

CHAPTER 8: THE OFFICIAL MAP

The official map is a tool authorized by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code that allows municipalities to delineate the locations of planned future public lands and facilities such as streets, trails, parks, and open space. The official map expresses a municipality's interest in acquiring these lands for public purposes sometime in the future and notifies developers and property owners of this interest. The official map is not a wish list and should only show those areas that a municipality seriously wants to consider for future development. In addition to helping municipalities identify future public facilities, official maps are also useful in implementing the comprehensive plan.

An Official Map is not a zoning map or base map of the municipality. Section 107(b) of the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) defines an official map as a "land use ordinance" with the map as the primary component of an official map ordinance. If a landowner seeks to build on or subdivide land noted on the official map, the municipality has up to a year to acquire the land from the owner before the owner may freely build or subdivide. The official map does not have to include the entire municipality. Several Centre Region municipalities have adopted official map ordinances.

Benefits of Adopting an Official Map

There are numerous benefits that municipalities receive when adopting an official map. These benefits include:

- The official map can help focus limited financial resources on projects that meet and advance community goals.
- The official map helps municipalities make improvements such as connecting and improving the local street network, intersection improvements, protecting important natural areas, and providing more green space, recreation facilities, trails, and sidewalks.
- The official map saves time and money by informing property owners and developers of municipal goals and intentions in advance of development plans.
- The official map is an effective negotiation tool for municipalities, helping to ensure that development is compatible with and supportive of public goals.
- The official map supports other land use management tools (zoning, subdivision/land development, etc.) by advancing the implementation of infrastructure and public spaces.
- The official map gives municipalities a competitive advantage in securing grants.



An official map can help municipalities identify future improvements that will be required as the community grows. Future roadways and bicycle facilities are two examples of infrastructure that can be identified on an official map.

Process to Create and Adopt an Official Map

The following section outlines the general process that should be followed when creating an official map. As with any planning effort, ensuring that the public has adequate input and time to review the proposals included on the map is of vital importance. The MPC provides requirements for municipalities to adopt an official map. These requirements are summarized as follows:

1. The municipality should have adopted a comprehensive plan.
2. The governing body, either itself or by charge either to its planning agency, a specific ad hoc committee, or other authorized designee, prepares the official map for consideration.
3. The governing body refers the proposed official map, once in draft form, and the accompanying ordinance by which it would be adopted, to the municipal planning agency for review.
4. The municipal planning agency reports its recommendations back to the governing body within 45 days, unless an extension is agreed to by the governing body (failure of the planning agency to take action within the designated time limit, be it 45 days or an extension thereof, authorizes the governing body to proceed without a planning agency recommendation).
5. Concurrently, the municipality forwards a copy of the draft official map and adopting ordinance to the county planning agency for review and comment, again within either 45 days or an extension of the 45-day statutory time limit.
6. In the event that, as shown on the draft official map, any street or public lands are shown as leading into any adjacent municipality, then a copy of the draft official map must be forwarded to the adjacent municipality or municipalities for review and comment within the 45-day time limit (again, as with both the county and adjacent municipalities, failure to act within 45 days absolves the governing body of this requirement and allows it to proceed to public hearing).
7. The governing body may (but is not required to) seek comment from other local authorities, such as park boards or environmental advisory committees or municipal water or sewer authorities.
8. The governing body sets a date, time, and place for a public hearing, and provides “public notice” (notice published once each week for two successive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the municipality, stating the time and place of the hearing and the particular nature of the matter to be considered at the hearing—first publication shall not be more than 30 days, and the second publication shall not be less than 7 days from the date of the hearing).
9. The governing body holds a public hearing on the draft official map and the ordinance to adopt the map (a public hearing is a formal meeting held to inform and obtain public comment, prior to taking action on the adoption of the ordinance and official map).
10. The municipal governing body adopts the ordinance and official map by majority vote at a public meeting.

11. Following adoption, a verified copy of the ordinance and map must be recorded in the county recorder of deeds office within 60 days after the effective date of the official map.
12. A certified copy of the ordinance and map must be forwarded within 30 days after adoption to the county planning agency, and as well to any adjacent municipality where the official map shows any street or public lands intended to lead into that adjacent municipality.

Implementing the Official Map

An official map ordinance can only provide benefits to a municipality if it is implemented. Implementation can occur proactively or at the time that land development is proposed on affected properties, but one key to encourage implementation is ensuring that the official map remains visible to appointed and elected officials. Much like zoning maps are displayed, municipalities should display official maps in rooms where planning commission or governing bodies hold meetings. This not only serves as a reminder to appointed and elected officials but also provides the public with a regular opportunity to view the official map and its contents. The map should also be posted on the municipality's website and in other locations where the public can view it.

In addition to displaying the official map, municipalities can also change their land use ordinances to provide references to the map where applicable. This can be a useful method of reminding developers, staff, and appointed and elected officials of the need to reference the official map when land development is proposed.

