

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

**PRESENT**

CARL J. RICHKO ) CHAIR  
KURT ALSTED ) VICE CHAIR  
ROBERT HOLTAWAY ) COUNCIL MEMBERS  
TIMOTHY DOUGHERTY )  
MICHAEL R. DRESSLER )  
MICHAEL FRANCIS )  
BRUCE JAMES )  
DAN VAN ABS )  
JAMES VISIOLI )  
RICHARD VOHDEN )

**ABSENT**

MICHAEL SEBETICH )

**CALL TO ORDER** 191<sup>ST</sup> meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council was called to order at 4:00pm at the Highlands Council Offices in Chester, NJ.

**ROLL CALL**

Roll call was taken. Members Dougherty, Francis, and Sebetich were absent. Member Dressler was present via teleconference. All other Council Members were present in person. *The following staff members were present: Lisa J. Plevin, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Kelley Curran, Neda Hartman, Herb August, Ranji Persaud, Annette Tagliareni, Allison Bittner, Carole Ann Diction, and Tom Tagliareni. Others present: Jeffrey Nielsen, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities Unit. Deputy Attorney General's (DAG's) office: Jason Kane via teleconference.*

**OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT** was recited.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** was recited.

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Chair Richko acknowledged the service of Lisa J. Plevin and read into the record the following resolution commending her leadership and dedication to the Highlands Council and its mission as Executive Director from 2018-2022.

**Resolution - Commending Lisa J. Plevin for her Leadership and Dedication to the Highlands Council and Its Mission as Executive Director, 2018-2022**

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council); and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act empowers the Highlands Council to appoint an Executive Director to serve, at the pleasure of the Council, as its chief administrative officer; and

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

WHEREAS, the Executive Director plays a vital role in implementing policies established by the Highlands Council, identifying new initiatives, and managing and providing leadership to the staff of the Highlands Council; and

WHEREAS, Lisa J. Plevin has been the Executive Director for the Highlands Council for the past four years having been appointed in July of 2018; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin brought to the Highlands Council a wide breadth of experience working on varied environmental matters;

WHEREAS, over the course of four years as Executive Director, Ms. Plevin has ably assisted the Highlands Council and has led the Highlands Council staff in its mission to implement the goals of the Highlands Act and the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP); and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin's commitment and dedication to the mission of the Highlands Council has served to guide its efforts and established the tone for all Council activities; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin has sought to encourage significant public participation in the Council's operations and has endeavored to involve all stakeholders in Council initiatives; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin provided exceptional leadership of the Highlands Council team during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was perhaps the most challenging time the organization has faced since the development of the RMP; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin was the driving force behind an incredibly successful effort to engage municipal and county partners in implementation of the RMP; and

WHEREAS, based on these efforts, several Petitions and Amended Petitions for Plan Conformance came before the Council and were approved, strengthening collaborative implementation of the Highlands Act and RMP; and

WHEREAS, during Ms. Plevin's tenure more than 20 municipal and county planning grants were approved for work including Water Use and Conservation Management, Stormwater Management, Transportation Planning, Lake and Stream Management, Economic Sustainability Planning, and more; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin spearheaded the completion of an effort that began in 2007 to have the Regional Master Plan endorsed by the State Planning Commission, which results in significant benefits for Highlands municipalities and counties; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin quickly ramped-up outreach to municipal and county partners experiencing Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) to facilitate grant funding for watershed assessments, lake and stream management plans, and stormwater management plans to help identify and address many of the root causes of HABs; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin has significantly contributed to furthering the goals of the Highlands Act and the Highlands RMP, and has left a solid foundation for future activities of the Highlands Council; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Plevin has many other accomplishments that distinguish her tenure as Executive Director and will have a lasting, positive impact on the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council wishes to publicly and formally acknowledge Ms. Plevin's accomplishments as Executive Director, and the legacy she leaves to the future of the Highlands Council and the Highlands Region generally;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Highlands Council hereby commends Lisa J. Plevin for her outstanding service as Executive Director of the Highlands Council and her service to the people of the State of New Jersey;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to Governor Philip D. Murphy recognizing Ms. Plevin's achievements as Executive Director of the Highlands Council from 2018 to 2022.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

*Member Alstede moved the resolution. Member Holtaway seconded it.*

Prior to Council discussion, Chairman Richko introduced Jeffrey Nielsen, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities. On behalf of Governor Murphy, Mr. Nielsen congratulated Ms. Plevin on her retirement and read into the record a letter from Governor Murphy.

It is my honor to congratulate you on your retirement from your incredible career in government and non-profit leadership roles, departing as the Executive Director of Highlands Council.

You have established a career of significant work in environmental advocacy and natural resource protection. Your role for U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg, as a Senior Advisor on environmental issues in New Jersey, as Chief of Staff for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2, and as Deputy Director of our innovative Environmental and Energy Transition Committee; coupled with your involvement in the developmental framework causing numerous Conservation Acts to be passed deserves to be highlighted and recognized. Your personal contributions and leadership in support of important environmental issues and programs will forever be remembered by the Garden State. The tireless work you have done within the State of New Jersey for more than three decades has undoubtedly earned you the respect and admiration from colleagues and is owed a great debt of gratitude from all of New Jersey.

Lisa, you have made a tremendous impact on New Jersey's environmental protection, development, and advocacy system that has initiated many policies and implementation strategies to better our lives. On behalf of the State of New Jersey, I applaud you for your generous dedication throughout your esteemed career. Now, as you embark upon this new and exciting chapter in your life, take pride in knowing that the entire Garden State will benefit from your hard work and lasting contributions for years to come.

Congratulations, again, and best wishes for lasting health and happiness!

### Council Comment

Vice Chair Alstede commented that he has served with every Executive Director since the inception of the Council and as the Council has matured in terms of functionality and serving residents in the region, so have our Executive Directors. Vice Chair Alstede added that Lisa's professionalism, objectivity, dedication did not go unrecognized.

Member Holtaway commented that watching Lisa gave the public a much better vision of what we are and Lisa was also able to get more towns involved. The outreach she has done, has done all of us good. Member Holtaway added he is very pleased to have had the opportunity to work with Lisa for the past 4 years and wished her Godspeed.

Member Visioli thanked Lisa and commented that the proclamation and letter from Governor says it all.

Member Van Abs commented that he has interacted with Lisa on almost every major position of her career and always enjoyed working with her and respects her tremendously as a professional. Member Van Abs added that he is very pleased to have had the last couple of years on the Highlands Council working with her for the first time in an official capacity.

Member Vohden commented that he believes all of us agree with what has been said and that Lisa has done a great job.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

*Member Dressler was present at 4:18pm.*

Member Dressler commented that Lisa is the consummate professional. She is courteous, personable and knows her stuff. It has been a pleasure to work with Lisa. Member Dressler added that Lisa has taken this Council to heights we have never been before.

Member James commented he and Lisa have a friendship and he is happy . that they will continue to spend time together.

#### Public Comment

**Elliott Ruga, New Jersey Highlands Coalition** – Mr. Ruga congratulated Ms. Plevin as a representative of the environmental community. Mr. Ruga added that Lisa has won the respect of the council members, advocacy groups, municipal officials throughout the Highlands, agencies and has carried this position with a great deal of professionalism.

Chairman Richko commented that he has never worked with anyone like Lisa. Lisa has done her job very well. Chairman Richko added a sincere thank you and many years of happy, healthy retirement.

*Members Dougherty and Francis were present at 4:19pm.*

*A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.*

At this time, Ms. Plevin said she was speechless and overwhelmed by the well wishes, the resolution and added that Governor Murphy's letter was a nice surprise. Ms. Plevin said that it has been an honor to serve as the Executive Director for the last four years. She appreciated the opportunity to have worked with both the dedicated members of the Council as well as the dedicated staff. Together, we've made significant strides in advancing the mission and goals of the agency. We've undertaken many new, creative, and far-reaching projects, developed new and improved relationships with municipalities and counties. Ms. Plevin added that despite the obstacles of COVID, we all continued to move forward with advancing the work of Council and goals of the Highlands Act.

Ms. Plevin added that she feels incredibly lucky to have worked on issues that she is passionate about for most of her career. Ms. Plevin gave a special thanks to Carl, Kurt, and Bob for their strong leadership and support in helping guide this agency. In addition, the Council Committees are the engine that keep this agency moving forward. Ms. Plevin thanked Committee Chairs Members James, Dressler, Visioli, Van Abs, Vohden, and Francis for their hard work and dedication to the mission of the agency. Ms. Plevin also thanked the staff as they are just as passionate about the goals of the agency and accomplishing the mission.

#### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Ms. Plevin then gave her last Executive Director's report and highlighted the following updates and staff activities:

#### **Plan Conformance Updates**

##### Municipal Petitions

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

Petition for Center Designation for Clinton Township, Hunterdon County was approved by Council on June 15, 2022.

**Municipally Issued Exemptions**

Since the prior report, the Highlands Council has been notified of the following municipally issued exemptions.

- Washington Township, Morris County: three exemption #5, one exemption #1
- Hardyston Township, Sussex County: one exemption #5
- High Bridge, Hunterdon County: one exemption #4.
- Montville Township, Morris County: one exemption #5
- Sparta Township, Sussex County: 12 exemption #5s.

**Project Review Updates**

Staff reviewed two (2) Highlands Applicability Determination (HAD) Exemption #11 projects.

- Veolia Water New Jersey, Inc., has applied to NJDEP for HAD #11's for 2 separate projects, both in West Milford, Passaic County, and both to achieve regulatory compliance for chlorine contact time:
  - The first involves the installation of a water main under the driveway of the Sussex Drive Well facility. Highlands Council staff finding: Consistent.
  - The second involves the installation of approximately 30 feet of water main piping at the Bald Eagle Water Treatment Plant. Highlands Council staff review is pending.

**Personnel Update**

The vacant Environmental Scientist 3 position has been filled, and the candidate is expected to begin August 15. Also, Council will be considering a resolution for the Executive Director position at this meeting.

The next Council Meeting is scheduled for August 18, 2022.

**APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MINUTES OF JUNE 16, 2022**

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Minutes of June 16, 2022

*Member Visioli made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Minutes of June 16, 2022. Member James seconded it.*

*A roll call vote was taken. The Highlands Council Minutes of June 16, 2022 were APPROVED 10-0.*

**PRESENTATION – New York-New Jersey Trail Conference**

Ms. Plevin gave an overview on the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference project and then introduced Zachary Cole, Long-Distance Trails Program Coordinator who provided a presentation which can be found on the Highlands Council website at the following link:

[https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2022/jul21/preso\\_jul21.pdf](https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2022/jul21/preso_jul21.pdf)

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

Council Comments

Vice Chair Alstede asked if he has been able to track/quantify the economic impact of the trail. Mr. Cole responded that we do keep track of visitors to the trail and there could possibly be a way to quantify the impact and will be happy to bring his question back to the office.

Jeffrey Neilson, Associate Council, Governor's Authorities Unit commented on his upcoming trip to the Camino de Santiago trail and examples of its economic impacts. Mr. Neilson added that he could foresee the New York-New Jersey Highlands Trail having that same identity.

Member Vohden asked who maintains the trails. Mr. Cole responded that the trails are maintained by the Conference and over 2,000 volunteers who take ownership of a mile of the trail.

**BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Resolution – Approval to Extend the Fiscal Year Budgets 2022 at the Same Average Monthly Spending Level**

Committee Chair Holtaway reported that per annual practice, the Council will consider a resolution to extend the monthly amounts for the FY22 Operating and Grants budgets until the Council approves and adopts its FY23 budgets in the fall.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

*Member Holtaway moved the resolution. Member Visioli seconded it.*

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

*A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.*

**Resolution – Executive Session**

Chair Richko announced that Council would enter executive session. Chief Counsel Gabrielle Gallagher read the following resolution into the record:

WHEREAS, the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4 6 et seq., permits the holding of closed sessions by public bodies in certain circumstances, and the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (“Council”) is of the opinion that those circumstances presently exist; and

WHEREAS, the Council will discuss personnel matters concerning a prospective employee within the meaning of N.J.S.A. 10:4 12(b)(8);

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council may enter into closed session at its public meeting of July 21, 2022 for that purpose. It is anticipated at this time that the nature of the closed session will be made public upon completion or resolution of the issues to be discussed, except any matter protected by the attorney client privilege will not be disclosed.

This Resolution shall become effective upon a roll call vote of the Council.

Chair Richko requested a motion on the resolution.

*Member Van Abs made a motion. Member James seconded it.*

There was no Council discussion.

*A roll call vote was taken. The Resolution was approved 10-0.*

Public portion of the meeting was temporarily dismissed at 4:50pm.

[EXECUTIVE SESSION]

The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council meeting resumed at 5:10pm.

Chair Richko asked Personnel Committee Chair to read the resolution into record.

**Resolution – Appointment of Executive Director**

Committee Chair James read:

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) empowers the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) to appoint, retain and employ personnel as it may require without regard to the provisions of Title 11A of the New Jersey Statutes but within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available for those purposes; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act authorizes the Highlands Council to conduct its business as needed, subject to the statute, to effectuate the purposes of the enabling legislation; and

WHEREAS, Section 5.g. of the Highlands Act provides for the Highlands Council's appointment of an Executive Director to serve, at the pleasure of the Council, as its chief administrative officer, and shall be a person qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Highlands Act, the Highlands Council has adopted bylaws which provide for the appointment of an Executive Director whose duties are enumerated in said bylaws and who shall serve at the pleasure of the Council.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

1. The Highlands Council hereby appoints Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq. as its Executive Director, at an annual basis of \$135,000.00.
2. The Executive Director is hereby authorized and directed to exercise all of the duties and responsibilities as set forth in the bylaws.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

*Member James moved the resolution. Member Alstede seconded it.*

At this time, Chairman Richko provided a summary on Mr. Spinelli's professional experience:

- B.A. Political Science/History - Muhlenberg College
- Law Degree – Seton Hall University – School of Law
- Assistant County Prosecutor for Essex County Prosecutor's Office and Trial Attorney
- 1998-2007 –Chester Township Mayor
- 1991-1998 – Chairman, Chester Twp Environmental Commission
- Chairman, Morris County Open Space & Farmland Preservation Trust
- Member, State Agriculture Development Committee
- Member, NJ Environmental Infrastructure Trust Board
- Executive Director, Westchester Land Trust
- Executive Director, State of New Jersey – Office of Smart Growth
- 2004-2006 - Original Member, NJ Highlands Council - worked with fellow board members to establish the RMP and procedures that we follow to this day; and presently,
- Principal/Partner of Greener by Design – provides consulting service related to agriculture, alternative energy, open space planning, and sustainable and affordable housing. Principal areas of the practice center on environmental and conservation matters including working with governmental agencies.

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment

**Hank Klumpp, Tewksbury, NJ** – Mr. Klumpp commented that he likes Council's choice for Executive Director. Mr. Klumpp also added that landowners have not been compensated since the Act was passed. Mr. Klumpp commended Ms. Plevin for her efforts and maybe the new Executive Director can find the funding landowners deserve.

There were no further comments from the Council.

*A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.*

Chair Richko congratulated Mr. Spinelli and offered him an opportunity to say a few words.

Mr. Spinelli congratulated Lisa on her next stage in life. Working as a customer with Lisa, Mr. Spinelli commented that she has always been a professional, fair, kind, and decent person. Mr. Spinelli hopes to carry on the work Ms. Plevin has done with the Council.



NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

Mr. Spinelli then thanked the Council members. Mr. Spinelli added that he has worked on issues surrounding the Highlands council, the policies that protect the resources for over two decades and having been here at the beginning as a Council member and this appointment brings things full circle for him. Ms. Spinelli hopes to carry out the Council's wishes and to help bring the policies and the goals of the Act to fruition going forward and to help you to continue to implement the Act. Thank you again for the confidence the Council has shown in hiring him.

Chairman Richko noted that it is anticipated that we will have a smooth transition.

Council Comment

Vice Chair Alstede asked when Ben's start date will be. Ms. Plevin responded that if everything goes smoothly, Mr. Spinelli will start August 15<sup>th</sup>. Chief Counsel Gallagher emphasized that we need to wait out the veto period.

**OLD/NEW BUSINESS:**

There was no old/new business reported.

Chairman Richko opened the meeting to the public for any other comments.

Public Comment

**Elliott Ruga, New Jersey Highlands Coalition** – Mr. Ruga congratulated the Council on selecting Ben Spinelli as its Executive Director. Mr. Ruga added that Mr. Spinelli brings a valuable perspective as a former Council member, as well as in his other positions, including being a representative of a developer of the regulated community and someone that builds good projects. Mr. Spinelli has a visionary high-level way of seeing things, gets the big picture and understands the goals and objectives of the Highlands Act and the RMP and what this body can do.

Hank Klumpp, Tewksbury, NJ – Mr. Klumpp commented that his public comment made at the end of Council's June meeting was never answered. Mr. Klumpp also added that it is a crime that the land being used is not being compensated for.

Chairman Richko read Mr. Klumpp's comment from the June meeting and confirmed that it was in the minutes.

Chair Richko asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

*Member James made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Holtaway seconded it. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:29pm.*

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 21, 2022

**CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council.

Date: 10/21/2022

Name: *Annette Tagliareni*  
Annette Tagliareni, Executive Assistant

Vote on the Approval of Minutes	Motion	Second	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
Councilmember Alstede			√			
Councilmember Dougherty		√	√			
Councilmember Dressler			√			
Councilmember Francis			√			
Councilmember Holtaway			√			
Councilmember James			√			
Councilmember Sebetich			√			
Councilmember Van Abs	√		√			
Councilmember Visioli			√			
Councilmember Vohden			√			
Chairman Richko			√			