



State of New Jersey

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Highlands Council Approves Major Regional Economic Sustainability Study *Plan will address COVID-related impacts*

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting, the New Jersey Highlands Council approved a contract to develop an Economic Sustainability Plan for the New Jersey Highlands Region. The project is expected to be completed within 18 months and will result in a comprehensive plan that includes an economic analysis and profile of the Highlands Region along with recommendations for strategies and policies to guide economic growth in the region. Given the current COVID-19 crisis, the project will focus sharply on considerations related to the pandemic and its impacts on Highlands economies. The \$150,000 contract was awarded to the team of Camoin Associates 310 and Maser Consulting.

“Communities throughout the Highlands, and the entire state, are reeling from the economic impacts of COVID-19. We hope that the development of this plan will help them identify sustainable ways to recover and grow,” said Lisa J. Plevin, Highlands Council Executive Director.

The origins of the Highlands Regional Economic Sustainability Plan can be found in the 2018 *Monitoring Program Recommendation Report (MPRR)*, which summarized the findings of the first-ever review of the Regional Master Plan (RMP). The MPRR includes a section focused on the regional

economy and a specific recommendation to create an economic development plan for the Highlands Region. Subsequently, the Highlands Council established an Economic Sustainability Steering Committee with representation from all seven Highlands counties. The committee collaborated on the Request for Proposals (RFP) that was issued, and participated in the interview and recommendation process to select the winning firm.

“The Highlands Act and RMP are very clear about ensuring the economic health of the Region,” noted Plevin. “In response to the economic devastation being caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is now more critical than ever that we do all we can to support sustainable economic development, redevelopment, eco- and agri-tourism, with a comprehensive regional approach in mind.”

The study will include 1) Development of a Stakeholder Outreach Plan; 2) Development of an Economic Profile for the Highlands Region; 3) Analysis of Economic Growth Potential in the Highlands Region; 4) Development of Economic Growth Strategies; 5) Development of an Implementation Action Plan; and finally 6) the Economic Sustainability Plan for the Highlands Region itself, which will assemble all components into a single plan.

“A thriving Highlands Region must offer desirable places to live and work, while at the same time retaining the natural qualities that make the Region special,” says Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “Our goal with this study is to provide a roadmap to sustainable economic growth that continues to protect our natural assets.”

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: www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/ (click on June 18, 2020 meeting).

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands.

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