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Executive Director

M E M O R A N D U M

To: Budget & Finance Committee

From: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director

Subject: Committee Meeting Minutes – January 8, 2025

Date: January 10, 2025 (*revised*)

A Budget and Finance (B&F) Committee meeting was held on Wednesday, January 8, 2025 at 12:00pm via Zoom. The following participants were present:

Committee: Council Chair Richko, Committee Chair Visioli, and Committee Member Bush

Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU): Alexis Franklin, Associate Counsel

Highlands Staff: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kelley Curran, Neda Hartman, Carole Diction and Annette Tagliareni.

Committee Chair Visioli opened the meeting at 12:00pm.

A roll call was taken.

Committee Chair Visioli reported that the committee will discuss two (2) agenda items.

1. Tourism Expansion Grant Program
2. Mount Olive Township – Lake Management Plan

Tourism Expansion Grant Program (Not to exceed \$400,000)

Ben Spinelli, Executive Director, informed the committee that the Council will be opening a Tourism Expansion Grant Program. The grant program stems from recommendations in the 2022 Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan.

Maryjude Haddock-Weiler noted that as the Highlands Council continues to investigate opportunities for sustainable economic growth, various types of tourism have emerged as positive economic drivers. As the Council continues to have success with our county partners, we want to leverage and build this program and open it up to other entities:

- Highlands counties and municipalities
- Nonprofit organizations

- Business Improvement Districts (BIDS) and Special Improvement Districts (SIDs)
- Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)

Haddock-Weiler noted that the funding for this program will come from the Regional Master Plan (RMP) fund and added that this program is to facilitate and support additional efforts to increase tourism in the Highland region (different from the Plan Conformance funding which implements the RMP). The funding range (dependent on the entity) is between \$35,000-\$100,000. The current funding amount for this fiscal year is \$400,000 and could be renewable annually (dependent on available funds and effectiveness of delivered work project.)

With this program, Mr. Spinelli emphasized that we want to be consistent with the brand and recommendations being developed by our consultant North Star Place Branding + Marketing (North Star.) Mr. Spinelli noted that North Star will provide a presentation to the full Council at its January 16th meeting on the first phase of their research and setting a path moving forward. Mr. Spinelli also noted that staff will reach out to the Division of Tourism to pursue additional/available funding for this effort.

It was noted that the full Council will not be asked to consider any funding for this program at this time but will in the not-too-distant future.

Mount Olive Township – Lake Management Plan - \$85,630

Kelley Curran, Science Manager, reported that Mount Olive Township submitted a Scope of Work prepared by Raritan Headwaters Association requesting funding for lake management planning to support a study to characterize pre-implementation, baseline water quality, hydrology, and habitat conditions within Budd Lake and its tributaries. This data will serve as a point of comparison for changes in water quality following implementation of projects designed to improve water quality. This project aligns with the NJDEP-approved Budd Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan. The goal of the characterization study is to identify water quality conditions to understand targeted pathways for restoration and impairment mitigation. Ultimately, understanding and improving Budd Lake will support the cultural and economic revitalization of this important New Jersey landmark. Due to budget constraints, Ms. Curran noted that this funding is for Phase 1 tasks of this project. It is estimated that Phase 1 work will be completed in nine (9) months. Phase 2 of this project is approximately \$41K in scope and the Township will come back to the committee for consideration at the conclusion of Phase 1.

Phase 1 Tasks include:

1. Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) development for baseline characterization and future monitoring.
2. Development of a Community Science Program
3. Baseline characterization of Budd Lake (includes 17 sampling events at 12 sites)

This project meets RMP Goals, Policies and Objectives – Goals 1D and 1L.

Committee Chair Visioli asked for a motion to move the Mount Olive Township Lake Management Plan in the amount of \$85,630 to the full Council for consideration. Member Bush made the motion and Chair Richko seconded it. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12pm.