



Pennsylvania Society of Land Surveyors

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March 24, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf:

The Pennsylvania Society of Land Surveyors (PSLS) appreciates the difficult decisions that need to be made to protect the public health, safety and welfare when dealing with the Coronavirus. We agree with and support your directive that prudent measures are needed to prevent the spread of the virus, such as limiting or prohibiting large gatherings, as well as events, activities and businesses that attract congregations of people.

I am writing to respectfully urge that any order limiting business activities be mindful of the unique characteristics of the engineering, surveying, and geospatial profession and that field activities not be closed or limited.

PSLS understands that Professional Land Surveyors in Pennsylvania have the responsibility to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public. Centralized office operations should be and have been suspended by most engineering and land surveying firms in the Commonwealth, as required by your directive, and individuals are working from home, as recommended.

PSLS believes field work in surveying can continue with minimal risk in suburban and rural areas. With today's technology, field crews are one or two persons who do not have to work in close physical proximity to one another nor engage with the general public. We note that walking out in the fresh air is somewhat encouraged in suburban and rural areas and that parks are open as well. Land Surveyors do the same thing, but with survey equipment.

Professional Land Surveyors support real estate settlements and transactions that are necessary for financing and refinancing properties owned by residents of the Commonwealth. Pennsylvanians will need to refinance now more than ever to tap equity in their homes if they are faced with interruption of their income. These purchases and refinance transactions cannot close without appropriate documentation for title and flood insurance provided by a Professional Land Surveyor conducting a field survey.

Surveyors working in the field also support energy, communications, underground utilities, forestry, oil and gas, infrastructure, agriculture, waste management, and other industries that are critical to the ongoing functioning of our society.

Professional Land Surveyors also mark the location of boundary lines so that property owners can landscape and install fences on their properties to keep their children and pets safe. Our profession is the only one that can accurately measure, determine, and mark property lines for individuals, companies, and government agencies.

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Aerial data acquisition, such as aerial photography for mapping, is time sensitive. Such projects must be flown in the coming days and weeks when there is no snow on the ground, the sun is high enough in the sky so as to not cast long shadows, and the leaves have not yet come out on trees. This activity cannot wait and resume later this year. An entire season/year would be lost. If this data is not acquired now, the work of thousands of employees who will be spending the rest of this year analyzing and processing that data will be terminated, causing a serious long-term threat to economic recovery.

Moreover, important projects such as resilience, flood plain mapping, development, infrastructure, and environmental protection, that are dependent on this data will be delayed, again, stifling longer term economic recovery. It is important to note that the work performed by surveyors in the field and those in their employ are necessary for "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers", as defined by Department of Homeland Security guidance, to perform their necessary and critically important responsibilities in service to our fellow citizens.

Both the Governors of New Jersey and Maryland have clarified their Executive Orders to permit firms in surveying and engineering to remain open as they are deemed essential businesses related to federal critical infrastructure sectors.

Any stop-work order can and should exempt such surveying-related field activities. Such an exemption would not create a risk of persons being infected or spreading the virus. No amount of working from home or telecommuting can change the need for surveying work in the field.

Under a shelter in place scenario, an exception for these types of activities would alleviate the impact on surveying business, as well as other planning, design, construction, and other downstream economic activities, businesses, and industries that are dependent on surveying for other livelihoods. Even a short-term limit on surveying-related services will have a long-term negative impact on our economy.

Land surveying fieldwork is the foundation of an engineering project and those projects cannot move forward in a timely manner without a surveyor working in the field. Design work needs to continue in order to be ready when construction projects continue; land surveying is part of that design process.

Land Surveyors working in the field can and will comply with all CDC recommendations to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the reasons stated above, these activities can be carried out with low health and safety risk, are vital to keeping our economy moving forward, and should not be limited or curtailed.

We respectfully urge you to implement policies that are mindful of the unique characteristics of our profession and the long-term impact a limitation on surveying will have on our economy. Please permit us to continue working in the field, in a safe and responsible manner, to serve our fellow citizens.

Sincerely,



Jonathan J. Tabas, PE, PLS
President, PSLS

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