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MEMORANDUM

TO: RMP Amendment Committee

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

DATE: June 4, 2026

SUBJECT: RMP Amendment Committee Meeting Minutes of June 2, 2026

The Regional Master Plan (RMP) Amendment Committee met on Tuesday, June 2, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

RMP Amendment Committee Members Present: Council Chair Richko; Committee Chair Alstede; Members Kibler, Oswald, Smith, and Van Abs.

Highlands Council Staff Present: Gabrielle Gallagher, Kelley Curran, Jocelyn van den Akker, Neda Hartman, Corey Piasecki, Carole Ann Diction, and GIS Intern Meghan Smith.

Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU): Azeem Chaudry, Associate Counsel.

Committee Chair Alstede opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Piasecki began the meeting with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR) chapters, fundamental RMP issues, and recommendations. He then opened the discussion to Committee members.

Discussion of MPRR Chapters

- Future Land Use
- Natural Resources
- Landowners Equity

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- Implementation

Future Land Use

Mr. Piasecki reviewed the fundamental RMP issues regarding Future Land Use, as well as the below recommendations contained in the MPRR chapter.

- Review potential to produce LULC data for Region
- Ensure effectiveness/utility of Smart Growth Strategies
- Amend Redevelopment Procedures to limit development of greenfields, forests, and Agriculture
- Develop formalized mitigation standards
- Develop Highlands specific LID standards
- Implementation of Highlands Centers
- Effective date of centers
- Timeline for implementation
- Rescind Centers not substantially implemented
- Revised guidance on cluster requirements
- Develop guidance to address a diverse housing stock including ADUs

Following the presentation, committee members discussed several issues and recommendations.

Committee Chair Alstede asked what changes might be considered when reassessing redevelopment procedures for greenfields, forests, and agricultural landscapes.

Mr. Humphries responded that staff would review the redevelopment procedures generally and determine what updates may be appropriate. He noted that any specific standards would be developed as part of the RMP Amendment process.

Committee Member Kibler stated that, because the Council seeks to limit development of greenfields, forests, and agricultural lands, the Committee should discuss where agriculture fits within the development framework. He also asked how “development” is defined for redevelopment purposes and how agriculture should be addressed to ensure continued protection of agricultural lands.

Mr. Humphries explained how agriculture is defined under the RMP and how it would be considered during the redevelopment procedure update process.

Committee Member Kibler emphasized the importance of protecting agricultural lands and maintaining consistency.

Mr. Humphries added that guidance regarding forests would also need to be developed.

Mr. Humphries emphasized that redevelopment considerations depend on the location of the property and that properties must be evaluated objectively. He noted that sustainability and long-term viability should be considered for both agricultural lands and woodlands.

Mr. Piasecki agreed and stated that it is difficult to incorporate those considerations into a regulatory framework without creating loopholes or unintentionally including areas that should not qualify.

Committee Member Kibler stated that redevelopment standards should be objective and not arbitrary, noting that each property presents unique circumstances.

Mr. Piasecki agreed and stated that broader discussions with the Committee and the Council would occur before any amendment is proposed.

Committee Member Van Abs stated that the Committee should consider how land use zones are defined, noting that isolated areas within a zone may present challenges. He also suggested conducting a GIS analysis to identify areas within the Highlands Region where redevelopment designations could be problematic.

Mr. Humphries agreed that such an analysis could be conducted during the RMP Amendment process to support the proposed amendment.

Natural Resources

Mr. Piasecki reviewed the below recommendations contained in the Natural Resources chapter of the MPRR.

- Develop an outreach and education program focused on Natural Resources
- Improve the practical application of the FEV
- Stream corridor and/or subwatershed-based Stream Corridor Protection/restoration plans.
- Reevaluate critical habitat GPOs
- Reevaluate critical habitat ranking criteria
- Funding opportunities for lake water quality
- Highlands Region Lake/watershed management plans
- Monitoring and maintenance of small/private lakes
- Model steep slope and ridgeline ordinances

Following the presentation, committee members discussed several issues and recommendations.

Committee Member Van Abs suggested that flood damage reduction efforts should be linked to riparian restoration initiatives. He asked whether programs similar to the Blue Acres Program could be appropriate in certain areas of the Highlands Region.

Mr. Piasecki responded that the concept could be incorporated into the Natural Resources chapter under stream and riparian area restoration.

Committee Member Kibler commented on several Natural Resources recommendations, including emerging forests, stream restoration, and the importance of applying scientifically based standards when addressing steep slope ordinances.

Committee Member Van Abs agreed with the need for scientifically based standards.

Mr. Humphries added that emerging forests may also fit within the climate change section of the MPRR.

Landowners Equity

Mr. Piasecki reviewed the below recommendations contained in the Landowners Equity chapter of the MPRR.

- Incentivize creation of TDR receiving areas
- Amendments to Highlands Act to increase TDR viability
- Funding for direct HDC purchases
- Establishment of a Water User Fee
- Expand Highlands Open Space Preservation Program
- Establish a dedicated source of preservation funding
- Priority rankings into the RMP

Following the presentation, committee members discussed several issues and recommendations.

Committee Chair Alstede discussed the Highlands Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program and noted the lack of incentives and authority for the creation of receiving zones, which has limited the effectiveness of the Highlands Development Credit Bank. He stated that mechanisms are needed to create a viable market for Highlands Development Credits.

Committee Member Kibler agreed and stated that legislative changes to the TDR Program and open space funding should be pursued.

Committee Member Van Abs stated that statewide redevelopment law changes had reduced the Council's ability to work with municipalities outside the Highlands Region and that the issue could not be addressed solely through amendments to the Highlands Act.

Mr. Piasecki agreed and suggested that recommendations should support broader legislative action focused on achieving desired outcomes rather than prescribing a specific legislative mechanism.

Committee Member Van Abs agreed that the TDR Program should be strengthened through amendments to state legislation.

Implementation

Mr. Piasecki reviewed the below recommendations contained in the Implementation chapter of the MPRR.

- Establish policies and procedures for grant recipients
- Request additional Highlands Council staff resources
- Coordination with NJDEP
- Local notification of development applications
- Address municipal failure to Conform
- Limit other state funding for non-conforming municipalities
- Continuous updates to GIS data
- Update LUCZ
- Regular updates of LiDAR and aerial imagery

- Evaluate statewide Critical Habitat methodology
- Reevaluate Integrity Score, Resource Area, and Transit Score methodology
- Update public water and wastewater EAS
- Update Highlands Boundary layer
- Develop a comprehensive outreach and education program
- Continued Highlands science symposiums
- Implement recommendations of SPC consistent with endorsement of the RMP

Following the presentation, committee members discussed several issues and recommendations.

Committee Member Kibler stated that outreach efforts should be formally documented to ensure continued progress. He also suggested discussing the Council's potential use of artificial intelligence (AI), including applications related to consistency determinations and stream-monitoring data, noting that AI is likely to become increasingly useful.

Mr. Piasecki stated that staff currently uses AI informally for various purposes.

Committee Member Van Abs suggested that, instead of hiring additional staff under the limited budget, the Council could utilize consultants, partner agencies, or other shared resources as a short-term solution through alternative funding sources.

Mr. Piasecki responded that the Council already utilizes the RMP implementation budget for such purposes, citing the GIS contract as an example.

Mr. Humphries added that the Council is currently utilizing a Rutgers engineer in that capacity and noted that the tourism project may benefit from a similar approach.

Ms. van den Akker and Ms. Dicton agreed that utilizing consultants and shared resources has been beneficial.

Mr. Humphries discussed the process for amending redevelopment procedures and explained that an MPRR recommendation is required before an RMP Amendment can be initiated.

Mr. Piasecki noted that several affordable housing plans currently utilize redevelopment procedures to accommodate affordable housing obligations. He stated that many of these plans remain under review and subject to court proceedings, and cautioned against disrupting the process.

Committee Member Van Abs stated that he believed the Council should continue moving forward and that there may be ways to reduce potential conflicts associated with the issue.

Council Chair Richko asked staff to explain the advantages and disadvantages of amending the redevelopment procedures immediately versus waiting until the MPRR process concludes later in the year.

Mr. Humphries explained the differences between the two approaches.

Council Chair Richko added that any public meeting of the RMP Amendment Committee should take place directly before a Council meeting.

Mr. Piasecki stated that the Committee had now completed its review of all ten MPRR chapters. He then outlined the next steps for finalizing the MPRR, including public comment, revisions, public release, and the anticipated schedule.

Mr. Piasecki stated that staff would contact Committee members regarding the next meeting date.

The RMP Amendment Committee adjourned at 10:59 a.m.