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Clinton Township Maximizes Transit Assets with Highlands Center Designation

Highlands Council also approves grants for Allamuchy Township and Somerset County

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting, the Highlands Council voted to approve a request from Clinton Township to designate a portion of the Township as a Highlands Center. A Highlands Center is an area within a municipality that the town and the Highlands Council have jointly determined is appropriate for development. The Clinton Township Center includes parts of the historic Annandale Village, the intersection of State Route 31 and Interstate 78, and a commercial corridor further north along State Route 31.

“Clinton Township is a diverse municipality with abundant farmland, the scenic Round Valley Reservoir, and the historic Annandale Village,” explains Lisa J. Plevin, Highlands Council Executive Director. “They also have great transit access with three major highways running through the Township, a New Jersey Transit train station, and a sizable bus facility. During our work with the Township over the past seven years, the idea emerged to designate a Highlands Center in portions of the Township to help direct growth to areas that would maximize these transit assets while continuing to protect the rural and historic nature of the community.”

The proposed Highlands Center encompasses portions of the northwest corner of the Township. Although the Center is split into two distinct areas, separated by a portion of Route 31 located in the Town of Clinton, planning will be for the center as a whole, given the two areas proximities to each other and the number of shared attributes.

The larger of the two areas includes portions of the Township surrounding the intersection of I-78, Route 22, and Route 31, which has historically served as a regional hub. This area also includes the Annandale Train Station and Annandale Village Historic District, Clinton Township Park-and-Ride

bus facility and commercial and residential uses. The smaller portion further north along Route 31 is primarily commercial.

The majority of residential uses in the Center are within walking distance (within ½-mile) of the train station. In addition, the residential uses around the train station are among the most densely developed in the Township and include five of the municipality's affordable housing sites, both existing and proposed. All of the parcels included in the center lie in an existing sewer service area, however funding up to \$80,000 is included in the approval to complete a Water Use and Conservation Management plan, which is a condition of the approval.

To ensure protection of sensitive environmental areas within the Center, undeveloped areas that contain Highlands resources will be protected within the parameters of a "Highlands Environmental Resource Zone" (HERZ). The delineation of the HERZ recognizes that a designated Center, while generally suitable for future development and redevelopment, may contain areas of sensitive resources that may require additional protections.

"The wonderful thing about a Highlands Center designation is that it allows a town to concentrate development and redevelopment in areas that make the most sense, while simultaneously ensuring protection of resources in those same areas," says Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. "It's always very rewarding when the Highlands Council can approve requests from municipalities to advance local goals that align so well with the planning and resources protection goals of the Highlands Act and Regional Master Plan."

Also, at the June meeting the Council approved grant funding not to exceed \$17,000 for the Township of Allamuchy in Warren County to complete an update to its Open Space and Recreation Plan, and grant funding not to exceed \$59,150 for the Somerset County Park Foundation to conduct assessments of the watersheds of the lakes in Lord Stirling Park in Bernards Township and the Leonard J. Buck Garden in Far Hills Borough.

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/index.html (click on June 16 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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