

The Official Map

What Constitutes an Official Map?

An Official Map is a tool that identifies the geographic location of proposed streets, waterways, parks and other facilities in a municipality. It can be used to reserve private land for future public use and to preserve farmland or open space. Accompanied by an ordinance, an Official Map is a declaration by the governing body of areas the community will eventually need for public purposes. The Official Map identifies specific land where potential projects are desired. By identifying the specific lands on which public projects are envisioned, the municipality is announcing its intent to acquire the land for municipal purposes prior to other development proposals.

What is Not an Official Map?

🏠 **A street map**

Contrary to what its name may suggest, an Official Map is not a street map. It is not used for directional or navigational purposes.

🏠 **A zoning map**

Although an Official Map is considered a land use ordinance, an Official Map is not a zoning map. Zoning allows local governments to place reasonable requirements on the use and development of land. An Official Map complements zoning, but it is not zoning.

🏠 **A form of eminent domain**

While it can be used to set aside land for future use, an Official Map does not impose eminent domain on property. That is, it does not authorize the municipality to acquire private property for public use without the owner's consent.

Why Adopt an Official Map?

It helps make good use of local resources by mapping out the community's long-range goals for roads, land, public facilities, and open space.

It helps to manage community growth by implementing elements of the municipality's comprehensive plan, and by identifying and reserving lands for future needs. This can include everything from roads, sidewalks, and transit rights-of-way, to recreation, flood control areas, and stormwater and drainage easements.

It provides predictability and stability by giving local residents, businesses, and developers an idea of what the community landscape may look like in the future.

It encourages community participation by engaging community stakeholders in the process of identifying the appropriate location of public facilities necessary to accomplish community goals.

It supports local project grant applications by illustrating to funding sources that there is a long-term commitment to specific community projects that demonstrate sound planning backed by public involvement.

How Does an Official Map Work?

Local governments must follow a specified adoption process to enact an Official Map. The adoption process is similar to standard land use ordinance adoption processes, but also requires specific steps not necessary in typical land use regulations. As with most land use regulations, it requires referral to the local and county planning agency for review, but also requires the review of adjacent municipalities in certain circumstances. Once adopted by the governing body, the Official Map is required to be recorded in the county Recorder of Deeds office.

The adoption of an Official Map serves as a notice of reservation and intent of the governing body to acquire land for future public improvements. The reservation put in place by the Official Map does not exist in perpetuity.

The Official Map acts similarly to a "right of first refusal" to purchase property for the local government. The governing body must act to purchase property or give up its right after a property owner announces his or her intention to develop a property subject to the Official Map.

The time limit is triggered once a property owner officially notifies the local government of his or her intent to develop or subdivide the property. The local government must take action to purchase the property within a specified period (generally, one year) or give up its rights under the Official Map.



Where is the Official Map Used?

Today, more than 60 municipalities of all sizes and one county have adopted an Official Map. It is still an unfamiliar tool, and while most local officials are not aware of its usefulness, useage is growing.

Communities that have used an Official Map have found them most useful. In southeastern Pennsylvania, townships in Chester County (East Caln, West Bradford) have witnessed extraordinary growth and related pressure for public services. An Official Map in these municipalities enables residents, businesses, developers and those thinking of locating there to predict the area's future landscape, quality of life and economic opportunity.

Additional Resources

The Official Map: A Handbook for Preserving and Providing Public Lands and Facilities

www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/elibrary/brepublications

Similarly, growth in Millcreek Township, Erie County, has necessitated focused growth management measures. There, the Official Map is used to delineate intersections and roadway improvements, reserve open space and farmland, and identify flood control basins.

By accessing information and financial assistance resources available through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), this helpful land use tool can prove effective for municipalities experiencing and anticipating growth.

Is Financial Assistance Available?

YES! The Governor's Center for Local Government Services (CLGS), through DCED, encourages municipalities to apply for financial assistance to formulate an Official Map.

*Relevant Statute Referenced:
Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code
(Act of 1968, P.L. 805, No. 247, as amended)*

For more information, contact:

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