the two most common legal formats for subdivision are fee simple and unit title.

Subdivision Legal Formats

1

Fee Simple Subdivision: This is the most straightforward and familiar form. It creates entirely new, individually owned sections. Each section becomes its own legal lot with a title that's not tied to any shared ownership or common property.

2

Unit Title Subdivision: Typically used for properties like townhouses or apartments, where density is higher. Each dwelling is owned individually, but common areas—such as driveways, gardens, or hallways—are shared and managed by a body corporate. This format often involves more ongoing communal management.

With the decision made to proceed, the process moves into the planning and feasibility phase. This is where the true potential of the land is explored. Using tools like online GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping, which provides detailed property maps, zoning overlays that define how land can be used, and the local District Plan—a set of council rules that outlines what you can and can't do on your land, surveyors identify the constraints and possibilities specific to your property.

Even if your land appears large enough to divide, subdivision rules vary widely depending on your local zoning. Councils often require a minimum lot size, access for vehicles, availability of essential services like water and sewer, and space for a legal building platform. These standards can differ significantly between urban, suburban, and rural zones. Your surveyor or planner will assess these requirements early in the process to help determine what kind of development is allowed and practical under the current rules.

When planning a subdivision, councils will also assess how your development affects stormwater runoff. Adding new hard surfaces—like roofs, driveways, or paving—reduces the ground's ability to absorb rain. This can increase the risk of flooding or overwhelm existing drainage systems. In response, councils may require you to install stormwater controls such as detention tanks, soak pits, or flow-limiting devices to manage water discharge onsite. These solutions help prevent issues for neighbours and downstream infrastructure and are an increasingly common part of subdivision design.

Modern technology, including drones, plays an important role here. Aerial photography can help visualise topography (the physical shape and surface features of the land, such as hills, slopes, and flat areas), identify access issues, and support the preparation of accurate design plans. Legal aspects, such as land titles and easements (legal rights that allow someone else to use part of your land, such as a shared driveway or access for services), are also reviewed, alongside utility access and stormwater management considerations



All of this research is distilled into a project outline—a kind of roadmap that outlines what's possible and what needs to happen to get there.

In some cases, additional preliminary investigations may be needed before you can confidently proceed. These can include flood risk assessments, stormwater capacity checks, or contaminated land reviews. For example, if your property is in a low-lying area or previously hosted certain industrial activities, councils may require reports to confirm the site is safe and suitable for development. While not always necessary, these assessments help identify potential constraints early and can save time and money later in the process.

Step 3: Telling the Story to Council

Every subdivision must be approved by the local council. This requires a formal application for resource consent (official permission from your local council that allows you to subdivide land, especially if it doesn't already meet the existing planning rules). But more than a formality, this is an opportunity to present a well-reasoned, well-documented proposal that aligns with the rules and values of the community.

The application typically includes a Scheme Plan showing the proposed lot layout, supported by topographical data (information that shows the shape and features of the land, such as slopes, contours, and elevation), aerial imagery, and relevant assessments—such as those covering environmental effects. Today's digital lodgement systems and experienced planning practices make this step more efficient than it once was.



In some cases, depending on your site and proposal, you may also need a land use consent. This is required when you're proposing an activity that doesn't fully comply with the zoning rules in your local District Plan—such as placing multiple dwellings on one lot or altering the use of the land. Your surveyor or planner can help determine if this applies to your situation and manage the process alongside your subdivision application.

A strong application gives the project the best chance of moving forward without delays.

Step 4: Council Responds

After reviewing the submission, the council issues a decision—often within four to six weeks. If the application is approved, the consent will come with a set of conditions that must be met before titles can be issued.

These conditions might include building a new accessway, upgrading stormwater infrastructure, or making a financial contribution to council development funds. Some conditions are straightforward, while others can be more involved. These financial contributions—often called development contributions—are fees set by the council to help fund local infrastructure that supports new growth, such as roads, stormwater systems, and public facilities. The amount will depend on your location, council policies, and the type of development you're undertaking. Regardless, a capable surveyor will guide you through the details, ensuring the requirements are met in a cost-effective and timely manner.



Step 5: From Plans to Physical Work

In many cases, subdivision is largely a paper-based process. But sometimes it involves physical construction. Whether it's forming driveways, laying pipes, or managing site grading, these tasks must meet the standards outlined in your consent.

You may choose to work with your own contractors or with those recommended by your surveyor or project manager. Either way, oversight and compliance are essential. Proper planning and supervision help avoid unexpected costs and delays.



In some locations—particularly sloped, coastal, or previously undeveloped land—the council may require a geotechnical assessment to confirm that the land is stable and suitable for building. This involves testing the soil and ground conditions to ensure they can support foundations, driveways, and other structures. If required, a geotechnical engineer will carry out the assessment and provide a report as part of your subdivision documentation. While not always needed, it's a crucial step in ensuring the long-term safety and viability of the development.

Step 6: Defining the New Boundaries

Once all physical work is complete, it's time to formally define the new lots. This is where licensed cadastral surveyors take over. Pegging out the new boundaries, calculating the legal dimensions, and lodging survey plans with Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), the government agency responsible for managing New Zealand's land records, including titles and surveys ensures that the lots exist not just on paper—but in law.

This stage also involves applying for the Section 223 Certificate from your local council. This certificate confirms that the lot layout shown on the survey plan matches what was approved in the resource consent and that the design is ready for formal acceptance.



Step 7: Frequently Asked Questions

The final step is securing the Section 224(c) Certificate. This is the council's final sign-off confirming that all conditions of consent—such as construction work and payments—have been met, and that the subdivision can now be legally completed. Once this certificate is granted, your solicitor can lodge the completed documents with LINZ, and the new titles are issued.

It's a moment of transformation. What began as an idea becomes a legal reality. You now have new titles—each representing an opportunity for sale, development, or long-term investment. Subdivision, done well, can be life-changing.

1

How long do I have to complete a subdivision?

Subdivision consents in New Zealand typically remain valid for **five years**. This means you must begin the process—specifically by submitting your survey plan to council and receiving your Section 223 Certificate—within that timeframe. Once Section 223 approval has been granted, you then have **three additional years** to deposit the plan with Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) in order to receive your new titles.

Altogether, this gives most subdivision projects up to **eight years** from the date the consent is issued to fully complete the process. However, timelines can vary depending on the complexity of your project, local council capacity, and any unforeseen delays—so it's best to stay on top of each step and avoid cutting it too close to the legal deadlines.

2

Can I subdivide my property if it's on a slope, flood zone, or rural land?

It depends. Land with steep slopes, flood risks, or rural zoning can still be subdivided, but they often require more checks and specialist input. Councils may ask for geotechnical reports to assess land stability on sloped sections, flood modelling in low-lying areas, or stricter rules under rural planning zones. These requirements help ensure safe, practical development and protect the environment. A qualified surveyor or planner can assess your site and guide you through what's needed.

3

What is a scheme plan, and why is it important?

A scheme plan is a draft layout that shows how your land will be divided—usually into separate lots. It includes proposed new boundaries, accessways, easements, and legal details like rights-of-way. A licensed surveyor prepares this plan, and it becomes a central part of your resource consent application. While it's not the final legal document, it sets the direction for the entire subdivision process, so getting it right early on is critical.

4

What is the difference between resource consent and land use consent?

A resource consent is the general permission required to carry out a subdivision or other activities that may affect the environment. A land use consent is a more specific type of resource consent that's needed when a development doesn't comply with the zoning rules in the District Plan—for example, placing multiple dwellings on a single lot or reducing required setbacks. Not every project needs both, but your surveyor or planner can assess your site and guide you through the appropriate approvals.

5

Do I need to provide access to every new lot I create?

Yes. Every new lot in a subdivision must have both legal and physical access. This means there must be a designated way for vehicles to reach the property—either directly from the street or via a shared driveway or right-of-way. Councils have specific standards for access, including minimum widths, turning areas, and construction quality. Your scheme plan will need to show how access will be achieved, and the council will confirm it meets their requirements before issuing consent.

6

Will I need to upgrade or install new services like water, power, or fibre?

Yes. Every new lot must be able to connect to essential services such as water, wastewater, stormwater, power, and often fibre internet. If these services aren't already available at the boundary, you may need to install or upgrade them. This can involve trenching, service applications, and coordination with utility providers. Your surveyor or engineer will help design the servicing plan and ensure it meets council requirements.

7

What is an easement, and will I need one?

An easement is a legal right that allows someone else to use part of your land for a specific purpose—most commonly for things like shared driveways, stormwater or wastewater pipes, or utility cables. Easements are commonly used in subdivisions where access or services cross more than one lot. They are shown on the scheme plan and recorded on the legal title of the property so all future owners are aware of the shared rights and responsibilities.

8

What is the difference between a Section 223 and a Section 224(c) certificate?

These two certificates represent different legal checkpoints in the subdivision process. A **Section 223** certificate is issued by your local council to confirm that your survey plan matches the layout approved in your subdivision consent. It's typically obtained after your Land Transfer Survey is complete. A **Section 224(c)** certificate is issued once all consent conditions—such as physical works, servicing, and financial contributions—have been fulfilled. With both certificates in place, your solicitor can then lodge the documentation with LINZ to issue new titles.

9

Do I need a solicitor, and when do they get involved?

Yes. A solicitor plays a key role in the final stages of your subdivision. Once the Section 223 and 224(c) certificates have been issued by council, your solicitor will prepare and lodge the required legal documentation with Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) to create the new titles. They may also review the title for any encumbrances, draft easement documents, and help manage any land sales or transfers. Involving a solicitor early helps ensure there are no legal surprises at the end.

The TSC Approach

We don't just survey land. We build partnerships.

Subdivision is a technical process—but it's also a personal one. Every site has a story, and every client has different goals. At TSC, we take the time to understand both. Whether you're a first-time landowner exploring options or an experienced developer looking for a reliable team, we approach your project with honesty, care, and strategy.

Our process is grounded in communication. We explain each step clearly, help you weigh your options, and keep you informed from start to finish. We offer all-inclusive, section-based pricing that makes sense—because clarity breeds confidence.



We don't just deliver survey plans. We coordinate with council planners, engineers, solicitors, and contractors. We bring local knowledge, long-standing relationships, and proven systems to every project. From feasibility to titles, we act as your advocate—identifying risks, unlocking opportunities, and ensuring compliance at every turn.

We're known for our integrity. If we don't believe a project will generate meaningful value, we'll say so. If your goals shift midway through, we'll adapt. Our priority is delivering real outcomes—not just ticking boxes.

THANK YOU!



Download this guide and get in touch to discuss how we can maximise the value of your land.

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