

# The Zoning Code (Township regulated)

The Zoning Code is the set of regulations which dictate how property can be used or developed. A Zoning Ordinance is the local law that regulates the immediate, allowable use of each piece of land within a township. Each township will have its own unique zoning code.

The reason for this is the code must address the local conditions of each area. Each zoning code is typically made of two parts, a text which sets forth a written description of the property development standards and an illustrated map which graphically depicts the different zones within the township.

A Zoning Ordinance assigns each parcel within the township a set of regulations which govern the type of building allowed to be developed on a SPECIFIC piece of property and how a building can interact with the piece of land. For example, typical zoning regulations are building height, setbacks from the property lines, parking requirements, and maximum lot coverage.

The zoning classification is given by the township and applied to whole areas of land. So, if your property is Rural Conservation, it's likely that your whole block or several surrounding properties are also zoned this way.

The zoning classification of a property dictates which set of rules in the code apply to the property. For example. If your property is zoned Rural Conservation, there will be different rules than if your property is zoned Shoreline Recreation.

As you have probably guessed, these technicalities can get quite complicated. But the important thing to keep in mind if you are a property owner is that you are not bound by these rules. You have the right to request special permission for anything you want by seeking approval through the Zoning Hearing Board.

# The Building Code (State regulated)

Unlike the Zoning Code which applies different rules to different types of properties, the Building Code is applied to all properties equally. Generally, the building code is applied to dimensional standards and best practices for the construction phase of a project.

The Building Code deals with safety and technical related requirements such as fire safety requirements, structural loads, maximum occupancy loads, mechanical/electrical/plumbing requirements just to name a few. Unlike the Zoning Code, which is unique for each township, the Building Code is a statewide code which all structures in the state of Pennsylvania must conform with.

In some instances, there may be some overlap in requirements between the Building Code and the Zoning Code. A classic example of this is the height restriction. Typically, a zoning code will have a maximum allowable height that your building must be under, and the IBC (International Building Code) also has a section which regulates the maximum height of a building for fire safety. A good rule of thumb to use when in a situation like this is that the most restrictive requirement will apply.

When selecting an Architect, Engineer, or a Builder for a project, it is advisable to work with someone who has experience in the jurisdiction. If they are working on projects in the area, they should have good handle on the local zoning code regulations and process at the township. Each township has its own quirks and nuanced requirements. A firm who has experience in the area will be able navigate the permitting process more efficiently thus saving valuable time and resources for the project schedule and budget.