

Protecting Your Water Resources

A Glimpse of a Model Municipal Ordinance

Clean Water Fund, Delaware Riverkeeper Network and Green Valleys Association have developed a Model Municipal Water Resources Ordinances designed to protect public health and the environment. These groups have the staff, as well as legal and technical resources, to support municipalities in their adoption of the ordinances. Below is a glimpse at the nine provisions of the Ordinance.

1) COMPREHENSIVE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT: This ordinance is designed to ensure that development won't cause sewers and natural waterways to be overwhelmed by stormwater. The ordinance calls for methods to control stormwater by infiltrating it into the ground, mimicking natural conditions.

2) RIPARIAN BUFFER ZONE MANAGEMENT: Waterways need vegetation along their banks to keep harmful substances from reaching the water, to provide crucial shading and organic matter for water ecosystems, and to increase stream bank stability. This ordinance requires vegetation near surface waters.

3) STEEP SLOPE CONSERVATION DISTRICTS: This ordinance prevents erosion and flooding by regulating the intensity of land development and use in areas with steep slopes. Steep slope areas are fragile and their destruction causes siltation of waterways and property damage.

4) WOODLAND PROTECTION: Trees are one of a municipality's greatest assets. By protecting woodlands and vegetation, this ordinance offsets drainage costs, air-borne dust and loss of soil fertility. It increases property values, groundwater recharge, aesthetics and reduces noise.

5) WELLHEAD PROTECTION: Wells are prone to contamination from land uses. Groundwater contamination is a major problem throughout Pennsylvania. To protect public health, welfare and safety townships may adopt this ordinance to regulate land use in areas close to public and community water supply wells. This ordinance does not regulate private wells.

6) WETLANDS PROTECTION: Wetlands are regulated by both Federal and State agencies, though not perfectly. This ordinance gives the municipality greater authority over project approval. This also calls for a Wetlands Buffer Zone to offer extra protection for wetlands.

7) FLOODPLAIN PROTECTION: Floodplains are an excellent resource for managing heavy precipitation and preventing dangerous flood conditions. To maximize the capacity of floodplains this ordinance promotes natural vegetation and dissuades soil compaction.

8) COMPREHENSIVE WATER SUPPLY/USE MANAGEMENT: Municipalities can maintain the balance of their local hydrologic cycle even with continued land development. This ordinance protects local water resources from going dry.

9) COMPREHENSIVE WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT: This ordinance calls for land-based wastewater treatment technologies which optimize the return of locally-sourced water back to the local water systems as treated effluent. This both safeguards the quantity of water in a municipality and protects surface waters from contamination.

Municipalities have the authority to enact ordinances regulating land uses to ensure public health and safety, to provide safe, reliable water supply and to preserve natural values.



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