

**ISSUES UNIQUE TO RECREATIONAL AND LAKE SHORE PROPERTY:
RESOLVING ACCESS PROBLEMS
JUNE 3, 2010¹**

I. EASEMENTS BY AGREEMENT.

A. Introduction.

Issues of access to property, access to water, and use of property for recreational purposes can be addressed through an easement by agreement, if the necessary parties are willing.

Easements, of course, are a non-possessory interest in real property, a right of use, distinguishable from ownership of the property.

“A private easement appurtenant is not an estate in land. It is an incorporeal hereditament which permits use of the land of another in a way fixed by the scope and nature of the easement granted or otherwise acquired.”

Farnes v. Lane, 281 Minn. 222, 224 (Minn.,1968); see also *Hebert v. City of Fifty Lakes*, 744 N.W.2d 226, 230 (Minn. 2008) (noting the difference “between *possessing* the land for adverse possession and *using* the land for a prescriptive easement.”) (emphasis added).

B. Creating Easements by Agreement.

1. Must be in Writing.

The statute of frauds renders oral easements unenforceable:

“No estate or interest in lands, other than leases for a term not exceeding one year, nor any trust or power over or concerning lands, or in any manner relating thereto, shall hereafter be created, granted, assigned, surrendered, or declared, unless by act or operation of law, or by deed or conveyance in writing, subscribed by the parties creating, granting, assigning, surrendering, or declaring the same, or by their lawful agent thereunto authorized by writing. This section shall not affect in any manner the power of a testator in the disposition of real estate by will; nor prevent any trust from arising or being extinguished by implication or operation of law.”

Minn. Stat. § 513.04

2. Type of Document.

When the parties have reached an agreement, easements can be created by granting a deed. This is the most common method, and quit claim deeds are most often used. Easements are also often created by a written agreement, which can address issues such as a sharing maintenance costs. SUMMARY GUIDE TO EASEMENTS, HUGH M. MAYNARD AND SHANNON HOAGLAND (Minn. CLE, 2007) .

¹ Materials by Thomas B. Olson, Scott M. Lucas, and Shaun D. Redford, Olson & Lucas PA, Edina, MN

3. Scope.

- a. The scope of the easement is determined by the language of the easement itself:

“The language of the deed expresses the final, binding agreement between the grantor and grantee. *Hubachek v. Brown*, 126 Minn. 359, 362-63, 148 N.W. 121, 122 (1914). . . The scope of an easement created by express grant depends entirely upon the construction of the terms of the grant. *Highway 7 Embers, Inc. v. Northwestern National Bank*, 256 N.W.2d 271, 275 (Minn.1977). The extent of an easement should not be enlarged by legal construction beyond the objects originally contemplated or expressly agreed upon by the parties. *Minneapolis Athletic Club v. Cohler*, 287 Minn. 254, 258, 177 N.W.2d 786, 789-90 (1970).”

Larson v. Amundson, 414 N.W.2d 413, 417 (Minn.App.,1987)

- b. The possibilities are very flexible. An easement can be for ingress and egress, of course. May also be for recreation-specific uses such as for the purposes of “boating and bathing.” *Nelson v. City of Birchwood*, 2009 WL 3426792, 1 (Minn. Ct. App., 2009).

4. Recording.

Easements should, of course, be properly filed of record. See Minn. Stat. § 507.34; Minn. Stat. § 508.25.

5. Consent.

A subordination, or consent, to the easement should be obtained from the grantor’s mortgagee. Otherwise, if said mortgage is foreclosed, the purchaser at the sherriff’s sale will own free of the easement:

“Minnesota caselaw has not directly addressed whether easements receive the same treatment as other encumbrances recorded after the recorded mortgage, but we are unable to discern a reason to treat them differently. . . [W]e conclude that a valid foreclosure of a mortgage terminates all easement interests in the foreclosed real estate that are junior to the mortgage being foreclosed and whose holders are properly joined or notified in the foreclosure action. Likewise, Minnesota courts have not expressly held that a mortgagee can subordinate its interest to the holder of a later-recorded easement through declaration or agreement, but caselaw indicates that mortgagees should be treated the same as other senior-interest holders. . . .A mortgage, by declaration of its mortgagee, may be made subordinate in priority to an easement on the mortgaged real estate.”

In re Crablex, Inc., 762 N.W.2d 247, 253 (Minn. Ct. App., 2009)

C. Title Insurance.

If access is by an easement, it is advisable to obtain title insurance to protect the rights provided for in the easement. ALTA Endorsement Form 17.0, the Indirect Access and Entry endorsement, includes the following language:

“The Company insures against loss or damage sustained by the insured if, at Date of Policy: (i) the easement identified [as Parcel _____] in Schedule [A][C] (the "Easement") does not provide that portion of the land identified [as Parcel _____] in Schedule [A][C] both actual vehicular and pedestrian access to and from [insert name of street, road, or highway] (the "Street"), (ii) the Street is not physically open and publicly maintained, or (iii) the insured has no right to use existing curb cuts or entries along that portion of the Street abutting the Easement.

This endorsement is issued as part of the policy. Except as it expressly states, it does not (i) modify any of the terms and provisions of the policy, (ii) modify any prior endorsements, (iii) extend the Date of Policy, or (iv) increase the Amount of Insurance. To the extent a provision of the policy or a previous endorsement is inconsistent with an express provision of this endorsement, this endorsement controls. Otherwise, this endorsement is subject to all of the terms and provisions of the policy and of any prior endorsements.”

D. The Nature of Riparian Rights.

An owner of property adjoining water has an extra “stick” in their bundle of rights: Riparian rights.

“Riparian rights are rights incident to an estate in land which adjoins a body of water such as a lake. Riparian rights include the right of access to the water; the right to install and use a dock; and other rights of value.”

Farnes v. Lane, 161 N.W.2d 297, 299 (Minn., 1968) See also *Nelson v. DeLong*, 7 N.W.2d 342, 346 (Minn., 1942).

“A riparian right-holder does not own the water; rather, a person who owns a lakeshore or lake bed has the riparian right to use and enjoy the water.”

Nelson v. City of Birchwood, 2009 WL 3426792, 5 (Minn.App.,2009), citing *Pratt v. State, Dep't of Natural Res.*, 309 N.W.2d 767, 772 (Minn.1981).

Those rights depend on a fee simple interest in the shore land:

“There are certain interests and rights vested in the shore owner which grow out of his special connection with such waters as an owner. These rights are common to all riparian owners on the same body of water, and they rest entirely upon the fact of title in the fee to the shore land.”

Sanborn v. People's Ice Co., 84 N.W. 641, 642 (Minn., 1900).

“Riparian land is land so situated with respect to the body of water that, because of such location, the possessor is entitled to the benefits incident to the use of the water. The land must touch upon the water and be under one ownership and within the watershed. If there is a severance of ownership, the land that does not touch upon the water ceases to be riparian.”

BURBY, REAL PROPERTY (3 ed.) § 19a, *quoted with approval in Farnes v. Lane*, 161 N.W.2d 297, 299 (Minn. 1968)

Such rights do not run to the holder of an access easement:

“A private easement appurtenant affording access to a lake over land adjacent to the water does not make the grantee of the easement a riparian owner entitled to exercise riparian rights.”

Thompson v. Enz, 379 Mich. 667, 154 N.W.2d 473. , *quoted with approval in Farnes v. Lane*, 281 Minn. 222, 224, 161 N.W.2d 297, 299 (Minn., 1968).

Therefore, an access easement will not give the benefitted party other rights – such as the right to construct a dock on the water – unless the easement specifically provides for it.

“The grantee of an easement or right-of-way to the lake may or may not be entitled to install and use a dock extending from the way into the lake, depending on the circumstances of the particular case. If the easement is granted in terms which clearly and specifically allow or deny this use, the language of the instrument creating the right will control.”

Farnes v. Lane, 281 Minn. 222, 225, 161 N.W.2d 297, 300 (Minn.,1968)

E. Recreational Easement Statute.

There is statutory protection against statutory dedication, common law dedication, and easement by prescription for owners who allow use of their property for recreational purposes:

“No dedication of any land in connection with any use by any person for a recreational purpose takes effect in consequence of the exercise of that use for any length of time except as expressly permitted or provided in writing by the owner, nor shall the grant of permission for the use by the owner grant to any person an easement or other property right in the land except as expressly provided in writing by the owner.”

Minn. Stat. § 604A.27

II. IMPLIED EASEMENTS.

A. Generally.

Implied easements typically arise in connection with landlocked parcels.

“Minnesota courts analyze the rights of an owner of a landlocked parcel under the law of implied easements.” *Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees Federal Credit Union*, 576 N.W.2d 463, 465 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998).

Where parties convey a parcel of land without a necessary easement, the courts may infer the existence of the easement:

“An easement created by implication arises as an inference of the intention of the parties to a conveyance of land. The inference is drawn from the circumstances under which the conveyance was made rather than from the language of the conveyance. To draw an inference of intention from such circumstances, they must be or must be assumed to be

within the knowledge of the parties. The inference drawn represents an attempt to ascribe an intention to parties who had not thought or had not bothered to put the intention into words, or perhaps more often, to parties who actually had formed no intention conscious to themselves. In the latter aspect, the implication approaches in fact, if not in theory, crediting the parties with an intention which they did not have, but which they probably would have had they actually foreseen what they might have foreseen from information available at the time of the conveyance.” *Olson v. Mullen*, 68 N.W.2d 640, 646 (Minn. 1955), *citing* Restatement, Property, § 476, Comment (a).

B. Types of Implied Easements.

1. Quasi-Easements / Implied Easements

“The doctrine of implied grant of easement is based upon the principle that where, during unity of title, the owner imposes apparently permanent and obvious servitude on one tenement in favor of another, which at the time of severance of title, is in use and is reasonably necessary for the fair enjoyment of the tenement to which such use is beneficial, then, upon a severance of ownership, a grant of the dominant tenement includes by implication the right to continue such use. That right is an easement appurtenant to the estate granted to use the servient estate retained by the owner. *Under the rule that a grant is to be construed most strongly against the grantor*, all privileges and appurtenances that are obviously incident and necessary to the fair enjoyment of the property granted substantially in the condition in which it is enjoyed by the grantor are included in the grant. . . . Prior to the severance and while there is unity of title, the use is generally spoken of as a quasi-easement appurtenant to the dominant tenement.” *Romanchuk v. Plotkin*, 9 N.W.2d 421, 424 (Minn. 1943) (emphasis added).

2. Easement of Necessity.

In contrast, easements by necessity do not have specific locations prior to the time they are created by the court.

“An easement by necessity is unique in that it has no definite location at the time it is created.” *Bode v. Bode*, 494 N.W.2d 301, 304 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

3. These Terms Are Used Interchangeably, at Times.

The Minnesota Court of Appeals has noted that the terms are often used “interchangeably,” at least “in dicta.” *Bode v. Bode*, 494 N.W.2d 301, 304 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

The Court of Appeals has noted that the distinction between the terms is limited to the parties to the transaction in which the property was divided:

“The language in *Bode* suggests a distinction, recognized by some jurisdictions and commentators, between implied easements and easements of necessity. . . . However, any distinction in *Bode* was limited to the parties to the severing transaction. “[W]hen a landowner conveys a portion of land that has no access * * * the owner of the purchased portion *has a right of access* across the retained lands of the grantor unless the conveying document explicitly disclaims any right of access.” [*Bode v. Bode*] at 303-04 (emphasis added); accord *Pine Tree*

Lumber Co. v. McKinley, 83 Minn. 419, 420, 86 N.W. 414, 415 (1901) (defendant's grant to plaintiff of right to enter defendant's land and remove pine "included whatever was reasonably necessary to make it effective" including right to construct and use logging road across land retained by defendant); 28A C.J.S. § 91a (easement by necessity for access may be claimed only by immediate parties to transaction). Compare 4 Richard Powell & Patrick Rohan, Powell on Real Property § 34.07 (easement may be found despite many intervening conveyances); Pencader Assoc., Inc. v. Glasgow Trust, 446 A.2d 1097, 1100 (Del.Super.1982) (easement of necessity cannot be terminated by mere nonuse, remanding to determine fact issue of existence of easement of necessity 170 years after severance of property).” *Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees*, 576 N.W.2d 463, 466 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998) (emphasis added; former emphasis deleted).

Note that *Bode* court, in the instance of parties to the severing transaction, discusses a “right of access.” (Emphasis added).

C. Factors.

1. There are three factors which are typically examined.

“An easement by implication is created if the following factors exist:

- (1) a separation of title;
- (2) the use which gives rise to the easement shall have been so long continued and apparent as to show that it was intended to be permanent; and
- (3) that the easement is necessary to the beneficial enjoyment of the land granted.”

Romanchuk v. Plotkin, 9 N.W.2d 421, 424 (Minn. 1943); *see also Pickthorn v. Schultz*, 2008 WL 5335118, 2 (Minn. Ct. App. 2008).

2. Although those three are typical, they are not rigidly applied, this is not an exhaustive list; and necessity appears to be the most important factor.

“It is not always necessary that the existence of all these essentials be present; they are only aids in determining whether such easement exists. . . . Nor are the factors stated exhaustive. . . . Practically all the authorities do hold, however, that necessity is an essential factor.” *Olson v. Mullen*, 68 N.W.2d 640, 647 (Minn. 1955) (citations omitted).

3. In fact, it has been held that *only* necessity is required.

“Except the necessity requirement, these factors are only aids in determining whether an implied easement existed.” *Rosendahl v. Nelson*, 408 N.W.2d 609, 611 (Minn. Ct. App. 1987), *citing Olson v. Mullen*, 68 N.W.2d 640, 647 (Minn. 1955).

4. The factors are examined to determine whether an intention to create the easement existed at the time of severance, which is a fact-specific process:

“While an easement will not be implied unless it is necessary, all three elements are used as indicia of the parties' intent to create an easement.” *Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees Federal Credit Union*, 576 N.W.2d 463, 465-466 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998), *citing Olson v. Mullen*, 68 N.W.2d 640, 647 (Minn. 1955).

D. Factor One: Separation of Title.

Separation of title gives rise to the rationale for an implied easement, i.e., an intention to maintain an easement at the time of severance:

“The Schultzes argue that there was no evidence in the record of severance of title or that the two parcels were ever under common ownership. . . . The district court appears to have assumed that, as neighboring parcels, they were once under common ownership and were severed. The Pickthorns assert that the abstract of title establishes this fact. However, the abstract is not in the record. . . . Equally troublesome, assuming past common ownership of the two lots, there is nothing in the record that could establish that the claimed easement or need for the easement existed at the time of severance. As the claiming party, the Pickthorns had the responsibility for establishing the basis for an easement. . . . In sum, we conclude that the record does not establish the elements for an easement by necessity.” *Pickthorn v. Schultz*, 2008 WL 5335118, 2-3 (Minn. Ct. App. 2008).

E. Factor Two: Continued and Apparent Use.

The Court of Appeals stated in *Lake George Park, L.L.C.* that, unless the party claiming an implied easement is claiming against the person who was the owner at the time of severance, the use must have been continuous and apparent:

“Appellant cites no Minnesota case where an easement of necessity was implied for the benefit of a party remote to the severing transaction without a showing of apparent and continued use. This court, as an error correcting court, is without authority to change the law.” *Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees*, 576 N.W.2d 463, 466 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998).

This factor is examined as of the time of the separation of title:

“The use must have been ‘long continued and apparent’ as of the time of the severance.” *Pederson v. Smith*, 2000 WL 821682, 3 (Minn. Ct. App. 2000) (citations omitted).

Thus, for a purchaser buying after severance has occurred, *the use need not continue to be apparent*:

Appellant further argues that the easement was not known or apparent when he purchased But we consider the use giving rise to an easement by implication of necessity at the time of the severance. Here, the severance in title did not occur in 2000 when appellant entered into a contract for deed Instead, the severance of title occurred in 1991the haul road was apparent and obvious, and intended to be permanent at the time of severance.” *Magnuson v. Cossette*, 707 N.W.2d 738, 746 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006) (citations omitted).

F. Factor Three: Necessity.

1. Only reasonable necessity need be shown.

“Necessary’ does not require that the use be indispensable; rather a reasonable necessity is sufficient. The party attempting to establish the easement bears the burden of proving necessity.” *Olson v. Mullen*, 68 N.W.2d 640, 647 (Minn. 1955).

“Obstacles such as topography, houses, trees, zoning ordinances, or the need for extensive paving, may create conditions where an easement is necessary.” *Magnuson v. Cossette*, 707 N.W.2d 738, 745 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006); *see also Rollins v. Krueger*, 2006 WL 2677833, 4 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006), *quoting Rosendahl v. Nelson*, 408 N.W.2d 609, 611 (Minn. Ct. App. 1987) (upholding the trial court's finding of an implied easement where the land's topography, a city ordinance, and a large tree obstructed access to respondent's garage).

2. Necessity is analyzed as of the time of the separation of title.

“The correct analysis is as of the time of severance, and the [trial] court instead analyzed current necessity.” *Pederson v. Smith*, 2000 WL 821682 (Minn. Ct. App. 2000).

G. Equitable Doctrine.

This is an equitable doctrine, so the courts will examine the equities:

“Moreover, implying an easement is an equitable doctrine and equity does not favor appellant. *See Larson v. Amundson*, 414 N.W.2d 413, 417 (Minn.App.1987) (court has equitable power to determine fair extent of easement). *Appellant knew he was buying a landlocked parcel and presumably paid a price that reflected that fact.* Further, [the buyer of the burdened parcel] had no notice of an easement when he purchased his parcel. . . . Equity does not favor access at the expense of a good faith purchaser who was not a party to the transaction that landlocked appellant's parcel.”

Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees Federal Credit Union, 576 N.W.2d 463, 466 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998) (emphasis added); *see also Rajkowski v. Christensen, et al.*, 2008 WL 4394675 (Minn. Ct. App. 2008).

“Equitable” does not mean, however, that the easement needs to benefit the property to be burdened:

“Although an implied easement is an equitable doctrine, the elements for an easement by necessity do not include a reciprocal, separate benefit to the servient property.” *Magnuson v. Cossette*, 707 N.W.2d 738, 746 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006).

H. Location of Implied Easement.

If the location of the easement was not determined as of the time of severance, the owner of the land over which the easement is to run selects the location of the easement. If that owner fails to do so, then the owner of the property to be benefitted gets to choose:

Where there is no agreement, the location of the easement is established in this manner: ‘When no prior use of the way has been made, and the same is to be located for the first time, the owner of the land over which the same is to pass has the right to choose it, provided he does so in a reasonable manner, having due regard to the rights and interests of the owner of the dominant estate. But, if the owner of the land fails to select such way when requested, the party who has the right thereto may select a suitable route for the

same, having due regard to the convenience of the owner of the servient estate.” *Bode v. Bode*, 494 N.W.2d 301, 304-05 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

I. Duration of Implied Easement.

An easement of necessity will cease to exist when the necessity ceases to exist:

“An easement by necessity lasts only as long as the necessity and ceases when the owner of the dominant estate obtains a permanent right of public access to his or her property.” *Holmes v. DeGrote*, 2000 WL 1146745 (Minn. Ct. App. 2000), *citing Bode*, 494 N.W.2d at 304.

J. Uses for Which an Implied Easement May be Created:

The use can be of the types for which other easements exist– including, for example, lateral support of land. *Swedish-American Nat. Bank of Minneapolis v. Connecticut Mut. Life Ins. Co.*, 86 N.W. 420 (Minn. 1901). One has an implied easement for light and air on public streets; in fact, there is a constitutional right to ownership of easements of this type. This can even give rise to a takings case:

“An owner of property abutting a public street has implied easements of light, air, and view over the street. *Haeussler v. Braun*, 314 N.W.2d 4, 7 (Minn.1981). These easements are "property" within the meaning of the Minnesota Constitution. *Castor v. City of Minneapolis*, 429 N.W.2d 244, 245 (Minn.1988).” *Kooiker v. City of Coon Rapids*, 1998 WL 40502 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998).

Remember the requirement of reasonable necessity, however.

K. Exception: Where the Parties Indicate an Intent Not to Provide an Easement:

When the parties indicate in writing at the time of severance of ownership that the parties do not intend to create an easement, the courts will not infer an easement later:

“Where a land owner conveys a portion of land that is landlocked and has no access to the road, the owner of the purchased portion has a right to access across the retained lands of the Grantor unless the conveying document explicitly provides that they will not.” *Bode v. Bode*, 494 N.W.2d 301, 304 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

L. There is No Minimum Time Which Must Pass for the Easement to be Created.

There is no set minimum period of time that must expire for the easement to be created:

“In any event, this question of fact, length of use, is not essential to the creation of the easement and therefore not material for purposes of the summary judgment motion.” *Clark v. Galaxy Apartments*, 427 N.W.2d 723, 726 (Minn. Ct. App. 1988).

M. Torrens Property.

The Court of Appeals has held, in an unpublished decision, that implied easements cannot be obtained against Torrens property:

“The district court was correct when it concluded that the Torrens Act generally bars easements by implication.”

Crablex, Inc. v. Cedar Riverside Land Co., WL 729210, 4 -5 (Minn. Ct. App. 1997).

Minnesota law provides that Torrens property will not be subjected to unregistered claims:

“Registered land stands on a different footing than unregistered land: The purpose of the Torrens law is to establish an indefeasible title free from any and all rights or claims not registered with the register of titles, with certain unimportant exceptions, to the end that *anyone may deal with such property with the assurance that the only rights or claims of which he need take notice are those so registered.*”

Mill City Heating and Air Conditioning Co. v. Nelson, 351 N.W.2d 362, 364 (Minn. 1984) (emphasis added).

An implied easement would be an unregistered claim.

N. Practice Tip: Join All Necessary Parties.

Especially where you are claiming an easement by necessity, be sure to join all necessary parties, including neighboring property owners over whose property an easement may run:

“The trial court found appellants have not openly and notoriously used an easement across parcel "A" in favor of "E." Further, there has been no long, apparent nor continued use of an easement across "A" in favor of "E" for all relevant time periods at issue. The trial court further concluded that owners of adjacent lands over which a road easement could be prescribed were not joined in the action, and that these parties were "necessary for a fair and complete resolution of the plaintiffs' claim for an easement by necessity." We agree. The record demonstrates that at least one survey indicated an easement across parcel "F" which is located immediately east of the appellants' parcel and the owners of parcel "F" are not parties to this lawsuit.”

Nunnelee v. Schuna, 431 N.W.2d 144, 147 (Minn. Ct. App. 1988).

O. Special Issues for Lakefront Property

1. Discussion of “necessity” may play out differently for lakefront or recreational property.

“‘Necessary’ means reasonably necessary for the beneficial enjoyment of the property.” *Lake George Park, L.L.C. v. IBM Mid America Employees Federal Credit Union*, 576 N.W.2d 463, 465 (Minn.App.,1998), citing *Romanchuk v. Plotkin*, 9 N.W.2d 421, 426 (Minn. 1943).”

For example: Is access by water sufficient access so as to render an implied easement unnecessary? It depends on the use being put to the property. If access by heavy equipment is necessary, then no.

“Appellant argues that the easement was unnecessary because the facts establish that the north bank of the east channel can be accessed across land presently owned by Anderson,

the original grantor, or by water during the summer and by ice during the winter. But the question is not whether there are hypothetical alternative routes available; it is whether the haul road was reasonably necessary. . . The district court found that there is no other access to the north bank of the east channel for purposes of dredging and removing soil other than the haul road. While Anderson's testimony shows that it may be possible to dredge the marina bay and east channel without use of the haul road, it was only possible if "done at the right time of the year where the ice conditions are just right." The record does not show dredging from the ice was practicable or feasible every year. Both Anderson and respondent testified that the haul road was reasonably necessary to conduct the dredging operations. And the COE and amended DNR permits specifically authorize the haul road for dredging operations. Consequently, the district court did not err in concluding that the easement was necessary."

Magnuson v. Cossette, 707 N.W.2d 738, 746 (Minn.App.,2006)

Water access can be a factor, at least, according to one unpublished decision. .

Here, appellant has not established that the easement is necessary to the beneficial enjoyment of his land. Evidence in the record suggests that access to the western part of the island, while more treacherous, can be used, and is used by several landowners. The district court found that western lot owner Strand used both sides of the island for access, and installed a roller dock near his lot on the west side. The district court also found that owner Gulbro accessed his western lots primarily from the west, and had a dock and boat lift installed on the west side at one time. And other western landowners also testified that they used the western side of the island for access, including the Lingitzes, former owners of appellant's land. Based on this evidence, appellant cannot establish that an easement by implication is necessary for the beneficial enjoyment of his land, since it appears from the record that the western side of the island is generally accessible. Furthermore, if appellant encountered inclement weather, it is clear that he could use the Dedicated Trail from the eastern access to walk to his property on the western side. While not ideal, appellant's safety is not endangered by using the Dedicated Trail, and keeping abreast of weather developments that could possibly preclude use of the western access is not so onerous as to necessitate an easement through another's property.

Rollins v. Krueger 2006 WL 2677833, 4 (Minn Ct. App., 2006)

Can the use of riparian rights be argued to be necessary? The courts appear open to the idea, and in one recent case denied the implied easement for a dock because other docks were available:

[W]e must examine the element of necessity as it existed upon severance of ownership in 1985 when lots three and four were reconveyed back to Barnes. Although the easement need not be indispensable in order to be necessary, a reasonable necessity must be found to exist. *Olson*, 244 Minn. at 40, 68 N.W.2d at 647. The east-west dock does not appear to be even reasonably necessary for the Cowgills' beneficial enjoyment of their land. We believe the trial court based its decision on the erroneous belief that the DNR would not allow the Cowgills to build a new dock. Construction of other docks has been permitted by the DNR, however, and the Cowgills may also derive access to the water from the use of another existing dock which they own.

Barnes v. Cowgill WL 145414, 1 -2 (Minn Ct. App., 1989)

III. STATUTORY DEDICATION

A. Definition

Statutory dedication occurs where a governmental entity takes possession of property and maintains a roadway located upon it for at least six years.

The process is created by statute:

DEDICATION OF ROADS.

“Subdivision 1. Six years. When any road or portion of a road has been used and kept in repair and worked for at least six years continuously as a public highway by a road authority, it shall be deemed dedicated to the public to the width of the actual use and be and remain, until lawfully vacated, a public highway whether it has ever been established as a public highway or not. Nothing contained in this subdivision shall impair the right, title, or interest of the water department of any city of the first class secured under Special Laws 1885, chapter 110. This subdivision shall apply to roads and streets except platted streets within cities.” Minn. Stat. § 160.05.

B. Statutory Dedication Can Be Found Even Where the Government Opposes It:

Statutory dedication can be found even over the objection of the governmental entity in question.

“The city argues that its activities in the turnaround cannot be characterized as the type of repair work contemplated by the statute because it was merely doing what was necessary to access public utilities it maintained in the turnaround for which the city has an easement. . . . Viewing the evidence in this case in the light most favorable to [the property owner], we conclude that she has raised a sufficient issue of fact regarding the city's maintenance of the turnaround to withstand summary judgment on her action to declare the turnaround public.” *Rixmann v. City of Prior Lake*, 723 N.W.2d 493, 496, 498 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006).

C. Minnesota Case Law Indicates That Statutory Dedication is a Form of Adverse Possession.

In 1892, the Minnesota Supreme Court noted that claims under the User Statute, first enacted in 1877, were based on a claim of adverse possession:

“The first paragraph of this section, that which specially relates to the width of roads laid out by supervisors, or county commissioners, was enacted in its present form in 1873, with a proviso authorizing the establishment of cartways two rods wide. In 1877 the legislature remodeled and amended this section, [including] a complete sentence, relating to the acquiring of public ways by user, - a statute of limitations, in effect, predicated, and only justifiable, upon a claim of actual *adverse possession*, occupation, and improvement for the period of six continuous years.” *Marchand v. Town of Maple Grove*, 51 N.W. 606, 607 (Minn. 1892).

In 1912 the Minnesota Supreme Court held that the requirement of public improvement provided notice to a property owner of an adverse claim, or a “statutory adverse user,” at a time when public travel was not confined to roads that had been improved:

“It is obvious, from a reading of the [User S]tatute and a consideration of the decisions of this court construing it, that mere use of premises for public travel is not sufficient to put the statute in motion. *Such use is only one of the essential conditions of adverse possession by the public.* The other is that some portion at least of the alleged highway must have been worked or repaired at least six years before a highway by statutory adverse user can be successfully asserted.” *Minneapolis Brewing Co. v. City of East Grand Forks*, 136 N.W. 1103, 1103-1105 (Minn. 1912) (emphasis added).

The statutory dedication statute:

“provides a substitute for the common law creation of highways by prescription or adverse use. During the running of the statute, the township and the public are adverse users.” *Shinnemann v. Arago Township*, 288 N.W.2d 239, 243 (Minn. 1980).

D. The Property Taken is the Property Used.

“Ownership of only that property actually used will pass to the governmental entity by the process of statutory dedication. This will include land used for the roadway, and also the land used for shoulders and ditches.” *Barfnecht v. Town Bd. of Hollywood Tp., Carver County*, 232 N.W.2d 420, 423 (Minn. 1975)

E. Exceptions.

Statutory dedication does not apply to platted city streets, which the statute specifically excludes:

“This subdivision shall apply to roads and streets *except platted streets within cities.*” Minn. Stat. § 160.05 subd. 1 (emphasis added).

IV. COMMON LAW DEDICATION

A. Definition.

“A common-law dedication is one accomplished otherwise than by a plat executed and recorded as required by statute.” *Flynn v. Beisel*, 102 N.W.2d 284, 291 (Minn. 1960); *see also Barth v. Stenwick*, 761 N.W.2d 502, 510-511 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009).

Common law dedication occurs where a landowner expresses an intent to dedicate property to a governmental entity, and the entity accepts. The required elements are intent to dedicate and public acceptance.

“To prove common law dedication, one must show the property owner's express or implied intent to devote land to public use and the public's acceptance of that use. *Wojahn v. Johnson*, 297 N.W.2d 298, 306-7 (Minn.1980).” *Sackett v. Storm*, 480 N.W.2d 377, 379 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

B. There is No Set Period of Time Which Must Pass for Common Law Dedication to Take Place.

“Unlike statutory dedication, no specific “waiting” period is required. *Wojahn*, 297 N.W.2d at 306-07 n. 4.” *Sackett v. Storm*, 480 N.W.2d 377, 380 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

C. An Owner’s Intent to Dedicate Can be Inferred, But The Evidentiary Standard is High.

The owner’s intention to dedicate can be inferred from the owner’s conduct.

“For example, intent may be inferred from the owner’s long assent to, and acts in furtherance of, the public use, from the owner’s recognition of the public’s need for the use, and from the owner’s recognition that the public has a valid claim to the property after using it.” *Sackett v. Storm*, 480 N.W.2d 377, 380 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

“Both intent and acceptance can be inferred from longstanding acquiescence in the right of the public’ to use the land and ‘from acts of public maintenance.’” *Barth v. Stenwick*, 761 N.W.2d 502, 511 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009), *citing Wojahn*, 297 N.W.2d at 307.

There is a high standard of evidence required for such a showing: Such actions must “*unequivocally and convincingly* indicate an intent to dedicate.” *Security Federal Savings & Loan Ass’n v. C & C Investments, Inc.*, 448 N.W.2d 83, 87 (Minn. 1990) (emphasis in original).

The *Sackett* Court noted a predecessor of the plaintiff had testified “that he ‘intended that the roadway be dedicated . . . for the general use of the . . . public.’” 480 N.W.2d at 380. In *Mueller v. Drobny*, the Court noted that the plaintiffs’ predecessor had acknowledged the right of the public to travel across his property by providing a detour, also on his property, for use in wet weather. 31 N.W.2d 40, 42-43 (Minn. 1948).

D. Public Acceptance.

Public acceptance can also be inferred from the conduct of the parties. It may be established by public use or by public maintenance. “Common user by the public ‘is the very highest kind of evidence’ of public acceptance of a dedication.” *Keiter v. Berge* 219 Minn. 374, 380, 18 N.W.2d 35, 38 (Minn. 1945). Acceptance may also be inferred from the “acts of public officers in improving and maintaining the dedicated property, although the maintenance need not be publicly funded.” *Sackett v. Storm*, 480 N.W.2d 377, 380-81 (Minn. Ct. App. 1992).

V. PRESCRIPTIVE EASEMENTS.

A. Definition.

The right to use real property based on prior use for a set period of time, i.e. 15 years:

“A prescriptive easement grants a right to use the property of another based on prior continuous use by a party. *See Romans v. Nadler*, 217 Minn. 174, 181, 14 N.W.2d 482, 486-87 (1944).” *Magnuson v. Cossette*, 707 N.W.2d 738, 745 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006).

B. Stating a Claim for a Prescriptive Easement is Similar to Stating a Claim for Ownership by Adverse Possession.

Prescriptive easements are established in a manner similar to claims of adverse possession:

“A prescriptive easement claim involves the same elements of proof as an adverse possession claim, subject to the inherent differences between such claims.” *Ebenhoh v. Hodgman*, 642 N.W.2d 104, 112 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002); *Mehrkens v. Ryan*, 2003 WL 21694568 (Minn. Ct. App. 2003); *Heuer v. County of Aitkin*, 645 N.W.2d 753 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002).

“The elements necessary to prove adverse possession are well established and require a showing that the property has been used in an actual, open, continuous, exclusive, and hostile manner.” *Rogers v. Moore*, 603 N.W.2d 650, 657 (Minn. 1999).

“the claimant must prove . . . the use of the property . . . for the prescriptive period of 15 years.” *Magnuson v. Cossette*, 707 N.W.2d 738, 745 (Minn. App. 2006).

C. Distinctions Between Adverse Possession and Prescriptive Easements.

1. Right to use, not ownership, is established under doctrine of prescriptive easements.

“A prescriptive easement grants only a right of use and does not carry with it title or a right of possession in the land itself.” *Wasiluk v. City of Shoreview*, 2005 WL 1743746, 2 (Minn. Ct. App. 2005).

“the inherent difference between the two doctrines revolves around the fundamental difference between possessing land (adverse possession) and using land (prescriptive easement).” *Claussen v. City of Lauderdale*, 681 N.W.2d 722, 727 (Minn. Ct. App. 2004).

2. The right to use does not arise from expiration of a statute of limitations:

“Statutes of limitation *do not by their terms apply to actions involving incorporeal hereditaments such as easements*. An easement by prescription rests upon the fiction of a lost grant. By analogy to title by adverse possession, an adverse user of an easement for the statutory period is held to be evidence of the prescriptive right.” *Romans v. Nadler*, 14 N.W.2d 482, 485 (Minn. 1944) (emphasis added).

D. The Elements Required to Show Prescriptive Easements Turn on Use, Not Possession.

“A prescriptive easement requires the same elements, but a difference exists ‘between *possessing* the land for adverse possession and *using* the land for a prescriptive easement.’” *Hebert v. City of Fifty Lakes*, 744 N.W.2d 226, 230 (Minn. 2008), quoting *Boldt v. Roth*, 618 N.W.2d 393, 396 (Minn. 2000) (emphasis added).

E. First Element: Actual Use.

1. What constitutes actual use or possession will generally be obvious: Use of a gravel driveway may constitute actual use, *Nordin vs. Kuno*, 287 N.W. 2d 923 (Minn. 1980); as will use of a farm road, *Block v. Sexton*, 577 N. W. 2d 521 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998); and the use of a footpath, *Mehrkens v. Ryan*, 2003 WL 21694568 (Minn. Ct. App. 2003).
2. The noise of gunfire will not constitute actual use to qualify: *Citizens for a Safe Grant v. Lone Oak Sportsmen's Club, Inc.* 624 N. W. 2d 796 (Minn. Ct. App. 2001). Nor does natural water flow: “The district court correctly found that Kral's use of the drainage system could not be supported by his prescriptive easement claim.” *Kral v. Boesch*, 557 N.W.2d 597, 600 (Minn. Ct. App. 1996).
3. But, a drainage ditch can satisfy the requirement. *Naporra v. Weckwirth*, 226 N.W. 569 (Minn. 1929).

F. Second Element: Open Use.

In order to establish a prescriptive easement, the use must be open. *Nordin v. Kuno*, 287 N.W.2d 923 (Minn. 1980).

Open use, for this purpose, means visible. This is so the owner is made aware of the claim of an interest by another:

“‘[W]here the claimant has shown an open, visible, continuous, and unmolested use’ for the required period inconsistent with the owner's rights and under circumstances from which may be inferred his knowledge and acquiescence, the use will be presumed to be under claim of right and adverse, so as to place upon the owner the burden of rebutting this presumption by showing that the use was permissive. . . . As stated in *Swan v. Munch*, 65 Minn. 500, 503, 67 N.W. 1022, 1024, 35 L.R.A. 743, 60 Am.St.Rep. 491:

‘There was no trick or artifice on the part of the defendant, but an open and notorious taking possession of the premises by the defendant for her use and needs, and whereby the public were also benefited. These acts were notice to the owners that defendant was occupying the premises under a claim of right.’”

Hildebrandt v. Hagen, 38 N.W.2d 815, 818-819 (Minn. 1949).

“The claim of right must be exercised with the knowledge of the owner of the servient estate, i. e., actual knowledge or a user on the part of the claimant of such character that knowledge will be presumed.” *Naporra v. Weckwerth*, 226 N.W. 569, 571 (Minn. 1929).

G. Third Element: Hostile Use.

1. For the purposes of prescriptive easements, hostile means non-permissive.

“A use is hostile in prescriptive easement cases if it is nonpermissive.” *Oliver v. State ex rel. Com'r of Transp.*, 760 N.W.2d 912, 919 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009).

“But in 1983 or 1984, the Lingitzes met the Kruegers and discussed the access to the east side of the island. The Kruegers gave the Lingitzes permission to use the Disputed Trail when the weather was bad, or when they otherwise needed to use it. Therefore, the Lingitzes' use was permissive, and appellant cannot show an adverse use of the Disputed Trail for the statutory 15-year period. Because appellant cannot show all the elements required to establish a prescriptive easement, the district court did not clearly err in denying appellant's claim of a prescriptive easement.” *Rollins v. Krueger*, 2006 WL 2677833, 6 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006) (emphasis added).

2. However, use which is originally permissive can become hostile. For example, where a utility company entered onto property with permission, but the parcel on which their utility lines were located was described as an easement on a later deed, the requirement of hostility has been found to be satisfied:

“The Ericksons argue that the city's use of the land did not become hostile because the original use was granted pursuant to a license. . . . Where an original use is permissive, it is presumed that the use continues as permissive “until the contrary [is] affirmatively shown.” *Norgong v. Whitehead*, 225 Minn. 379, 383, 31 N.W.2d 267, 269 (1948); *see also Johnson v. Hegland*, 175 Minn. 592, 596, 222 N.W. 272, 273 (1928) (noting that transforming a permissive use into a hostile use requires a “distinct and positive assertion of a right hostile to the rights of the owner”). . . . [W]e must inquire whether at some point in time there was notice to the Ericksons or to their predecessors in interest that the city had begun claiming under an assertion of right hostile to their interest in the property, so as to start the prescriptive period running for asserting a claim of a prescriptive easement. We conclude that such a point in time was the notation of a utility easement on the recorded 1985 deed from the elder Tibbetts to the younger Tibbetts family. . . . such a notation was a distinct and positive assertion of hostility to the rights of the servient property owner, transforming the original permissive use into an asserted hostile claim. . . . [W]e conclude that *at least since 1985, the year an easement was noted on their predecessor's deed, the Ericksons had constructive notice of a “distinct and positive assertion” of a hostile right in the form of a utility easement.*” *Erickson v. Grand Marais Public Utilities Com'n*, 2004 WL 1445081, 3-4 (Minn. Ct. App. 2004).

3. Acquiescence is distinguished from permission:

“License or permissive use on the part of the landowner must be distinguished from mere acquiescence. The one is evidence that claimant did not have the drainage right in the absence of the permission; while the other is evidence that he did.” *Naporra v. Weckwirth*, 226 N.W. 569, 571 (Minn. 1929).

Distinguishing one from the other is difficult. The Minnesota Supreme Court distinguished acquiescence from permission as follows:

“‘Acquiescence,’ regardless of what it might mean otherwise, means, when used in this connection, passive conduct on the part of the owner of the servient estate consisting of failure on his part to assert his paramount rights against the invasion thereof by the adverse user. ‘Permission’ means more than mere acquiescence; it denotes the grant of a permission in fact or a license.” *Dozier v. Krmpotich*, 35 N.W.2d 696, 699 (Minn. 1949).

4. Belated consent will not overcome an initial hostile entry:

“But if the entry was adverse and hostile-not by virtue of Weckwerth's permission sought and given in recognition of his permissive authority but in spite of Weckwerth-it would not matter whether Weckwerth consented thereto or not. His unsought consent could not destroy the adverse entry. Had the entry been made under and by virtue of his recognized right to grant a permission, the situation would have been quite different.” *Naporra v. Weckwerth*, 226 N.W. 569, 571 (Minn. 1929)

H. Fourth Element: Continuous Use.

1. One who seeks to establish a prescriptive easement must show that his or her use was continuous. This does not require a constant presence, but sporadic use is insufficient to qualify:

“In cases of easements, the requirement of continuity depends upon the nature and character of the right claimed. It is sometimes said that there must be such continuity of use as the right claimed permits. This statement of the rule, like the one governing cases of title by adverse possession, does not mean that the right can be acquired by occasional and sporadic acts for temporary purposes.” *Romans vs. Nadler*, 14 N. W. 2d 482, 486 (Minn. 1944).

In *Romans*, changing out storm windows and painting the house were too sporadic; but water dripping off of eaves happened continuously enough to establish a prescriptive easement.

“The projection of the eaves and gutters of the house and of the garage and the dripping (such as it was) were of such a character as to satisfy the rules of adverse user, and consequently as to those portions plaintiffs acquired by prescription an easement in defendants' land to have the eaves and gutters project and to have the gutters drip. . . The periodical entries for putting on and taking off storm windows and screens and painting were occasional trespasses for the purposes mentioned, and consequently could not give rise to any prescriptive rights.” *Romans v. Nadler*, 14 N.W.2d 482, 486 (Minn.1944)

In rural or undeveloped areas, occasional use may give rise to a prescriptive easement. *Block v. Sexton*, 577 N. W. 2d 521 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998). Use consistent with farming operations has also been held to be sufficient, even meeting the exclusivity requirement discussed below:

“Respondents, their renters, and their employees have accessed their property four to five times a year via the south drive since their family acquired the property in 1950. . . *This use was consistent with the act of farming and is sufficient to constitute continuous use. See Rogers*, 603 N.W.2d at 657 (“[C]ontinuity of use will vary depending on the type of use, and accordingly the court should not view continuity of use in the context of a prescriptive easement as strictly as in the context of adverse possession.”); *see also Block v. Sexton*, 577 N.W.2d 521, 523-25 (Minn.App.1998) (granting prescriptive easement based on use of farm road several times per month during summer months).” *Michel v. Lambrecht*, 2004 WL 2857361, 1 (Minn. Ct. App. 2004) (emphasis added).

Greater use is required for urban areas. *See Skala v. Lindbeck*, 214 N.W. 271, 272 (Minn. 1927) (holding that actual and visible occupation is more imperative with developed land).

2. If the use is interrupted during the running of the statutory period, the prescriptive easement will be defeated: Continuous possession requires that the occupation of the land be ongoing

and without cessation or interruption. See *Rice v. Miller*, 238 N.W.2d 609, 611 (Minn. 1976) (holding that, where the landowner owner took affirmative steps to prohibit use by others, he broke the continuity of adverse use).

3. As with adverse possession, an owner can “tack on” to their predecessor in title:

“[A]ppellant must show that his use was continuous. “The possession of successive occupants, if there is privity between them, may be tacked to make adverse possession for the requisite period.” *Fredericksen v. Henke*, 167 Minn. 356, 360, 209 N.W. 257, 259 (1926). . . Minnesota courts generally allow tacking to all successors in privity with the original owner of the dominant estate . . .” *Rollins v. Krueger*, 2006 WL 2677833, 6 (Minn. Ct. App. 2006)

I. Fifth Element: Exclusive Use.

Exclusivity, for the purposes of establishing a prescriptive easement, means exclusive against the community at large.

“Minnesota law is clear, however, that exclusivity for a prescriptive easement is not as strictly construed as for adverse possession . . . The use need not be exclusive in the sense that it must be used by one person only . . . Rather, the right must not depend upon a similar right in others; it must be exclusive against the community at large.” *Nordin v. Kuno*, 287 N.W.2d 923, 926 (Minn. 1980).

Use to the exclusion of all other users is not required. So a claim may overcome sporadic use by the public. See, *Wheeler v. Newman*, 394 N.W.2d 620, 623-24 (Minn. Ct. App. 1986). And use by others with similar claims -- see, *Oliver v. State*, 760 N.W.2d 912, 918-919 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009) (where the Court of Appeals found, in reviewing an entry of summary judgment, that exclusivity might be held to exist where there was evidence that “the road was used by the five owners who were either fee holders to the servient estate or who owned those parcels that abutted the easement, not by the general public.”)

J. Presumptions Made In Prescriptive Easement Cases:

1. Often proof of the character of the original entry into the property is problematic because it occurred fifty years ago or more. If all the other elements are proven clearly, then the claimant will have the benefit of the doubt on the original entry being hostile, i.e., without consent.

“The general rule is that where the claimant of an easement by prescription shows open, visible, continuous and unmolested use for the statutory period, inconsistent with the rights of the owner and under circumstances from which the owners’ acquiescence may be inferred, the use is presumed to be adverse or hostile.” *Nordin v. Kuno*, 287 N.W.2d 923, 926 (Minn. 1980).

2. This presumption can be rebutted, if the property owner of the servient estate has evidence that demonstrates that the original entry was with consent. This means that, in effect, once the other elements are shown, the burden of proof regarding hostility shifts to the defendant.

“The effect of the presumption articulated in *Dozier* is that once a claimant to a prescriptive easement has established actual, open, continuous, and exclusive use for the

required length of time, the burden of proof shifts to the owner of the servient estate to prove permission.” *Boldt v. Roth*, 618 N.W.2d 393, 396 (Minn. 2000).

3. Some cases in the adverse possession arena have inferred consent where the property was owned by family members.

“We have recognized that this general rule of presumed hostility is modified in cases in which family members own both the dominant and servient estates. *See Wojahn v. Johnson*, 297 N.W.2d 298, 306 (Minn.1980). The reason for this modification is that the nature of close familial relationships is such that mere actual, open, exclusive, and continuous possession is not enough to give notice to a family member that a use is hostile. *See Beitz v. Buendiger*, 144 Minn. 52, 54, 174 N.W. 440, 441 (1919) (explaining the impact of a close familial relationship in an adverse possession case). In these situations, the presence of the close familial relationship gives rise to "the inference, if not the presumption" that the use is permissive. *See Wojahn*, 297 N.W.2d at 306.” *Boldt v. Roth*, 618 N.W.2d 393, 396-97 (Minn. 2000).

How close must the family tie be to allow inference of consent? *Nordin vs. Kuno* contains the following discussion:

“The defendants claim that the presumption should instead be one of permission due to the family relationship between the Kunos. This court has inferred permission where a close family relationship exists. *Burns v. Plachecki*, 301 Minn. 445, 223 N.W.2d 133 (1974) (parent and child); *Lustmann v. Lustmann*, 204 Minn. 228, 283 N.W. 387 (1939) (close brothers); *Collins v. Colleran*, 86 Minn. 199, 90 N.W. 364 (1902) (parent and child). However, the court has refused to infer permission between three unfriendly sisters, *Beitz v. Buendiger*, 144 Minn. 52, 174 N.W. 440 (1919), and friendly neighbors, *Alstad v. Boyer*, 228 Minn. 307, 37 N.W.2d 372 (1949).” *Nordin v. Kuno*, 287 N.W.2d 923, 927 (Minn. 1980).

A sale of the property outside the family will end the presumption of consent.

“We now extend our *Wojahn* analysis to hold that, absent evidence of continued permission, the transfer of the servient estate to a stranger renders hostile a use previously considered permissive due to a close familial relationship *and such transfer will commence the 15-year prescriptive easement time period.*” *Boldt v. Roth*, 618 N.W.2d 393, 398 (Minn. 2000) (emphasis added).

4. The Court of Appeals has recently held in one unpublished opinion that, where the initial entry was by close friends who are “like family,” the presumption of hostility is rebutted.

“[T]he groups had cordial relations for many years, according to them, “like an extended family,” . . . This evidence shows that the . . . use of the “Front Lot” was permissive and not hostile. . . .” *Mahoney v. Spors*, 2008 WL 2102692, 3 (Minn. Ct. App. 2008)

K. Public Land.

1. Generally, one cannot obtain a prescriptive easement over any public lands. Minn. Stat. § 541.01.

“The prohibition against acquiring title to public land by adverse possession was added to the Minnesota statutes by 1899 Minn. Laws ch. 65. *Murtaugh [v. Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Ry]*, 102 Minn. [52], 54, 112 N.W. [860] 861[(1907)]; See, e.g., *State ex. Rel. Anderson v. Dist. Court of Kandiyohi County*, 119 Minn. 132, 136, 137 N.W.2d 298, 300 (1912) (land within high water mark of navigable lake cannot be acquired by adverse possession); *Murtaugh*, 102 Minn. at 55, 112 N.W. at 862 (legislature did not intend to provide for acquisition of title to school lands by adverse possession).” *Heuer vs. County of Aitkin*, 645 N. W. 2d 753, 757 (Minn. Ct. App. 2002).

It does not matter whether the public land is held in a governmental capacity or in a proprietary one. *Fischer v. City of Sauk Rapids*, 325 N.W. 2d 816 (Minn. 1982).

2. There are exceptions where the claim arises before, or after, the property was owned by the public.
 - a. If the claimant can show that a prescriptive easement arose before the property was acquired by the public body, he may be entitled to impose the prescriptive easement. *Heuer, supra* (reversing a summary judgment and remanding for trial on that basis); *see also Anderson v. State*, 2007 WL 2472359, 3 (Minn. Ct. App. 2007) (“[t]he evidence in this record supports the district court’s finding that respondents’ adverse use of the trails in section 25 extended for 15 or more years before the state’s ownership of the land.”).
 - b. “[W]hen the state takes title because of tax forfeiture, the prescriptive easement must be established prior to the tax assessment for which the property was forfeited.” *Wasiluk v. City of Shoreview*, 2005 WL 1743746, 2 (Minn. Ct. App. 2005).
 - c. Also, a claimant may acquire a prescriptive easement over formerly public property where a street has been vacated:

“Claimants were entitled to prescriptive easement to access route crossing adjoining owners’ property, notwithstanding fact that 60 feet of access route crossed over land which was dedicated as public street but later vacated, where vast majority of access route lay exclusively within boundaries of adjoining owners’ property, continuous use of route by claimants and their predecessors for prescriptive period was hostile, and adjoining owners or their predecessors could have taken steps to prohibit or limit use, but chose not to do so.” *Lindquist v. Weber*, 404 N.W.2d 884 (Minn. Ct. App. 1987).
 - d. “Quasi-public” property may also be claimed.

“Assuming the waterfront is properly characterized as “quasi-public,” there is no authority for the proposition that it cannot be adversely possessed . . . the plain language of Minn. Stat. sec. 541.01 limits the prohibition on adverse possession to property dedicated to public, not quasi-public, use.” *Denman v. Gans*, 607 N.W.2d 788, 794 (Minn. Ct. App. 2000).

L. Public Claims.

The public can also obtain an easement by prescription. *See Quist v. Fuller*, 220 N.W.2d 296 (Minn. 1974).

M. Proof Required.

Like adverse possession, proof of the existence of a prescriptive easement may be made via direct or circumstantial evidence, but the burden of proof is the clear and convincing evidence standard.

“Under clear and convincing standard, as applied to elements of proof required for a prescriptive easement, circumstantial evidence is entitled to as much weight as any other evidence.” *Rogers v. Moore*, 603 N.W. 2d 650 (Minn. 1999).

N. Scope of the Easement.

The use to which a prescriptive easement is put not only establishes the right to said easement, it defines the scope of it, as well:

“Rights of prescriptive easement in land are measured and defined by the use made of the land giving rise to the easement.” *Romans v. Nadler*, 14 N.W.2d 482, 486 (Minn. 1944).

O. Restrictions on Use of Property Subject to Easements.

The owner of the servient tenement subject to a prescriptive easement, or in modern parlance, the “burdened parcel,” cannot put the subject property to any use which would interfere with the use by the party benefitted by the easement. As the Court of Appeals has held in one unpublished decision:

“[T]he district court’s construction of the north-easement reasonable-use provision to allow Michels to plant grass on the servient land and to maintain and repair the servient land, is consistent with its 2004 findings and judgment. The 2004 judgment granted Michels the right to improve “the north legal easement ... to make it accessible to the equipment used by them.” And the district court found that Michels had previously improved the servient land by installing dirt and rocks. The 2008 order allowing Michels to plant grass and to maintain the servient land but preventing Lambrechts from plowing, planting, and harvesting is consistent with Michels’ right of improvement under the 2004 judgment. Again, disallowing plowing, planting, and harvesting in an area where Michels are authorized to plant grass is reasonably supported by the record evidence as a whole.” *Michel v. Lambrecht*, 2009 WL 2498480, 3 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009).

See also Romans v. Nadler, 14 N.W.2d 482, 487 (Minn. 1944) (finding that Defendants had “the right to erect and maintain . . . a structure which [did] not interfere with plaintiffs’ easement.”).

P. Impact of Torrens Status of Property.

The rule of law here is very simple -- one cannot obtain a prescriptive easement against Torrens property.

“No title to registered land in derogation of that of the registered owner shall be acquired by prescription or by adverse possession. . .” Minn. Stat. § 508.02.

VI. CARTWAYS

A. Introduction.

“Cartway” is not a statutorily defined term, but is perhaps best described as a combination of a public road and a private driveway. In the classic scenario, the owner of a landlocked parcel petitions to the township, county, or city for the establishment of a cartway over another owner’s land in order to allow access to the landlocked parcel.

B. Establishing a Cartway in a Township

Until recently, only townships (or counties in unorganized territories) could establish cartways. The process for establishing a cartway in a township is provided in Minn. Stat. § 164.08. There are two possible approaches under the statute:

1. Subd. 1: Permitted establishment of cartway—town board may establish cartway two rods wide and not more than ½ mile in length if:
 - a. Petition is signed by at least five voting landowners of the town;
 - b. Requested cartway is on a section line; and
 - c. Benefitting land is at least 150 acres, of which at least 100 acres are tillable.
2. Subd. 2: Mandatory establishment of cartway—town board must establish cartway at least two rods wide if:
 - a. Benefitting land is at least five acres
 - i. Or at least two acres if tract was on record as of January 1, 1998 as a separate parcel
 - ii. Multiple landowners may aggregate parcels to meet five acre requirement. *Watson v. Board of Supervisors of Town of South Side*, 239 N.W. 913 (Minn. 1931)
 - iii. Submerged land is counted toward acreage requirement. *Slayton Gun Club v. Town of Shetek, Murray County*, 176 N.W.2d 544 (Minn. 1970)
 - and
 - b. Lack of access to land except over water, the land of others, or access is less than two rods wide.
 - i. *In re Daniel*, 656 N.W.2d 543 (Minn. 2003) held that access by navigable water was sufficient access to land, and the owner did not qualify for a cartway. The legislature changed this result by amending the statute in 2004 to clarify that water access did not make an owner ineligible for a cartway.
 - ii. Owners with only impractical access to their property (e.g., steep terrain) may also be eligible for a cartway. *State Ex. Rel. Rose v. Town of Greenwood*, 20

N.W.2d 345 (Minn. 1945); *Schacht v. Town of Hyde Park*, 1998 WL 202655 (Minn. Ct. App. 1998).

PRACTICE TIP: Personally visit your client's property. If your client's property is less than 5 acres, determine whether neighboring parcels would benefit from the cartway and aggregate the land to meet the 5 acre requirement. Also, observe the terrain to determine whether access to the land is impractical.

3. Other provisions in Subd. 2:
 - a. Board discretion for alternate route—board may select an alternative route other than that petitioned for if:
 - i. the board determines that the alternative is less disruptive and damaging to affected landowners; and
 - ii. the alternative is in the public's best interest.
 - iii. BUT: the cartway must lead to a usable portion of the owner's land. *Kennedy v. Pepin Tp. Of Wabasha County*, 767 N.W.2d 30 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009)
 - b. Unorganized territory—the board of county commissioners acts as the town board
 - c. Town board's cartway proceedings are governed by Minn. Stat. § 164.07
 - d. Damages
 - i. Must be paid by petitioner to town before cartway is opened
 - ii. Damages include:
 1. Compensation to servient landowner(s)
 2. Cost of professional and other services and administrative costs and fees (Ex: board's attorneys' fees, surveys, appraisals, recording fees)
 - iii. Board may require petitioner to post bond before it acts on petition
 - e. Construction and Maintenance
 - i. No town road or bridge funds may be used on the cartway unless the board determines that the expenditure is in the public interest
 - ii. By default, grading, construction work, and maintenance is petitioner's responsibility (exception: see Minn. Stat. § 164.10)
 - iii. Shared maintenance by multiple landowners—equitable division, 3 factors:
 1. Frequency of use
 2. Type and weight of vehicles or equipment

3. Distance traveled on the cartway to the individual's property
- iv. Board may apportion maintenance costs if landowners cannot agree. Board's decision may be appealed with 30 days to district court.
- v. Landowners have a civil cause of action against other landowners who refuse to pay their share of maintenance costs.
- f. Designation as private driveway: After construction, board may designate the cartway as a private driveway with written consent of servient landowner, and no public funds may be expended for driveway maintenance.
- g. Vacating cartway: Vacation must be done in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 164.07

C. Establishing a Cartway in a City

Minn. Stat. § 435.37, which went into effect in 2007, permits cities to establish cartways. The conditions are similar to Minn. Stat. § 164.08, subd. 2, with some distinctions:

1. City council hears the petition
2. No exception for two acre parcels—petitioning property must be at least five acres
3. No provision for vacation of cartway
4. Definition of “city” includes statutory and home rule charter cities

The statute was recently amended in 2009 by adding subdivision 4, which provides that the proceedings of the city council must be in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 164.07, discussed below.

D. Cartway Procedure

Upon finding that the petitioner meets the cartway criteria, the town board, county commissioners, or city council must follow the procedure provided in Minn. Stat. § 164.07 to establish (or vacate, if under 164.08) the cartway. The procedure has three main components: the petition, notice, and the hearing.

1. Petition
 - a. Name(s) of the petitioner(s)
 - b. Description of petitioner's land meeting acreage requirements
 - c. Description of the proposed cartway (point of beginning, general course, termination)
 - d. Name(s) of owner(s) of the servient land
 - e. Statement of the purpose and necessity for the cartway
2. Notice
 - a. Petition must be filed with town clerk, who presents to board/council

- b. Board/council has 30 days to issue an order which:
 - i. Describes the proposed cartway and the land through which it will pass
 - ii. Sets a time and place for a hearing
 - iii. Contains a notice to all affected landowners that owner is entitled to appeal process under subdivision 7.

PRACTICE TIP: Along with the petition, Petitioner's counsel can submit a proposed order to be signed by the board/council.

- c. Petitioner must personally serve the order and copy of petition upon each occupant of the affected land at least ten days before the meeting
- d. Petitioner must post ten days' notice
- e. If cartway to be vacated terminates at, abuts upon, or is adjacent to any public water, petitioner must serve notice of the order by certified mail upon commissioner of natural resources at least 60 days before hearing. Board/council must consult with commissioner of natural resources at least 15 days before hearing.

3. Hearing

- a. Petitioner must file affidavit of service
- b. All interested parties will be heard
- c. Board/council determines whether to grant or refuse petition. If refused, board/council must note on the back of petition
- d. If the petition is granted, board/council may order survey (subdivision 4 contains statutory guidelines for surveyor) and has right to do so (see Minn. Stat. § 164.07, subd. 13)
- e. Damages are determined, as per above, either by agreement between petitioner and servient landowner or as decided by board/council
- f. Damage award is filed with town/city clerk. Within seven days after filing, clerk must notify affected landowners in writing. Notification must include date, amount, and any terms and conditions of the award. Notification must explain appeal procedure of subdivision 7 in plain terms.
- g. The order is recorded by the town clerk and a certified copy recorded with the county recorder or registrar of titles of the county in which the land is located, after first presenting the certified copy to the County Auditor.

PRACTICE TIP: Look for local ordinances that give further instructions and guidance regarding the cartway petition procedure. For example, Itasca County passed such an ordinance, found at <http://www.co.itasca.mn.us/Admin/Policy%20Manual/Cartway%20Ordinance.pdf>.

E. Appeals

Appeals of decisions regarding cartways fall into two categories: appeals of damage awards (including challenges to the public purpose or necessity of the cartway), and appeals of the board/council's refusal to establish the cartway.

1. Appeal of Damage Award (e.g., award is too big or too small)
 - a. May be brought by any party
 - b. Must be brought within 40 days after filing of damage award
 - c. File notice of appeal at district court in county in which land is located, to include:
 - i. The award or failure to award appealed from, nature and amount of the claim, and the grounds for appeal (e.g., challenge to the public purpose or necessity of the cartway)
 - ii. Appeal bond of at least \$250 must accompany notice of appeal
 - iii. Must mail copy of notice by registered or certified mail to town clerk or member of board/council
 - d. Board/council may begin construction of cartway even if damage award is appealed UNLESS appellant is challenging public purpose or necessity AND such appeal was filed within ten days after filing of damage award
 - e. Appeal is entered on trial calendar at the next general term of the court occurring more than 20 days after the appeal is perfected
 - i. Trial is conducted in same manner as an appeal in eminent domain proceedings.
 - ii. Prevailing party can recover costs and disbursements
 - iii. Where appeal brings up for review only the correctness of the decision of the board, the most appropriate procedure is trial without jury since there might be some difficulty in impressing upon jury the precise scope and extent of their duty in such a case. *Lieser v. Town of St. Martin*, 96 N.W.2d 1 (Minn. 1959).
2. Appeal of Board/Council's Refusal to Establish Cartway
 - a. Must file appeal within one year from filing of the order
 - b. Standard of review: A town or county board that grants or refuses a cartway petition acts in a legislative capacity and will be reversed on appeal only when:

PRACTICE TIP: If you are challenging the public purpose or necessity of the cartway, file your appeal within 10 days of the filing of the damage award in order to delay construction of the road. Otherwise, the board/council is authorized by statute to commence construction.

- i. The evidence is clearly against the decision; (*but see Kennedy v. Pepin Tp. Of Wabasha County*, 767 N.W.2d 30 (Minn. Ct. App. 2009) (using the standard “practically conclusive” instead of “clearly” against the decision)
- ii. An erroneous theory of law was applied; or
- iii. The town board acted arbitrarily and capriciously, contrary to the public’s best interest

See Silver v. Ridgeway, 733 N.W.2d 165 (Minn. Ct. App. 2007) (holding that a board’s decision to grant a cartway across private land instead of an alternate cartway which would have traversed state-owned land was not arbitrary and capricious)

F. Additional Resources on Cartways

For additional discussion of the cartway statute(s), please see the following excellent articles:

Chares H. Andresen, “New Cartway Statute,” Real Estate Law and Practice 2006, Sec. 3.

Troy J. Gilchrist, “Understanding Cartways,” Minnesota Association of Townships, Information Library, Document Number TR12000, revised April 25, 2006 (includes sample forms)