



## State of New Jersey

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Alpha Borough will Expand Highlands Center to Accommodate Planned Growth and Enhance Quality of Life for Residents

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) approved a petition from Alpha Borough in Warren County to expand its designated Highlands Center. A Highlands Center is an area where development and redevelopment are carefully planned to encourage sustainable economic growth while maintaining protection of critical natural, historic and cultural resources. The planning process for a Highlands Center is community-driven and designed to create a sense of place that reflects municipal goals. For Alpha Borough these goals include establishing a more cohesive downtown, improving walkability and bike-ability, and building-out its industrial district.

A rural community in southwest Warren County, Alpha was founded largely on the industrial potential of the rich limestone deposits that were used in the manufacture of cement. Today the town includes a mix of residential areas, farms, a small downtown, and an industrial area. Interstate 78 cuts through the southwest and southeast corners of the Borough. In 2011, the Highlands Council approved a Highlands Center designation for the eastern portion of the Borough north of I-78 with a goal to enhance a walkable residential area and to address existing brownfield sites. The expansion of the center adds areas to the west and southeast of I-78 to include additional portions of its business district and its industrial centers.

“Alpha is a small tight-knit community that continues to be very thoughtful about its growth,” explains Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Highlands Council Planning Manager. “The town first considered

expanding its Highlands Center about two years ago. They did a significant amount of community outreach to find out what residents wanted and incorporated those findings into their planning goals. The resulting Highlands Center Designation Plan emphasizes the need for placemaking, improved recreation and community areas, and enhanced transportation options. In fact, the Borough recently received a grant to improve pedestrian safety, which fits right into this Plan.”

To ensure Alpha’s planned growth remains consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and protective of Highlands resources, approval of the petition for expansion comes with several conditions that were crafted with the town. Notably, the petition approval requires adherence to the “Policy Standards for Warehousing in the New Jersey Highlands,” along with significant mitigation provisions for any loss of agricultural lands resulting from development. Condition 12 in the Highlands Council Consistency Review Report specifies that any loss of agricultural lands will be offset through the purchase of Highlands Development Credits (HDCs) or preservation of comparable farmland. This condition requires a formal agreement between the Borough, the Highlands Council and any owner/developer memorializing the mitigation.

“The Highlands Region has some of the best farmland soils not only in the state, but the world,” explains Ben Spinelli, Highlands Council Executive Director. “The RMP protects most of them, but in the Planning Area many of these lands remain at risk. This is the first time we are formally assigning a value to the potential loss of this resource. Alpha Borough has been an outstanding partner in this process and clearly understands that value. Since the Borough is already moving toward some industrial development, our Highlands warehousing policy standards will also be important.”

The Highlands Warehousing Policy Standards were also released by Council at the April meeting and are intended to supplement statewide siting guidance from the NJ State Planning Commission (September 2022). By providing local Highlands governments with assistance in making permitting and land use decisions that best meet their local needs, the Council is simultaneously ensuring that the resource protection and planning goals of the Highlands Act and Regional Master Plan are upheld.

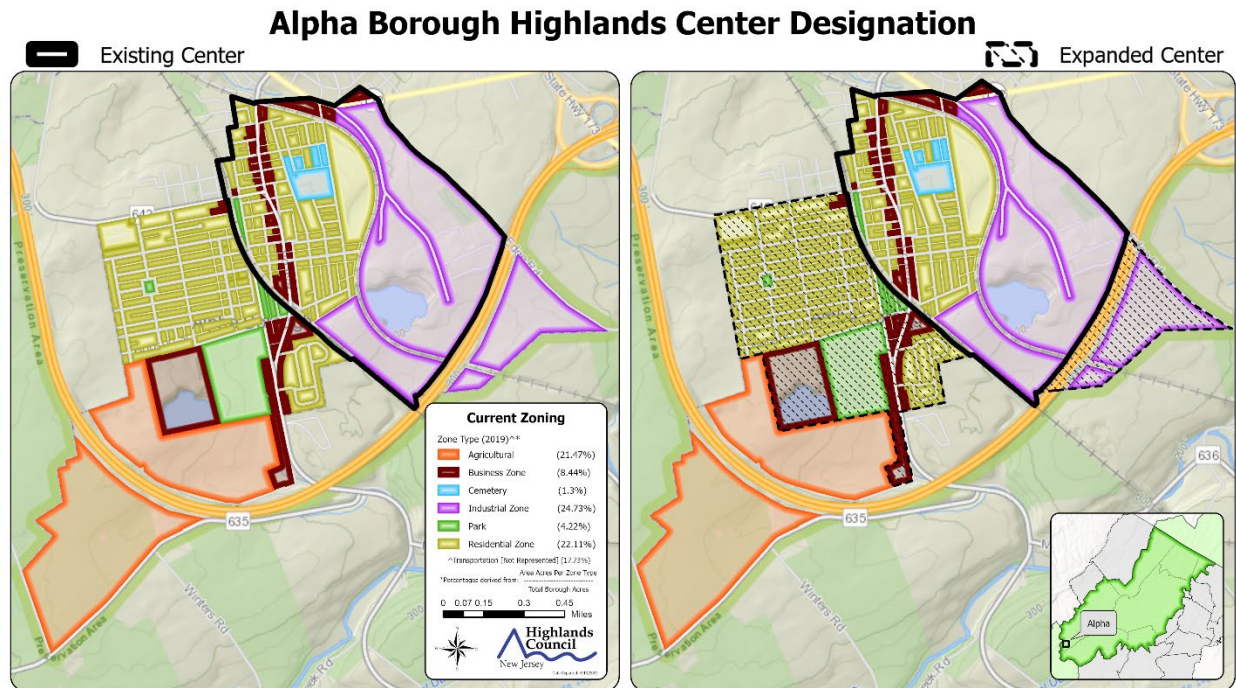
“The proliferation of warehousing is a matter of state-wide significance, but is of particular concern in the Highlands because of the important role the region plays in protecting drinking water for the rest of the state,” says Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “As the regional planning agency charged with protection of the Highlands, we must do all we can to ensure any warehouses are appropriately located and appropriately designed. These policy standards will help ensure we meet this obligation.”

Actions taken by the Council at this meeting will take effect following the Governor’s review and consideration of the meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of the minutes. Materials related to this meeting including resolutions, presentations, audio, and minutes will be posted at: [www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/index.html](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/index.html) (click on April 20 meeting).

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at [www.nj.gov/njhighlands](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands). Actions taken by the Council will take effect following the Governor's review and consideration of meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of meeting minutes.

ATTACHMENTS:

Alpha Borough Center designation map



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