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Highlands Council Helps Oakland Borough Address Wastewater Management Planning

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) approved a Petition for Plan Conformance for the entire municipality of Oakland Borough in Bergen County. The municipality originally petitioned to conform only for its Preservation Area lands, but later amended its Petition to include the entire municipality to help address wastewater management challenges facing the borough.

Oakland Borough is one of only two municipalities in Bergen County within the Highlands Region (the other is Mahwah). Oakland has 2,605 acres in the Preservation Area and 3,006 acres in the Planning Area of the Highlands Region. Roughly half of the municipality's Preservation Area lands are preserved through various programs and its Planning Area is largely developed. The entire municipality is currently served by septic systems.

“Highlands Council staff members have been working with Oakland for some time regarding wastewater management planning,” explains Highlands Council Acting Executive Director Margaret Nordstrom. “We have a shared goal of addressing Oakland’s wastewater and net water availability issues, for the benefit of both the municipality and the Highlands region overall, and I am pleased that Plan Conformance can be a part of the solution.”

Through conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan, Oakland becomes eligible for grant funding to support a range of planning activities that further the goals of the Highland Act as they relate specifically to the Borough. For Oakland, this includes Wastewater Management Planning, Highlands Center Planning, Redevelopment Planning, and Water Use and Conservation Management Planning among others.

“In addition to addressing water use concerns, Oakland is looking to explore some redevelopment opportunities in existing industrial areas and the possibility of establishing a Highlands Center as an economic focal point of the community,” notes Highlands Council Chairman Jim Rilee. “I am pleased that the Council is able to assist the municipality in all of these important endeavors.”

In other Council business, two contracts were approved. One award, in support of the upcoming Regional Master Plan (RMP) Monitoring Program, is to conduct a fiscal impact assessment that will seek to clarify the economic effects of the RMP on region as compared to the State and other comparable regions. The other is a modification to an existing contract with a firm that provides technical assistance to both Council staff and municipalities in the preparation of Water Use and Conservation Management Plans (WUCMPs), which are required for conforming municipalities in the Highlands Region. WUCMPs set priorities for available water use where net water availability is positive and establish methods to reduce and, where feasible, eliminate deficits where they exist.

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: <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/about/calend/> (click on May 15 meeting).

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