

**DRAFT – FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE JUNE 19, 2025
MEETING OF THE HIGHLANDS COUNCIL
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 17, 2025**

PRESENT

CARL J. RICHKO)	CHAIR
KURT ALSTEDE)	VICE CHAIR
DANIEL BUSH)	COUNCIL MEMBERS
TIMOTHY DOUGHERTY)	
WILLIAM KIBLER)	
JAMES VISIOLI)	
DANIEL J. VAN ABS, PhD)	

VIA TELECONFERENCE:

MICHAEL FRANCIS)
BRUCE JAMES)

ABSENT :

MICHAEL DRESSLER)
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CALL TO ORDER 211TH meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council was called to order at 4:02pm at the Highlands Council Offices in Chester, NJ.

ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken. Member Dressler was absent. All Council Members were present. Members James and Francis were present via teleconference. *The following staff members were present: Ben Spinelli, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kelley Curran, Corey Piasecki, Allison Bittner, Neda Hartman, Tom Tagliareni, Carole Dicton, Kyli Engle and Annette Tagliareni. Others present: Alexis Franklin, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU). Via Teleconference: Jill Denyes Deputy Attorney General's (DAG's) office*

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT was recited.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chair Richko thanked Member Vohden for his dedicated service and presented him with a plaque. At this time, Member Vohden gave a heartfelt statement on his career and as a member of the Highlands Council.

Chair Richko then welcomed William Kibler as our new Council member and provided his background. At this time, Member Kibler was sworn in and gave a brief statement on his appointment.

Lastly, Chair Richko appointed Member Kibler to the following committees:

Budget & Finance

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Plan Conformance

Regional Master Plan Amendment
Bylaws – Chair

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT

1. Mr. Spinelli thanked Member Vohden for his dedication to the Council and its committees.
2. Mr. Spinelli welcomed Member Kibler to the Council and emphasized that the Council is still operating with only ten members, which can threaten our ability to operate.
3. Drought continues. Recent rains and some snowfall have helped ease the wildfire issue but the rainfall deficit remains at around 20 inches regionwide. There has already been a number of wildfires in the state this spring, including one here in Chester. Meanwhile, the Highlands still exported more than ¾ billion gallons of water each day, provided water to the 850,000 residents and businesses of the region and met the agricultural needs of the Highlands’ farmers.
4. The dual appraisal provision has been passed by the legislature extending the term for another five years. The same bill codifies watershed moratorium aid that has been discussed here before; good news for towns like Ringwood and Wanaque. Legislature needs to assign an additional \$450,000 from the Realty Transfer Tax portion dedicated to the Highlands Protection Fund.
5. Open Space funding was sidetracked due to lobbying from environmental groups.
6. The Council continues to operate with reduced funding, inadequate levels of staffing and grant funding.
7. The Council currently has 13 towns pursuing Plan Conformance with the Regional Master Plan (RMP). Netcong Borough and Union Township will be considered today. The Town of Belvidere and Jefferson Township are out for public comment. Washington Township (Warren) was previously approved and is adopting its Highlands Land Use ordinance for the entirety of the township. Mendham Borough and Milford Borough have requested initial assessment grants in anticipation of conformance.
8. The Highlands Region Branding and Marketing Plan, a recommendation from the Economic Sustainability Plan, continues to move forward. An in-person presentation will be provided to the Council at its June meeting to wrap up their work and share their findings and recommendations.
9. To support efforts to attract visitors and economic investment, our tourism expansion grant program was designed to support Highlands municipalities and non-profits to undertake projects to move that forward. There are a number of grants for Council’s consideration today.
10. We continue to meet with educational institutions and other partners to initiate scientific research in the region that will forward our work. We met with Dr. Meiyen Wu from Montclair State University and Tim Eustace from North Jersey District Water Supply Authority to discuss cooperating on an analysis of the Jennings Creek wildfire site. We also partnered with Kean University to host a Science Symposium at the Kean Skylands campus in Jefferson to bring together scientists currently working on research projects in the region. The scientists were able to network and discuss their ongoing work that helps inform our mission. Special thanks to staff member Carolyn Klaube for organizing the event and Professor Shebitz (Kean) and scientists from NJDEP, Montclair State University and Rutgers University who contributed their expertise.
11. Moving forward on our work with the City of Newark. New Jersey Forest Service and Forest Fire Service are assisting us.
12. Working on convening all the water purveyors in the region to discuss common issues.
13. Progress on our agenda items for the upcoming years from our last meeting:

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- a. New Highlands website will be going live next week.
 - b. Working on the RMP Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR)
 - c. Annual Report for 2024 is complete and Council will consider its submission.
 - d. Audit Report is complete and the Council will consider its acceptance.
 - e. A new RMP update that addresses the impacts of climate change on the region is in development. We received a good proposal from Rutgers that meets our needs. However, the project cost dictates that we may go out for Request for Proposal (RFP) to see if their proposal was reasonable and if we can save money with another provider.
 - f. Open Space and Recreation Plan development continues.
 - g. Affordable Housing Plans are trickling in.
 - h. Branding and Marketing Place – mentioned above.
 - i. New conforming municipalities - mentioned above.
 - j. Impervious coverage standards for the region are being evaluated.
 - k. The Council will continue to advocate for new positions and increase grant funding for our municipalities.
14. Personnel – we have identified a replacement GIS specialist. Our receptionist, Linda Acker left us last week and we hope to move forward with that position soon. Lastly, Mr. Spinelli welcomed Kyli Engel, our new Communications Specialist.

At this time, Chair Richko asked if any Council members had comments or questions on the Executive Director's report.

Member Van Abs had a question regarding Council membership and how many of the Council members currently on the board have gone past the expiration date of their membership and need to be renominated.

Mr. Spinelli responded that the entire Council except three members are on expired terms.

APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2025

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Minutes of January 16, 2025.

Vice Chair Alstede made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Minutes of January 16, 2025. Member Visioli seconded it.

A roll call vote was taken. The Highlands Council Minutes of January 16, 2025 were APPROVED 8-0.

APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2025

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Executive Session Minutes of January 16, 2025.

Member Van Abs made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Executive Session Minutes of January 16, 2025. Member Dougherty seconded it.

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A roll call vote was taken. The Highlands Council Executive Session Minutes of January 16, 2025 were APPROVED 8-0.

AUDIT COMMITTEE

Resolution – Acceptance of Audit Report

Committee Chair Dougherty gave a report on the audit report. Committee Chair Dougherty reported that it is a clean audit but the Council has little funding.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution

Member Bush moved the resolution. Member Dougherty 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 8-0.

BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Visioli reported that Council will consider four (4) resolutions.

At this time, Highlands Council staff (James Humphries, Director of Planning, Science & GIS) gave a presentation. The presentation may be found on Council's website: [HC ppt apr17.pdf](#).

Member James was present via teleconference.

Resolution – Approval of FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget for Plan Conformance Funding Grants (Town of Clinton, Township of Jefferson, Borough of Mendham, Borough of Milford, Township of Tewksbury, Township of Washington (Warren), Clinton Township and Denville Township)

Council Comment

Member Van Abs commented on Clinton Township's Water Use & Conservation Management Plan (WUCMP). Member Van Abs recollected that the Town of Clinton was also engaged in the WUCMP as a requirement of their water allocation permit. Mr. Humphries responded that back in 2013 Town of Clinton never finalized their plan but updated their net water availability numbers and this is expanding that to implement the method to reduce the deficits needed for affordable housing developments.

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Vice Chair Alstede asked for specifics regarding Passaic County's farmland preservation plan grant request. Ms. Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager responded that the Passaic County request is to update their Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan as well as their Farmland Preservation Plan so both plans align (two (2) separate work products). Ms. Haddock-Weiler emphasized that Council staff will be working with the County of Passaic's Planning department.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Visioli moved the resolution. Vice Chair Alstede seconded it.

Public Comment.

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 9-0.

Resolution – Approval of FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget for Plan Conformance Funding Grant for Passaic County

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution

Member James was recused from voting on this resolution.

Member Visioli moved the resolution. Member Van Abs 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 8-0.

Resolution – Approval of FY2025 Regional Master Plan Implementation Fund For Tourism Expansion Grant for Hunterdon County

At this time, Ms. Haddock Weiler gave a presentation. The presentation may be found on Council's website: [HC_ppt_apr17.pdf](#).

At this time, **Brad Myhre, Hunterdon County Administrator**, gave an overview of their Tourism Expansion Grant application and the benefits of Council's support.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Bush was recused from voting on this resolution.

Member Visioli moved the resolution. Member Kibler seconded it.

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Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment.

Hank Klumpp, Tewksbury Township – Mr. Klumpp asked what tourism has to do with water.

Mr. Spinelli responded that the Council needs to provide economic viability for the region.

Chair Richko advised Mr. Klumpp to speak to Highlands staff after the meeting to continue the discussion.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 8-0.

Resolution – Approval of FY2025 Regional Master Plan Implementation Fund For Tourism Expansion Grants

At this time, Ms. Haddock Weiler continued the presentation. The presentation may be found on Council's website: [HC ppt apr17.pdf](#).

In between Ms. Haddock-Weiler's presentation for each grant request, the following representatives gave an overview of their Tourism Expansion Grant applications and the benefits of Council's support:

Morris County Economic Development Alliance:

- Samantha Rutledge, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Morris County Tourism Bureau
- Sarah Neibart, Executive Director of Morris County's 250th Celebration
- Meghan Hunscher, President and CEO of the Morris County Chamber of Commerce

Morris County Historical Society:

- Amy Curry, Executive Director, Morris County Historical Society

Borough of Ringwood:

- Kristen Holton, Director of Economic Development

The Growing Stage, Netcong Borough:

- Stephen Fredericks, Executive Director

Washington Borough Business Improvement District:

- Melanie Thiel, Executive Director

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution

Member Dougherty moved the resolution. Member Visioli seconded it.

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

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Public Comment.

Julia Somers, New Jersey Highlands Coalition – Ms. Somers commented that this is an incredible and important display of tourism opportunities in the Highlands region and salutes the Council for doing this.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 9-0.

PLAN CONFORMANCE COMMITTEE

On behalf of Committee Member Dressler, Chair Richko gave a brief report.

Resolution – Approval of Petition for Plan Conformance For Union Township, Hunterdon County

At this time, Corey Piasecki, Principal Planner, gave a presentation. The presentation may be found on Council's website: [HC ppt apr17.pdf](#).

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Van Abs moved the resolution. Member Bush seconded it.

Council Comment

Member Van Abs commented that he is pleased that Union Township has come to this point and the plan conformance process is right for them.

Public Comment.

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 9-0.

Member Visioli left the meeting at 5:23pm.

Resolution – Approval of Petition for Plan Conformance for Borough of Netcong's Highlands Center Designation

At this time, Ms. Haddock-Weiler gave a presentation. The presentation may be found on Council's website: [HC ppt apr17.pdf](#).

Ralph Blakeslee, Borough Administrator – Mr. Blakeslee thanked the Council staff for all their work. Mr. Blakeslee added after Mr. Spinelli attended one of Netcong's Council meetings, it moved the needle forward. He thanked the Council for considering the Borough's petition.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution

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Member Alstede moved the resolution. Member Dougherty seconded it.

Council Comment

Vice Chair Alstede commented that it is refreshing to have a municipality come on board that is seeking appropriate growth. Vice Chair Alstede also asked if Stanhope Borough is conforming. Mr. Humphries clarified that they are not, but he hopes the borough will see the benefits of conforming due to Netcong's petition.

Public Comment.

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 8-0.

OTHER BUSINESS

Resolution – Approval of Submission of 2024 Annual Report

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Dougherty moved the resolution. Member Bush seconded it.

Chair Richko encouraged all to read the 2024 Annual Report.

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment.

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 8-0.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

There was no old/new business.

Chair Richko opened the meeting for public comment and noted the 3-minute limit.

Public Comments

Lindsey Mason, Washington Township, Morris County – Ms. Mason thanked the Council for protecting our state and the resources in the Highlands region. Ms. Mason spoke about a parcel of land in her town for potential rezoning for a high-density development.

Chair Richko advised Ms. Mason to talk to Mr. Spinelli regarding her issue.

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Glen Van Olden, New Jersey Farm Bureau – Mr. Van Olden commented on Passaic County’s grant approval for a Farmland Preservation Plan. It is the NJ Farm Bureau’s hope that Passaic County preserves some of their farmlands but realizes there is a need to update their plan.

Vice Chair Alstede commented that he agrees with Mr. Olden’s comment and looks forward to seeing Passaic County’s plan.

Member Van Abs made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Bush seconded it. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:40pm.

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: ***5/1/2025***

Name: ***Annette Tagliareni***
Annette Tagliareni, Executive Assistant

Vote on the Approval of Minutes	Motion		Second		Yes		No		Abstain		Absent
Councilmember Alstede											
Councilmember Bush											
Councilmember Dougherty											
Councilmember Dressler											
Councilmember Francis											
Councilmember James											
Councilmember Kibler											
Councilmember Van Abs											
Councilmember Visioli											
Chairman Richko											