TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Delaware County Pennsylvania

Conservation Finance Feasibility Study

March 2026

Cover photo: Hildacy Preserve, Mark Williams

This research was supported by a generous grant from Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to The Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy for the Conservation Finance Initiative.

COUNTY OF DELAWARE
GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING

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February 5, 2026

Mr. Will Abberger
Vice President
Director Conservation Finance
Trust for Public Land
306 North Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Mr. Adam Snyder
The Nature Conservancy
120 19th Street North, Suite 200
Birmingham, Alabama 35203

Mr. Oliver Bass
President
Natural Lands
1031 Palmers Mill Road
Media, Pennsylvania 19063

Dear Messrs. Abberger, Bass, and Synder:

By this letter, Delaware County requests technical advice and assistance from Trust for Public Land, Natural Lands, and The Nature Conservancy in connection with our efforts to develop and sustain reliable, ongoing sources of funding for land conservation, open space, and natural area protection and stewardship.

As part of your advice and assistance, I understand you will conduct research with affected groups to develop recommendations for the Delaware County Council on strategies for supporting dedicated, ongoing sources of public funds for land conservation and related purposes.

We are interested not only in the factual information that you can provide, but also your opinions and recommendations on public funding measures available to us and strategies to enact such measures. That would include understanding the public's priorities and attitudes concerning land conservation, water quality, and natural areas—including parks, trails, and fish and wildlife habitat—and how the public would respond to different methods of presenting those issues.

While information provided to Delaware County will be public record as a matter of law, this request does not require public disclosure of any confidential information of Trust for Public Land, Natural Lands, or The Nature Conservancy.

This request will continue in effect for any advice you offer or presentations you submit for the use of this body related to such matters. In addition, we would like to take this opportunity to request that you continue to be available to provide technical advice and assistance in this area and on related matters in the future.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Richard Womack

Richard Womack
Chair, Delaware County Council

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Introduction

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit organization that creates parks and protects land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972, TPL has conserved more than 4.1 million acres of land nationwide. In Pennsylvania, TPL has helped protect over 3,700 acres.

To help state agencies and local governments preserve open space, TPL assists communities in identifying and securing public financing. TPL's Conservation Finance program offers technical assistance to elected officials, public agencies, and community groups to design, pass, and implement public funding measures that reflect popular priorities.

Since 1996, TPL has been involved in more than 680 successful ballot measures and dozens of successful legislative campaigns that have created over $112 billion in new public funding for parks, trails, open spaces, and flood mitigation. Voters have approved 84 percent of the ballot measures that have been supported by TPL.

In Pennsylvania, TPL has been involved in the efforts to preserve and increase funding for the Commonwealth's Growing Greener program and Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund. In May 2005, voters approved a $625 million Growing Greener II bond, which included $300 million for open space and farmland preservation, as well as brownfield redevelopment. The measure passed statewide with 61 percent support, 80 percent support in Delaware County. TPL is currently working as part of the Growing Greener III Coalition to increase state funding for conservation in Pennsylvania.

TPL has supported thirteen local conservation measures in Pennsylvania and all thirteen have passed, generating almost $555 million for new land acquisitions for open spaces and parks. TPL most recently assisted South Whitehall Township (Lehigh County) in the passage of an earned income tax for land protection. The measure passed with 74 percent support. In November 2022, TPL helped design and secure voter support for a $10 million bond in Carbon County, passed with 83 percent support. TPL also assisted Adams County and Pike County in the passage of $10 million bonds for open space. TPL has completed conservation finance feasibility studies for Monroe, Lackawanna, and Lehigh Counties, Upper Saucon Township in Lehigh County, the Sand Hills Area in Dauphin County and the Conewago Mountains Area in York County.

This study presents several viable local public options for funding parks, trails, and open spaces in Delaware County and provides analysis of which local options and funding levels are feasible, economically prudent, and likely to be publicly acceptable.

This research provides a stand-alone, fact-based reference document that can be used to evaluate financing mechanisms from an objective vantage point.[1]

[1] This feasibility study is not a legal document and should not be relied upon for legal purposes or a legal opinion. The contents of this report are based on the best available information at the time of research and drafting. March 2026

Executive Summary

Most funding for parks, trails, and open spaces in the United States comes from local governments. A dedicated source of local revenue often serves as the foundation for long-term efforts to conserve and manage land and water and can be key to leveraging grants offered by state and federal programs. Countywide funding can also be a catalyst for more municipalities (and other counties) within the county the consider open space funding.

Since 1988, over 150 county and municipal ballot measures that support the acquisition of land for open space, farmland, and recreational purposes have been approved by Pennsylvania voters, generating over $1.6 billion.[2] Of the twelve county conservation finance measures (all bonds) since 1988, only one -- Delaware County in 1996 -- has failed.

In Delaware County, Concord, Middletown, Upper Providence, and Radnor Townships voters have approved dedicated funding for conservation.

Over 14,000 acres of land in Delaware County are protected open space held by federal, state, county, municipal governments, and nonprofit organizations. While this is a significant achievement, a 2020 survey by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) found that Delaware County was behind its neighboring counties of Bucks, Chester, Montgomery and Philadelphia, with only 12.31 percent of its total land area dedicated to protected open space.[3]

In Pennsylvania, general obligation bonds are utilized most often by counties for parks, trails, and open spaces. A bond issue provides up-front funds that will allow for the immediate purchase of land while it is still available, or for other immediate capital needs. Bond costs are distributed over time, so that future beneficiaries also share in the burden. In addition, bonds are a familiar form of public financing for local capital improvements, including park development, in Pennsylvania.

As there are limited finance options that could be considered as tools for financing natural area conservation in Delaware County, this report specifically analyzes the revenue raising capacity of bonds as a conservation finance mechanism and their associated cost to taxpayers.

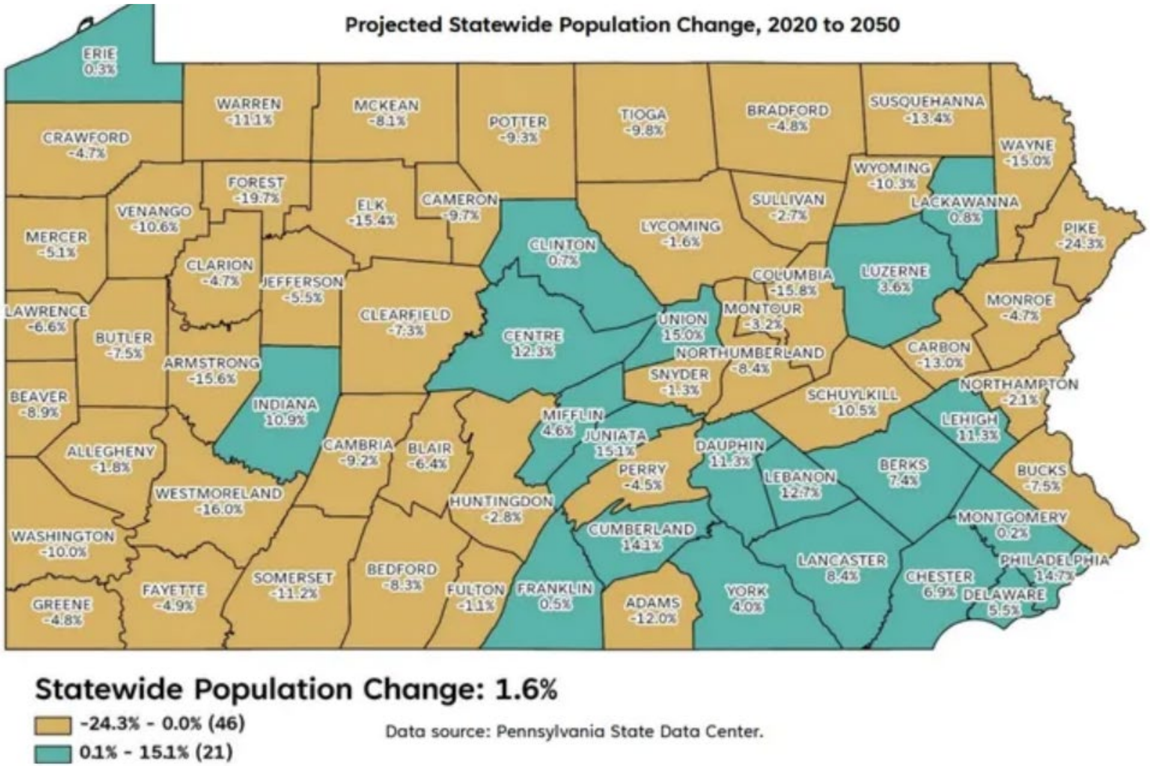
- For example, Delaware County could issue $100 million in general obligation bonds for the protection of natural areas at a cost of about $20 annually for the average homeowner. This could be done through voter approval or non-electoral means.

Next steps should include testing voter attitudes toward a specific set of funding proposals. TPL recommends conducting public opinion research that tests funding options, ballot language, tax tolerance, and program priorities of county voters.

Overview[4]

Delaware County is located in southeastern Pennsylvania (PA) between the City of Philadelphia, PA and the City of Wilmington, Delaware (DE). Consisting of nearly 184 square miles, Delaware County is home to roughly 584,881 residents, making it the second most densely populated county in Pennsylvania with nearly 3,138 residents per square mile.

[2] The Trust for Public Land. “LandVote database.” http://www.landvote.org Accessed February 2026. LandVote includes measures that have at least some funding for open space preservation.
[3] Sustain Delco, A Sustainability Plan for Delaware County, June 2023
[4] Excerpted from Sustain Delco, A Sustainability Plan for Delaware County, June 2023

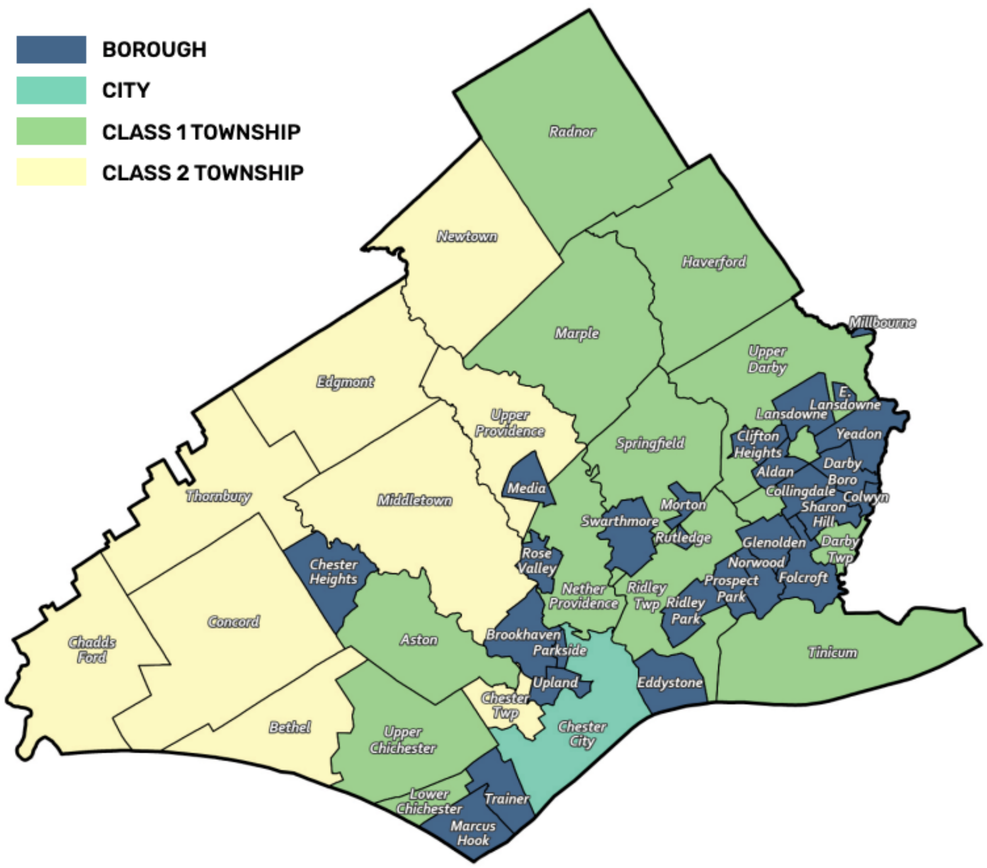


Delaware County comprises primarily urban and suburban neighborhoods, with some developing suburbs maintaining their rural character. Delaware County has continued to grow around 3 percent over the past decade and while this growth has contributed to a landscape defined by mature neighborhoods, charming main streets, and bustling communities, it has also led to continued development pressure placing remaining open spaces and natural resources at risk, while at the same time increasing demand for those same types of resources. Increased development in the county also exacerbates current stormwater challenges. Though Delaware County is growing moderately, it is bordered by Chester and Montgomery Counties, the third and tenth fastest growing communities in the Commonwealth.[5]

Delaware County is divided into 49 municipalities with the most populous being Upper Darby Township (U.S. Census Bureau 2024 population estimate 86,045). Municipalities include 29 Boroughs, 21 Townships, and one Third Class City, Chester City.[6] The County is home to a diverse population with around 36 percent of residents identifying as Black (24 percent), Hispanic (5 percent), or Asian (7 percent), compared to 25 percent across the Commonwealth. Roughly 41.9 percent of Delaware County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher contributing to a median household income of around $89,546. While these figures are higher than state averages, wealth distribution varies across the County, with many riverfront and eastern Delaware County communities falling below average with higher rates of poverty, while western municipalities have above average household median incomes.

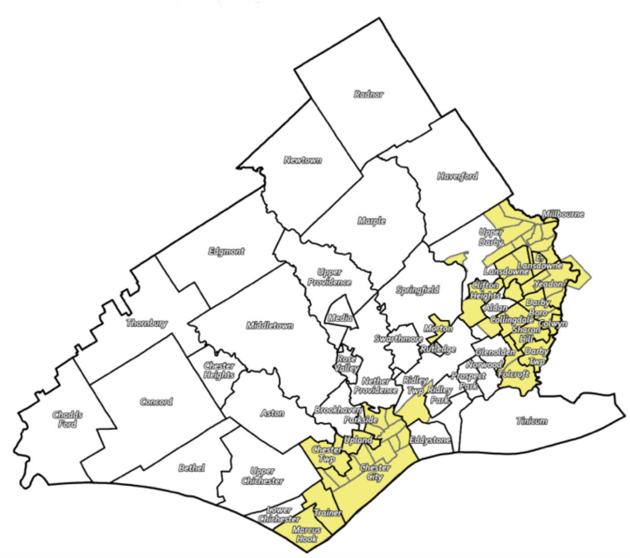
[5] Economic Research Service U.S. Department of Agriculture
[6] Boroughs, 1st and 2nd Class Townships, and 3rd Class City are each governed by different sections of the Pennsylvania State code. For example, Upper Darby Township is a Home Rule Option Municipality governed under that section of the Pennsylvania Code via the Upper Darby Township Home Rule Charter. This may impact local options for open space funding by individual municipalities should they pursue such options.

Delaware County Class of Municipality



In 2023, Delaware County ranked 37th for quality of life and health outcomes among the 67 counties in Pennsylvania.[7] Counties in the top 10 percent for Health Outcomes were found to have increased access to adequately funded schools, parks, social associations, healthy foods, clean air and water, quality housing, and quality healthcare. In Delaware County, 94,157 people live in communities located in Justice40 designated areas. These are disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized and overburdened by pollution and underinvestment in housing, transportation, water and wastewater infrastructure, and health care. These communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change, experiencing disproportionate impacts from other communities. A map of these areas is to the right.

Delaware County Environmental Justice Areas



[7] https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/pennsylvania/delaware?year=2023

Governance

Delaware County is governed by a five-member County Council, elected at-large. Members of Council are elected to four-year terms at staggered two-year intervals in years when municipal elections are held, which occur in odd-numbered years. Council organizes the first Monday of each even-numbered year when the members elect one of their own to serve as Chairman and one to service as Vice Chairman.[8] Delaware County is a Home Rule Option County governed under that section of the Pennsylvania Code via the Delaware County Home Rule Charter.

Delaware County Government		
Name	**Seat**	**Term Ends**
Richard R. Womack, Jr. Chair	County Council (D)	12/31/2029
Christine A. Reuther Vice Chair	County Council (D)	12/31/2027
Joanne Phillips	County Council (D)	12/31/2029
Elaine Paul Schaefer	County Council (D)	12/31/2027
Dr. Monica Taylor	County Council (D)	12/31/2027

Fiscal Overview

On December 10, 2025, Delaware County Council passed the 2026 budget. The budget continues historic capital investments in critical infrastructure while addressing Delaware County's structural deficit and incorporating important cost containment measures already in progress.

The 2026 budget includes a property tax rate of 4.609 mills, representing a 19 percent tax increase—an average of $185 per year for homeowners in Delaware County. This allows the County to continue to provide essential mandated services while positioning it to limit future increases in revenue enhancement.[9] This marks the second consecutive year of a double-digit increase. Last year's 23 percent increase added about $184 to similar tax bills. The $340 million budget passed on a 4–1 vote.

FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL BUDGET

ENTITY	2025	2026	CHANGE $	CHANGE %
Operating Budget	$321,355,826	$340,370,617	$19,014,791	5.9
Fair Acres	75,220,680	78,148,475	2,927,795	3.9
Capital Budget	120,926,840	127,225,839	6,298,999	5.2
Fiscal Budget	380,830,544	401,377,237	20,546,693	5.4
TOTAL BUDGET	**$898,333,890**	**$947,122,168**	**$48,788,278**	**5.4**

Open space funding through the capital budget increased nearly 200 percent in the latest budget.

[8] https://delcopa.gov/council/index.html
[9] https://www.delcopa.gov/budget-management#:~:text=On%20December%2010%2C%202025%20Delaware,future%20increases%20in%20revenue%20enhancement.

CAPITAL BUDGET BY CATEGORY

CATEGORY	2025	2026	CHANGE $	CHANGE %
Facilities & Buildings	$85,620,442	$74,411,349	($11,209,093)	(13.1)
Parks, Trails, Open Space	9,004,400	26,210,360	17,205,960	191.1
Information Technology	11,721,926	10,601,412	(1,120,514)	(9.6)
Vehicles & Equipment	1,852,513	931,160	(921,353)	(49.7)
Transportation	2,466,000	2,565,000	99,000	4.0
Contingency	10,261,559	12,506,559	2,245,000	21.9
TOTAL CAPITAL	**$120,926,840**	**$127,225,839**	**$6,299,000**	**5.2**

The County Council has prioritized the following in its "Community Health and Well-Being" mission:

- develop measures that will reflect improved health outcomes throughout the County including:
- *increase investment in the County's parks, trails, and open spaces; and*
- address the social determinants of health with focus on the housing continuum and food insecurity.

The Planning Department has a goal to "Advance Trails and Open Space in the County" by

- continuing the Delco Greenways Grant Program;
- completing the Chester Creek Trail Phase 4 Feasibility Study;
- finalize design for Chester Creek Trail Phase 2 and move into construction; and
- complete design work for Darby Creek Elevated Tail and Loop trail and continue to purse construction funding

The FY2026 to FY2030 Capital Improvement Plan includes 142 projects totaling $440.7 million over a five-year period. Though open space funding in the budget increased significantly in 2026, the funding diminishes by 2030 in the CIP. Of the total allocation:

- 58% (or $257.4 million) is dedicated to facilities and buildings;
- 18% (or $78.7 million) is dedicated to parks, trails, and open space;
- 12% ($50.9 million) of the funds are dedicated to information system projects, and vehicle and equipment replacements;
- 9% (or $39.4 million) comprises the supplemental contingency allocation; and
- 3% (or $14.2 million) to transportation- including the subsidy to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) - for transit system improvements.

Summary of the FY2026-2030 CIP						
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	Total
Facilities and Buildings	74,411,349	74,660,667	56,318,318	38,429,168	13,609,938	257,429,439
Parks, Trails, and Open Space	26,210,360	14,484,190	16,530,250	10,564,000	10,920,000	78,708,800
Equipment	341,685	945,000	945,000	945,000	945,000	4,121,685
Fleet	589,475	750,000	750,000	750,000	750,000	3,589,475
Information Technology	10,601,412	8,383,287	8,380,263	7,868,107	7,960,184	38,990,258
Transportation	2,565,000	2,693,250	2,827,913	2,969,308	3,117,774	14,173,244
Contingency	12,506,559	9,511,559	7,915,114	5,900,000	3,600,000	39,433,232
Total Expenditures	127,225,839	111,427,953	93,666,857	67,425,583	40,902,896	440,649,128

Past and Current Funding for Parks, Trails and Open Space Preservation

County Park and Trail Improvements

The Delaware County Parks and Recreation Department maintains almost one thousand acres of park land throughout the county, providing residents with scenic nature trails, picnic groves, playgrounds, cross-country running courses, and athletic fields for multiple sports. The figures below represent estimated county funding needs, solely for current county parks, trails, and the Greenways open space program. "Grant potential" is the current assessment of the likely amount of outside funding from Commonwealth or Federal sources. Total one-year needs for county parks and trails and a five-year cost of the Delco Greenways program are estimated to be $121 million.[10] This number does not include open space, trail, and greenway goals of the local municipalities, nor does it reflect similar needs identified in existing plans. Such plans include existing River Conservation Plans including the 2014 Delaware River Watershed Conservation Plan; river conservation plans for the Chester, Ridley, and Crum Creeks; the 2010 Greenway Plan for Darby Creek Watershed, the Brandywine Greenways Plan; plans currently under development, such as the Darby Creek Watershed Greenways and Park master plan and the Brandywine Creek flood study.

	Original Estimate		**Rough Estimate February 2026**
PARKS			
Delco Woods	n/a		$25.0m
Little Flower Property Phase Two	$3.3m	(2018)	$5.0m
Mineral Hill	n/a		$2.0m
Park Improvements—first fifteen years—from 2015 Plan			
Clayton	$1.1m		$1.7m
Glen Providence	$0.4m		$0.6m
Kent	$0.5m		$0.8m
Rose Tree	$2.5m		$4.0m
Smedley	$0.6m		$1.0m
Upland	$3.6m		$5.5m
PARKS SUBTOTAL	**$12.0m**		**$45.6m**
TRAILS			
Chester Creek Phase 2	$7.5m	(2022)	$9.0m
Chester Creek Phase 4			$5.0m
Darby Creek-Kent Park to Lansdowne	$4.5m	(2021)	$5.5m
Darby Creek-Lansdowne to Darby	$3.4m	(2009)	$7.0m
Media Smedley Connector	$9.5m	(2020)	$11.0m
East Coast Greenway			$13.0m
TRAILS SUBTOTAL	**$24.9m**		**$50.5m**
DELCO GREENWAYS			
Five-year Cost @$5m/yr	n/a		**$25m**
GRAND TOTAL	**$36.9m**		**$121.1m**

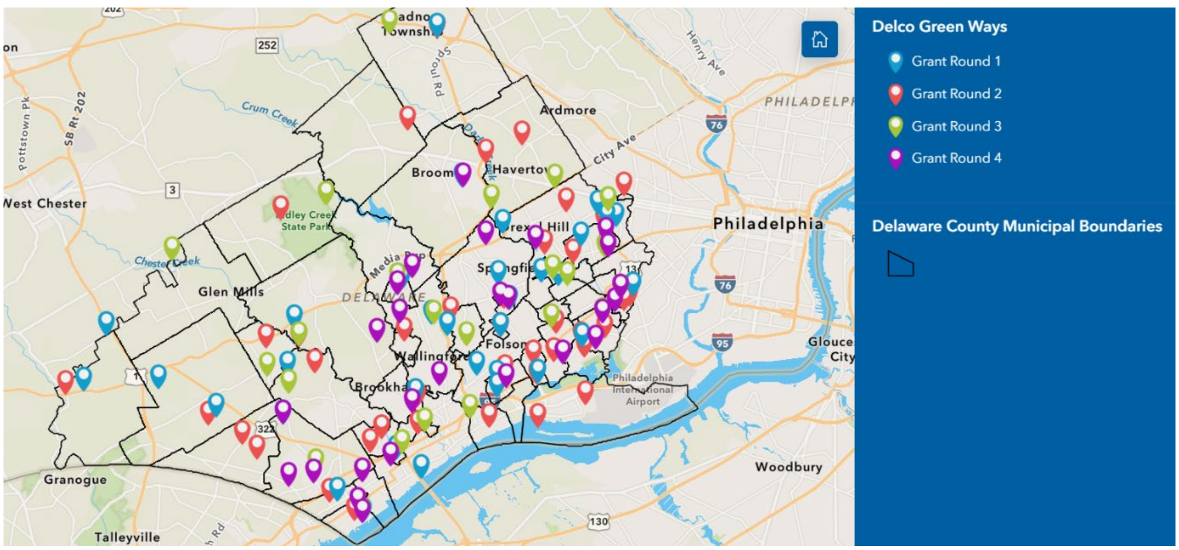
[10] Numbers provided by Delaware County Planning Department. Figures for Delco Woods, Littler Flower, and Mineral Hill include funding for improvements. The county is working on Phase 2 of the masterplan for Little Flower so updated cost estimates are based on the previous masterplan.

The 2023 Delaware County Sustainability Plan also calls for:

- an increase in the miles of sidewalk and trails by 5 percent over five years,
- an increase in miles of bike lanes, safe bike routes, and trails by 5 percent over five years and,
- an increase the number of Delaware County residents with access to open space within a half mile walk by 10 percent over the next 5 years

Delco Green Ways Grant Program

In 2018, Delaware County Council approved the borrowing of $40 million, including $10 million that was set aside to create the county's first fund specifically for open-space acquisition. Seeing the tremendous need for the preservation and investment in the County's remaining open spaces and natural resources, in 2019, Delaware County Council created the Green Ways Grant Program as a means of providing financial assistance to municipalities to conserve, enhance, and connect green spaces in Delaware County. Across the four rounds to-date, this program has awarded more than $20 million to 44 municipalities and three non-profits to elevate the County's parks and open space system as a unified whole. Applicants have secured $33.7 million in matching funds. There has not been a new grant round since 2023 due to a lack of funding.



The program aligned well with the new Delaware County Sustainability Plan, which calls for an increase in the number of acres of protected open space by 10 percent over the next 5 years.

The grant program has been funded by county bond funds except for one-time funding made available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The program's annual allocations have been as follows: 2019--$4.5m, 2021--$6.4m ($1.9m—ARPA funds + $4.5m—bond funds), 2022-$5.0m, 2023--$5.0m.

Every round continued to be more competitive, with grant requests outpacing funding. This included: 2021--$9.9m requested, 2022--$13m requested, 2023--$10.2m requested. Over $11 million in requested project funding could not be granted because of demand and lack of funding.

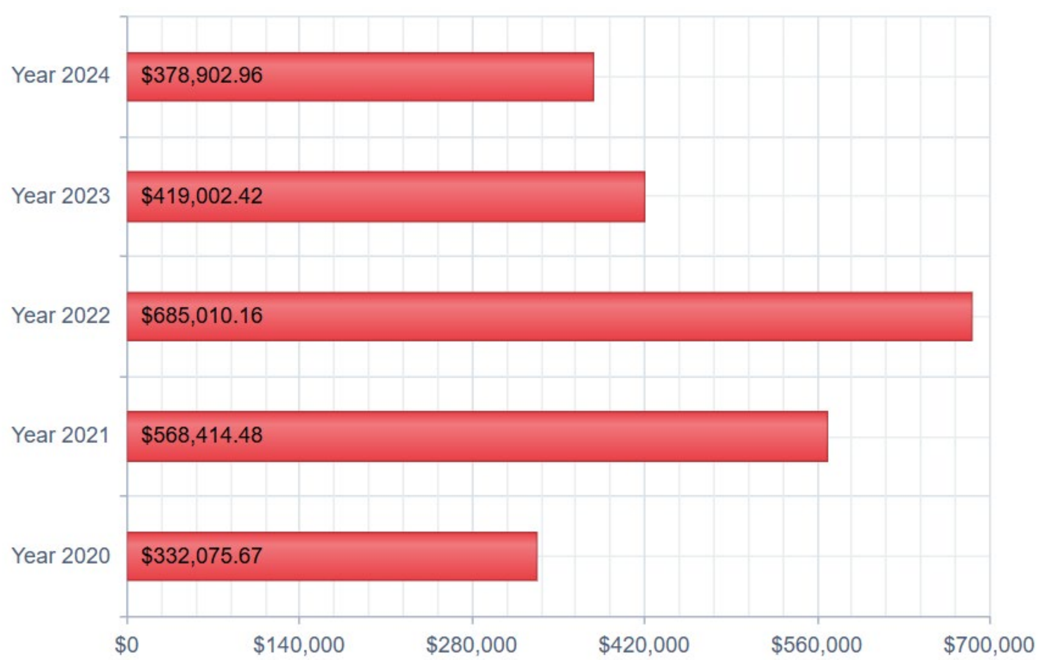
Prior to 2019, open space was not funded in a planned or strategic way. Regular operations and capital improvements at parks were covered by the annual budgeting process. There was no grant program for municipalities. New county parks and trails were acquired through grants and occasional capital investments.

ACT 13- Marcellus Legacy funds.

Delaware County has received an average of more than $535,000 annually over the past five years from Act 13 funds. The Marcellus Legacy Fund was created by Act 13 of 2012 to provide for the distribution of unconventional gas well impact fees to counties, municipalities, and commonwealth agencies. Pursuant to Section 2315 (a) (6) (i) of the Act, a portion of the fee revenue is transferred to the Commonwealth Financing Authority for statewide initiatives that include abandoned mine drainage abatement; abandoned well plugging; sewage treatment; greenways, trails and recreation; baseline water quality data; watershed restoration; and flood control. In Delaware County, these funds have been allocated through the Greenways, Trails, and Recreation Program (GTRP), part of Act 13. Projects can involve development, rehabilitation and improvements to public parks, recreation areas, greenways, trails, and river conservation.

Act 13 – Marcellus Legacy – Recent Allocations in Delaware County

The 2025 allocation was $378,902.96 (the same as 2024). Additional years are listed below.



Economic Considerations

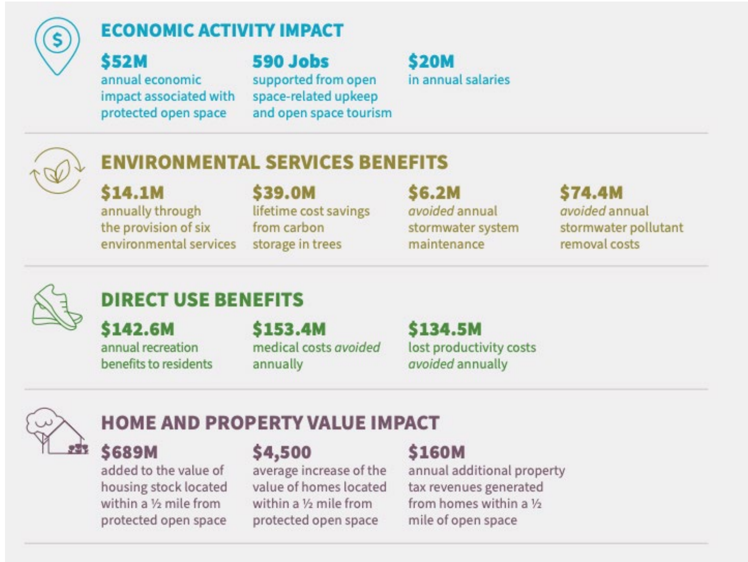
Return on Environment Report[11]

In April 2022, to better understand the economic value of green space in Delaware County, the County developed a study with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and their consultants at Econsult Solutions Inc. to calculate the return on public investment in greenspace, parks, recreation, and trails in Delaware County. The report found several Key Benefits of Protected Open Space shown in the graphic below:

[11] https://www.delcopa.gov/planning/pdf/greenspace/ESI-ROE_DelawareCo_2022-05-04_FINAL_Report.pdf

[12]

The report concludes, "Delaware County's Return on Environment Study shows that funding for green space, parks, recreation, and trails is an investment, not a cost. For every dollar spent, far greater than a dollar value is returned to the public. Cost savings and revenues generated return to the public in the form of clean air and water, health and wellness, crime prevention, support of local business, increased housing values, and overall quality of life for our diverse community."



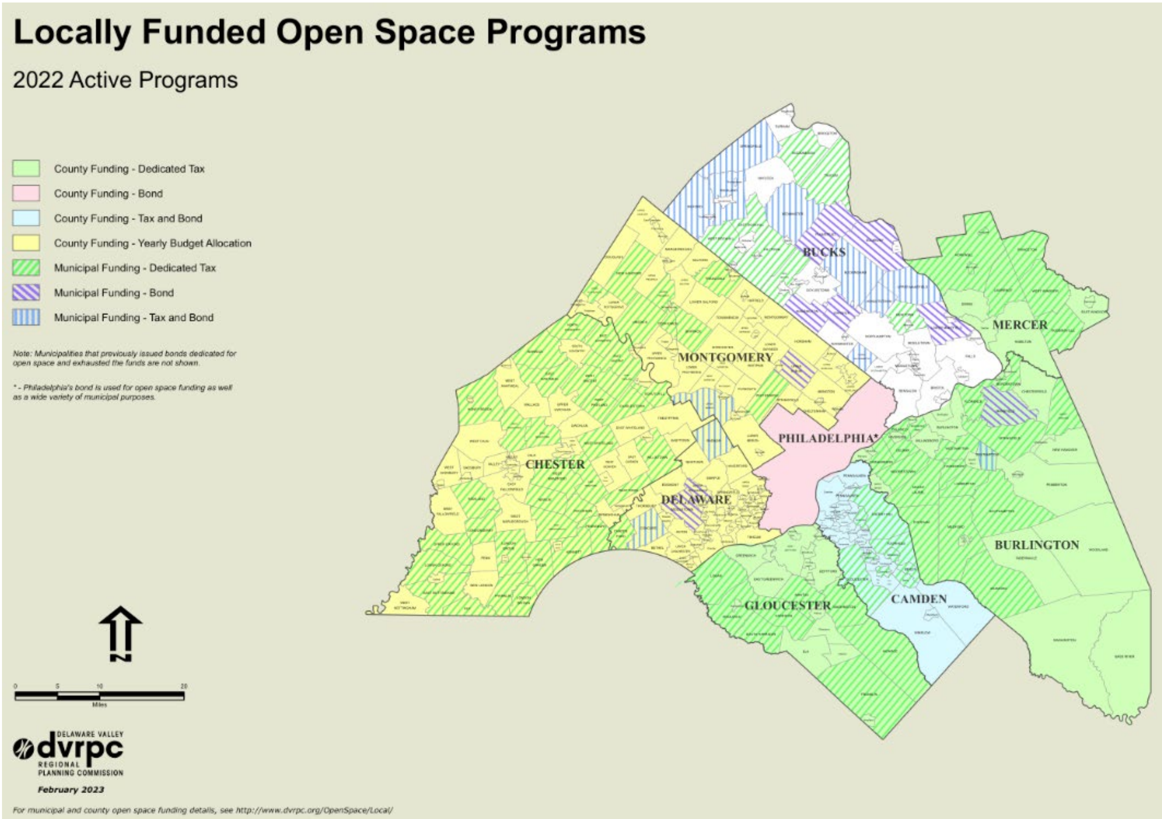
Local Funding for Conservation in Pennsylvania

Several municipalities in Delaware County have approved significant open space funds over the past several decades. Most recently, in May 2019 voters in Middletown Township approved $8 million for open space. At the municipal level, a pay-as-you-go tax, the property tax, has been used in Chadds Ford and Concord Townships, in addition to bonds in several other townships to finance parks, trails, and open spaces.

Successful Municipal Open Space Measures 2003-present				
Jurisdiction	**Date**	**Finance Mechanism**	**Conservation Funds Approved**	**% Yes**
Middletown Township	05-21-2019	Bond	$8,000,000	76%
Radnor Township	11-07-2006	Bond	$20,000,000	79%
Middletown Township	05-17-2005	Bond	$8,500,000	79%
Chadds Ford Township	05-17-2005	Property tax	$2,500,000	72%
Concord Township	11-02-2004	Property tax	$6,000,000	71%
Upper Providence Township	05-20-2003	Bond	$6,000,000	65%

Southeastern Pennsylvania is the most active area in the Commonwealth for local open space programs, most of which have been voter-approved. In Delaware County, six Townships have voter-approved, dedicated funding.

[12] Delaware County's Return on Environment Study, 2022



[13]

Delaware County Local Conservation Financing Options

Generally, there are three primary types of revenue sources available to local governments to pay for parks, trails, conservation, flood mitigation, and recreation : discretionary annual spending, creation of dedicated funding streams, and debt financing. The financing options utilized by a community will depend on a variety of factors such as taxing capacity, budgetary resources, voter preferences, and political will.

Significant, dedicated funding generally comes from broad-based taxes and/or the issuance of bonded indebtedness, which often require the approval of voters. In TPL's experience, local governments that create funding via the budget process often provide substantially less funding than those that create funding through ballot measures. As elected officials go through the process of making critical budgetary decisions, funding for parks, trails, and open spaces often lags behind other public purposes, and the amount appropriated tends to be less than what voters would support. It is understandably difficult to raise taxes without an indisputable public mandate for the intended purpose.

Ballot measures provide a tangible means to implement a local government's vision. With their own funding, local governments are better positioned to secure scarce funding from state or federal governments or private philanthropic partners. In addition, having a predictable funding source empowers the local jurisdiction to establish long-term parks and recreation priorities that meet important community goals and values.

[13] Map to be updated, but full list of recent measures is located in Appendix B

Nationwide, a range of public financing options has been utilized by local jurisdictions to fund parks, trails, and open space, including general obligation bonds, the local sales tax, and the property tax. The ability of local governments to establish dedicated funding sources depends upon state enabling authority.

Non-electoral debt

Non-electoral debt is bonding the County issues directly, without voter approval. Non-electoral debt is limited by law, whereas voter-approved electoral debt is not. The Pennsylvania Local Government Unit Debt Act establishes the limits for non-electoral debt by type of local unit. The amount of non-voted debt that can be issued by a county is up to 300 percent of their borrowing base.[14] The Act defines the borrowing base as the average annual revenue taken in over the last three years.[15] Delaware County is not approaching its non-electoral debt limit. As of October 2025, the Debt limit was $2,158,340,353. Debt outstanding was $355,547,735 and Debt Margin was $ 1,802,792,617.[16]

Total Revenues for 2022	$738,812,318
Total Revenues for 2023	704,658,616
Total Revenues for 2024	714,869,419
Total	$2,158,340,353
Annual Arithmetic Average (Borrowing Base)	$719,446,784

Source: County officials.

The following is a calculation of the County's current net debt limitations.

Net Nonelectoral Debt Limit:	
Borrowing Base	$719,446,784
Multiplier	300%
Net Nonelectoral Debt Limit	$2,158,340,353
Combined Net Nonelectoral Debt and Net Lease Rental Debt Limit:	
Borrowing Base	$719,446,784
Multiplier	400%
Combined Net Nonelectoral Debt and Net Lease Rental Debt Limit	$2,877,787,137

While non-electoral debt is an option for parks, trails, and open spaces, the County must adhere to debt limits and receive majority approval by the County Council. As mentioned, in Delaware County the non-electoral debt limit does not appear to be an issue. The alternative, voter-approved general obligation bonds for conservation, has enjoyed strong support in the Commonwealth.

In 2018, Delaware County Council approved the borrowing of $40 million in non-electoral debt, including $10 million that was set aside to create the county's first fund specifically for open-space acquisition, the Greenways Grant Program. Another $35 million was approved for additional capital projects. Council approved directing municipal advisors Calhoun Baker Inc. to instruct the Delaware Valley Regional Finance Authority to issue $40 million of general obligation notes.

Examples of Non-Electoral Debt and Appropriations for Open Space

County	Total Amount	Year
Adams	$2M	2003
Berks	$30M	1999
Berks	$36M	2005
Chester	$50M	1997
Chester	$75M	1999
Chester	$60M	2004-2007
Cumberland	$3M	2004
Lancaster	9M	1992-2006
Monroe	$7M	2009
Montgomery	$100M	1993
Schuylkill	$.65M	2000

Source: Heritage Conservancy. Opportunity Knocks – Open Space is a Community Investment. 2008

[14] Local Government Unit Debt Act Section 8022 (a)(2) http://www.pabondlawyer.org/media/downloads/lgud_act.pdf
[15] There are some provisions for the issuance of additional debt for certain purposes.
[16] https://emma.msrb.org/P21970889-P21503296-P21956218.pdf October 2025 Bond Statement

As shown above, a number of Pennsylvania counties have opted to raise open space funds using non-electoral debt without a referendum. A county can raise taxes to pay debt service. However, when debt is approved, the local government must establish that it already has sufficient revenue to pay the new debt, by calculation of its borrowing base.

Voter-Approved General Obligation Bond (Electoral Debt)

Voter-approved general obligation bonds have enjoyed widespread support in communities throughout Pennsylvania and the country. The passage rate for all parks and open space ballot measures in the Commonwealth is 80 percent, which is above the national passage rate of 76 percent for such ballot measures. Over the past three decades, bonds have an even higher success rate in Pennsylvania at 91 percent. In Pennsylvania, 38 counties and municipalities passed open space funding bond measures, most with overwhelming support, generating over $765 million. Below is a list of recent parks and open space general obligation bonds on the ballot.[17]

Recent Local Conservation Bond Measures

Jurisdiction	Date	Conservation Funds Approved	Status	% Yes
Lower Makefield Township (Bucks)	11/5/2024	$15,000,000	Pass	69%
Carbon County	5/8/2022	$10,000,000	Pass	83%
Middletown Township (Delaware)	5/21/2019	$8,000,000	Pass	76%
Smithfield Township (Monroe)	11/8/2016	$2,000,000	Pass	76%
Patton Township (Centre)	11/4/2014	$3,500,000	Pass	64%
Warrington Township (Bucks)	11/6/2012	$3,000,000	Pass	66%
Plumstead Township (Centre)	11/3/2009	$4,500,000	Pass	51%
Adams County	11/4/2008	$10,000,000	Pass	75%
Lower Makefield Township (Bucks)	11/4/2008	$15,000,000	Pass	69%
Upper Dublin Township (Montgomery)	11/4/2008	$30,000,000	Pass	67%
Buckingham Township (Bucks)	4/22/2008	$20,000,000	Pass	82%
Bucks County	11/6/2007	$87,000,000	Pass	74%
Milford Township (Bucks)	5/15/2007	$5,000,000	Pass	62%

A general obligation bond in Delaware County would provide the means to raise significant funds upfront to protect land that might not be available in the future or would cost more to acquire. A bond could provide the most readily accessible means to meet the county's conservation goals. Bond funds may only be used for capital expenditures, including acquisition of land or conservation easements, and development or improvement of park and recreational facilities. Bonds cannot be used for ongoing operations and maintenance expenses.[18]

The chart below includes the general obligation bond projections from a range of potential debt issuances displaying the annual household cost. For example, the County could issue $100 million in general obligation bonds at an annual cost of about $20 per year for the average homeowner in Delaware County.[19]

In May 2024, Moody's Investors Service downgraded Delaware County, PA's issuer rating and general obligation debt to 'Aa2' from 'Aa1', citing concerns over deficit spending, though the outlook

[17] The Trust for Public Land, LandVote®, 2021. www.landvote.org

[18] Federal IRS rules governing the issuance of tax-exempt bonds limit the use of proceeds to capital purposes such that only a small fraction of bond funds may be used for maintenance or operations of facilities. State and local laws may further limit the use of bond proceeds." We used to say, "Federal regulations governing the issuance of tax-exempt bonds limit the use of proceeds to capital purposes such that only a small fraction (up to five percent) of bond funds may be used for operation and maintenance **directly related to the funded** facilities. IRS Treasury Reg. 1.148-6(d)(3)(ii)(A)(5)

[19] Based on average home value of $255,533.67 and Current Common Level Ratio from PA Dept. of Revenue, 57.33 percent.

remained stable. This marked the first downgrade since 2013, indicating a very strong, but lower, credit position.

Delware County Bond Financing Costs				
Assumes a 20-year bond issues at 5% Interest Rate				
Total Taxable Assessed Valuation 2026 (AV)=$58,905,518,256				
2026 Common Level Ratio of 57.33%				
Bond Issue	**Annual Debt Svce**	**Mill Levy Increase**	**Cost/Year/ Avg./ House***	**Cost/$1,000 Assessed Value**
$ 60,000,000	$ 4,814,555	0.08	$ 11.97	$ 0.05
$ 80,000,000	$ 6,419,407	0.11	$ 15.97	$ 0.06
$ 100,000,000	$ 8,024,259	0.14	$ 19.96	$ 0.08
$ 120,000,000	$ 9,629,110	0.16	$ 23.95	$ 0.09
$ 140,000,000	$ 11,233,962	0.19	$ 27.94	$ 0.11
$ 160,000,000	$ 12,838,814	0.22	$ 31.93	$ 0.12
**Based on taxable assessment of $146,858.43, using Common Level Ratio and average home value of $255,533.67. Does not include exemptions.*				

The Trust for Public Land's bond cost calculations provide a basic estimate of debt service, tax increase, and cost to the average homeowner in the community for potential bond issuances for parks, trails, and open spaces. Assumptions include the following: the entire debt amount is issued in the first year and payments are equal until maturity; 20-year maturity; and 5 percent interest rate. The property tax estimates assume that the jurisdiction would raise property taxes to pay the debt service on bonds; however, debt could be funded from existing property taxes or other revenue streams. The cost per household represents the average annual impact of increased property taxes levied to pay the debt service. The estimates do not take into account growth in the tax base due to new growth and development over the life of the bonds. The jurisdiction's officials, financial advisors, bond counsel, and underwriters would establish the actual terms of any bond.

Authority

For all local government units (except Philadelphia) the Local Government Unit Debt Act provides the authority and procedure for issuing local government debt. There are no statutory debt limits on the amount of voter-approved (electoral) debt, or self-sustaining debt.[20]

Requirements for borrowing [21]

Once a decision has been made to incur debt for a capital project, the county must comply with a number of requirements imposed upon it by the Local Government Unit Debt Act for non-electoral and electoral debt.

Before a county can borrow funds, the governing body must enact an ordinance or a resolution in the case of small borrowings.[22] The ordinance is both an information tool for the county citizens and a means to officially begin the process of incurring debt. Notice of the ordinance must be

[20] PA Local Government Unit Debt Act Section 8022
[21] Section 8102 and 103, http://www.pabondlawyer.org/media/downloads/lgud_act.pdf
[22] The Local Government Unit Debt Act Debt Act § 8109, defines small borrowings as the aggregate amount of the debt outstanding at any one time shall not exceed the lesser of $125,000 or 30% of the non-electoral debt limit as authorized in section 8022(a) (relating to limitations on incurring of other debt).

published both before and after its enactment. The law requires that the ordinance contains certain items, which include the following:

- An indication of the type of debt to be incurred (electoral or non-electoral).
- An indication of the form of debt (general obligation, revenue, or guaranteed revenue).
- A repayment schedule and interest rates.
- A covenant.
- A notice whether the bonds will be sold at public or private sale.
- Authorization for an officer of the municipality [23] to prepare a debt statement (which must be submitted to the Department of Community and Economic Development), to execute and deliver the bonds or notes, and to take other official action as may be needed.
- An identification of the project/purpose for which the debt is being issued and its useful life.

Procedure [24,25]

Approval for non-electoral debt requires a majority approval by the County Council.[26]

Approval for electoral debt requires that the governing body of the municipality first adopt a resolution signifying its intent to issue electoral debt. A copy of the resolution and the form of the question to authorize the debt must be certified to the county Board of Elections at least 45 days before the election. [27] For example, if a question was proposed for the November 2026 election, the date by which the County Board of Elections must certify would be **September 19, 2026**.[28] According to conversations with the Board of Elections they recommend that questions be filed earlier for the purpose of programming the ballots.

The ballot question must be phrased substantially as follows:

> *Shall debt in the sum of [amount] dollars for the purpose of financing [insert brief description of project] be authorized to be incurred as debt approved by the electors?*

While the description of purposes should be brief, it should also be clear to the voters, and it should authorize all of the intended activities. Examples of ballot language from successful county questions authorizing electoral debt for conservation can be found in Appendix A. The county Board of Elections is responsible for determining the final wording of all questions. On voting machines, the question must not exceed 75 words.[29] All questions must be followed by the words "yes" and "no" with squares for making cross marks.[30]A simple majority -- 50 percent plus one -- vote of the electorate is required for approval of electoral debt.

Notice of the referendum must be published in one or two newspapers of general circulation beginning no earlier than 21 days before the election and no later than 14 days before the election. The County Board of Elections shall prepare a statement in plain English, which indicates the purpose, limitations and effects of the ballot question to be included in the notice along with the

[23] Counties are also considered municipalities in Pennsylvania.
[24] Local Government Unit Debt Act, sections 8041 through 8049 and Center for Local Government Services "Referendum Handbook"
[25] Section 8043 Personal Conversation with Bernadette Barattini, Deputy Chief Counsel, PA Dept of Economic and Community Development 6/16/2008
[26] Personal communication with the Deputy Chief Counsel, PA Department of Community & Economic Development, February 2018
[27] Section 8043 Personal Conversation with Bernadette Barattini, Deputy Chief Counsel, PA Dept. of Economic and Community Development
[28] Debt authorization is governed by the Local Government Debt Act. The section of the act is 53 PS. C.S.A. § 8043 which does state that 45 days is required.
[29] 25 P.S. § 3010(b).
[30] 25 P.S. § 2963(g).

date of the election and the question to be submitted to the voters. On the tenth anniversary of the election approving the debt, the authority to issue bonds or notes terminates. The governing body may also rescind or cancel the debt authorization without obtaining the voters' approval.[31]

Bonds ordinarily are not issued in the full amount authorized by voters, and usually are issued in one or more series.[32] In addition, on the tenth anniversary of the bond approval by voters, if those bonds, all or in part, have not been issued, the debt would need to be reauthorized electorally, or could become non-electoral debt.[33]

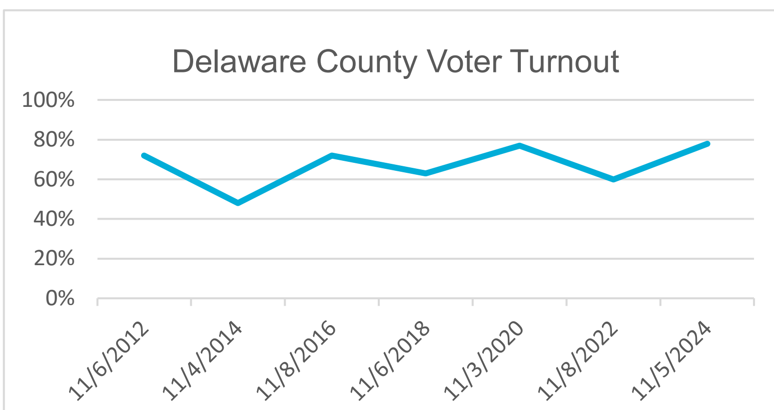
The governing body of any local government unit may by resolution, without the assent of the electors, rescind or cancel, in whole or in part, the authorization to incur electoral debt for any reason stated in the resolution, and thereupon the assent of the electors shall be of no further effect. A certified copy of the resolution with proof of the due publication thereof shall be filed with the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development.

Voter Registration, Turnout and Election Results

As of February 2026, Delaware County had approximately 409,475 registered voters.[34] Of these voters, 35 percent are Republicans and 49 percent are Democrats. On November 5, 2024, the county supported former Vice-President Kamala Harris with 61 percent support.

Delaware County Voting Method November 2024		
Voting Method	**# Voters**	**% of Total**
In-Person	236,300	72%
Mail-In	88,502	27%
Absentee/Provisional	3,370	1%
Total	**328,172**	**100%**
Source: Delaware County Elections Website		

Delaware County Registered Voters		
Political Affiliation	**# Voters**	**% of Total**
Republican	144,180	35%
Democrat	201,425	49%
Unaffiliated/Other[35]	63,870	16%
Total	**409,475**	**100%**
Source: Pennsylvania Department of State		



[31] §8047 (a) and (b) Local Government Unit Debt Act
[32] §8046 Local Government Unit Debt Act
[33] 53 Pa. C.S. § 8047
[34] https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/OtherServicesEvents/VotingElectionStatistics/Documents/2026%20Election%20Voter%20Registration%20Statistics.pdf
[35] Registered Independent, Non-Partisan, or with various minority parties.

11/6/2012	11/4/2014	11/8/2016	11/6/2018	11/3/2020	11/8/2022	11/5/2024
72%	48%	72%	63%	77%	60%	78%

Delaware County offers mail-in and absentee voting but not early voting. Any voter may vote by mail by filing an application, but without giving a reason or excuse. Any voter may vote absentee, which operates the same as voting by mail, except that the absentee application requires the voter to list a reason or excuse for not voting in person. Both systems require the voter to apply either online, in person or by mail, and both systems require the voter to provide a valid ID on the voter's application for a mail or absentee ballot.

Monday, September 14th 2026 is the first day on which county boards of elections must begin to process official applications for civilian absentee and mail in ballots. A county board of election may begin to process applications earlier if it deems it appropriate.[36]

No later than Saturday, September 19th, 2026 the county boards of elections must begin transmitting ballots and balloting materials to all covered voters under UMOVA who by this date submit a valid military-overseas ballot application.

Delaware County registered voters may return a mail/absentee ballot through the mail, at any of the more than two dozen Delaware County Ballot Drop Boxes located in municipalities throughout Delaware County, or in-person at the Delaware County Bureau of Election's Voter Service Center at the Government Center Building in Media, PA.

Vote-by-Mail Ballot Request Deadline: Applications for mail-in ballots and absentee ballots must be received by Delaware County Bureau of Elections no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 27th, 2026, seven days before Election Day.

Ballot Returns: Completed Vote-by-Mail ballots must be received by the Bureau of Elections no later than 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 5th, 2026.

Historically, voter support for parks, trails, and open spaces at the municipal level in Delaware County has been strong, as noted previously in this report. However, Delaware County voters have not been asked to vote recently on any county-wide referenda by which to gauge their support for public spending. The results of Delaware County voting on two municipal measures and relevant statewide ballot referenda are shown below.

Delaware County Public Spending Election Results

Date	Type	Measure	Description	Results	Local % Yes	Local % No
May 2013	Upper Chichester Township	Property tax	.00035 mill library tax	Fail	23%	77%
May 2011	City of Chester	Property tax	1.5 mill property tax for J. Lewis Crozer Library	Pass	68%	32%
Nov 2008	Statewide	Bond	$400 million Water and Sewer Improvements Bond (Passed 62%)	Pass	72%	28%
Nov 2006	Statewide	Bond	$20 million bond for a Persian Gulf Conflict Veteran's Compensation Fund (62%)	Pass	61%	39%
May 2005	Statewide	Bond	$625 million statewide Growing Greener II bond (61%)	Pass	80%	20%

[36] https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/dos/programs/voting-and-elections/running-for-office/2026/2026-general-election-calendar.pdf

Appendices

Appendix A- Successful County Ballot Language Examples

Jurisdiction	Carbon County, Pennsylvania
Election Date	November 8, 2022
Ballot language	Carbon County Water Quality, Working Farms, and Wildlife Habitat Protection Shall debt in a sum up to 10 million dollars for the purpose of financing land conservation, including protection of drinking water sources; water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; working farms; wildlife habitat; natural areas be authorized to be incurred as debt approved by the voters, requiring that the funds only be used for these purposes, with consideration of recommendations by an advisory board and public disclosure of project spending through annual public audits?
Results	Bond, passed 83% yes

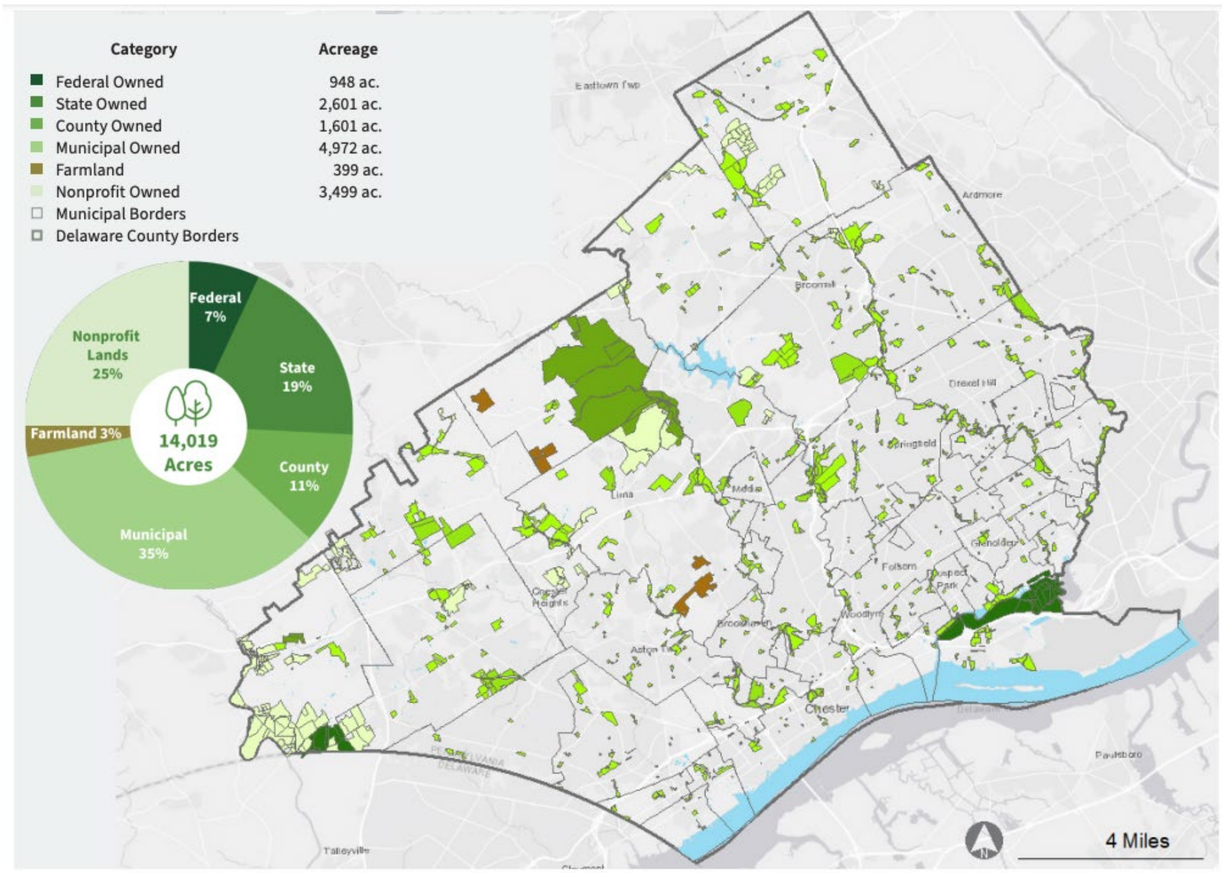
Jurisdiction	Adams County, Pennsylvania
Election Date	November 4, 2008
Ballot language	Adams County Water and Land Protection Bond Referendum “Shall debt in a sum not to exceed 10 million dollars be authorized for the purposes of financing land conservation and preservation efforts, including protection of drinking water sources, stream water quality, wildlife habitat, farmland, open space and recreation lands, all for future generations, to be incurred as debt approved by the electors of Adams County, with lands preserved solely in cooperation with willing sellers, and ensuring that an annual independent audit evaluates program success?”
Results	Bond, passed 75% yes
Jurisdiction	Pike County, Pennsylvania
Election Date	November 8, 2005
Ballot language	Pike County Scenic Rural Character Preservation “Shall a debt in sum not to exceed 10 million dollars for the purpose of financing protection of water; wildlife habitat; preservation of scenic ridges and critical open space; protection of water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams; parks and recreation areas; and improved planning be authorized to be incurred as debt approved by voters?”
Results	Bond, passed 67% yes

Appendix B: Local Conservation Ballot Measures in Pennsylvania 2015-2025

PA Local Conservation Measures 2015-2025					
Jurisdiction	**Date**	**Finance Mechanism**	**Conservation and Parks Funds Approved**	**Status**	**% Yes**
South Whitehall Township	11-4-2025	Income tax	$20,000,000	Pass	74%
Upper Frederick Township	11-4-2025	Income tax	$1,180,000	Pass	73%
Upper Providence Township	11-4-2025	Prop/Income tax		Fail	42%
Williams Township	11-4-2025	Income tax	$8,000,000	Pass	62%
East Whiteland Township	11-5-2024	Prop/Income tax	$28,000,000	Pass	56%
Lower Makefield Township	11-5-2024	Bond	$15,000,000	Pass	69%
Uwchlan Township	11-5-2024	Income tax	$50,000,000	Pass	57%
Heidelberg Township	4-23-2024	Income tax	TBD	Pass	57%
Whitehall Township	4-23-2024	Property tax	$3,000,000	Pass	54%
Richland Township	05-16-2023	Income tax	$1,832,000	Pass	89%
Carbon County	11-08-2022	Bond	$10,000,000	Pass	83%
Limerick Township	11-08-2022	Income tax		Fail	49%
West Sadsbury Township	11-08-2022	Income tax		Fail	39%
Westtown Township	11-08-2022	Prop/Income tax	$13,620,000	Pass	68%
Whitpain Township	05-17-2022	Income tax	$12,800,000	Pass	63%
Lower Macungie Township	11-02-2021	Income tax	$36,600,000	Pass	60%
Upper Saucon Township	11-02-2021	Income tax	$16,600,000	Pass	51%
Lower Frederick Township	11-03-2020	Income tax	$1,600,000	Pass	52%
Lower Nazareth Township	05-21-2019	Income tax	$14,000,000	Pass	63%
Middletown Township	05-21-2019	Bond	$8,000,000	Pass	76%
North Whitehall Township	05-21-2019	Property tax	$2,800,000	Pass	65%
Pittsburgh	11-05-2019	Property tax	$200,000,000	Pass	52%
Solebury Township	11-05-2019	Bond	$12,000,000	Pass	75%
Upper Nazareth Township	11-05-2019	Income tax	$4,000,000	Pass	56%
West Bradford Township	11-07-2017	Income tax	$22,000,000	Pass	67%
Lower Moreland Township	11-08-2016	Income tax		Fail	35%
Lower Saucon Township	11-08-2016	Income tax	$5,000,000	Pass	58%
Newlin Township	11-08-2016	Property tax	$380,000	Pass	60%
Richland Township	11-08-2016	Income tax	$1,600,000	Pass	76%
Smithfield Township	11-08-2016	Bond	$2,000,000	Pass	76%
Upper Milford Township	11-08-2016	Income tax	$7,200,000	Pass	59%
East Nottingham Township	11-03-2015	Income tax	$14,000,000	Pass	56%

Appendix C: Delaware County Protected Open Space

According to the census, Delaware County's land area is 117,632 acres. Based on the data below, about 12 percent of the county is currently preserved.



Source: Delaware County (2021), Econsult Solutions, Inc. (2021), ArcMap (2021).
Land includes parks and other open spaces by ownership.

With any questions or for more information please contact:

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