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Rights and Procedures of a CPE Appraiser/Assessor and Your Property

An assessor has a responsibility to seek, discover, list and value all real property in the jurisdiction they are employed. However, we also want to be respectful of your individual property rights and your right to privacy. Accordingly, Dauphin County has the following policy to govern when an Assessor/Appraiser may enter onto and/or into your property.

An assessor may not proceed onto a property where it is clear the resident or owner has taken affirmative steps to keep the public from entering their land. An assessor will not enter those areas clearly marked with "No Trespassing" signs or if there are chains, gates or fences enclosing all or part of a property, unless they have received written or verbal consent to do so.

An assessor may enter onto a property if it not clearly indicated that the property is off limits¹. Additionally, if you are renting a property, an assessor may enter onto the property despite "No Trespassing" signs or similar markings if the property owner has given permission.

Entry onto the property without explicit permission will be limited to what is legally known as the curtilage, which is the land and yard immediately surrounding your house.

An assessor will not enter your house or dwelling unless they have specific permission.

¹Is an assessment subject to the 4th Amendment?

One of the most common questions we get asked is whether an assessor who enters a property without explicit permission is a violation of the 4th Amendment. The answer is that they are generally not. An assessment is **not** considered a "search" because the assessor is making observations of a house's plainly visible exterior attributes and dimensions without entering or looking into the house. See *Widgren v. Maple Grove Township*, 429 F.3d 575 (2005).

Although the instructions above provide the general guidance for our Certified Pennsylvania Evaluator (CPE) Assessors/ Appraiser, it is nearly impossible to provide guidance for every situation. Listed below are some standard procedures an appraiser/assessor should follow upon entering onto your property:

1. A County issued employee photo ID card is prominently displayed.
2. Ring doorbell, knock on door, or both. If no answer, let a door hanger at that time at a prominent location(s). Identify themselves as a Dauphin County Assessor/Appraiser and reason for the visit.
3. Allow time for the owner to answer the door before walking around the house to inspect it.
4. An Assessor/Appraiser will not request an interior inspection. However, sometimes it is necessary to measure or verify interior characteristics. Should an interior inspection be requested by the property owner or ordered by the Board of Assessment, two Assessor/Appraisers will make the interior inspection.
5. **To be clear, interior inspections will only be made by two assessor/appraisers,** which may necessitate a return visit.
6. With an answer at the door or at the property, the assessor/appraiser will ascertain as to whether or not the individual answering the door or at the property has care and control over the property. If so, the assessor/appraiser will ask pertinent questions regarding the real property and/or ask permission to go onto the property for an exterior inspection which may include a walk around the property and measuring of exterior improvement(s). Most property information can be collected from an exterior inspection and speaking with a property owner. **Only an individual with care and control over the property can give such permission. Minor children CANNOT give permission.** The assessor/appraiser will make their best efforts to determine if the person at the property has the authority to grant them entry onto the property.
7. If additional information is needed, a Door Hanger/Hang Tag will be left at a prominent location(s). If additional information is needed and if the owner does not respond to the door hanger within 15 days, the assessor/appraiser may make additional visits. If no response is received, any assessment change will be based on *estimated* data for the improvements made and a notice of change in assessment mailed.
8. **If requested to do so, the assessor/appraiser will leave the property immediately.**
9. The assessor/appraiser will identify themselves to the builder, if on site, before entering new construction.
10. If the assessor/appraiser is denied access to any part of the property, they will collect the information based on what they view from outside the inaccessible area or from the street. Any data collected in this manner will be *estimated* and the property assessment revised accordingly.
11. Should, at any time, the assessor/appraiser believe their safety is in jeopardy, they will immediately leave the property and report the incident to the appropriate authority.
12. If an inspection is not possible, or the property inaccessible, an estimate will be made, assessment change (if warranted) mailed with the appropriate appeal notice.

The assessor/appraiser is not a law enforcement officer and will not be visiting your property to conduct a criminal investigation. However, they cannot wear blinders when working in the field and are required to report criminal activity or suspect properties.

We hope this helps to clarify and address any concerns you may have about how our CPE assessor/appraisers work in the field and your rights and responsibilities as a property owner.