



State of New Jersey

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Highlands Council Approves \$50,000 to Help Municipalities Address Warehousing Concerns *Additional funding available to support subsequent changes to local land use regulations*

CHESTER, N.J. — At its January meeting, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council) approved a [resolution](#) authorizing up to \$50,000 for grants to help municipalities examine local zoning to see where they may be vulnerable to inappropriate development, specifically warehouse siting.

“The increasing pressure for warehouse development is hitting the Highlands region just like it’s hitting the rest of the state, with one important difference – the Highlands is the source of drinking water for most of the state,” explained Ben Spinelli, Highlands Council Executive Director. “We must protect the environmental resources that are vital to the well-being of the entirety of New Jersey. There are places in the New Jersey Highlands where warehousing may be an acceptable use, but there are others where it is just the wrong type of development.”

In many towns, local zoning permits warehousing as-of-right, meaning a warehouse developer does not need to go through a lengthy variance process with the Zoning Board of Adjustment, but can simply gain local site plan approval at the Planning Board. The Highlands Council’s [“Local Zoning Local Control”](#) grant program provides up to \$5,000 per municipality to review a community’s current zoning to ensure that all potential as-of-right developments permitted by a zoning ordinance meet the vision for the municipality and its citizens. An assessment of current zoning will help identify any

deficiencies or issues that could lead to inappropriate, unintended, or unwanted development, as well as areas that are better-suited for development and redevelopment within a community.

“It’s important for municipalities to understand what their local zoning will allow,” said Spinelli. “Often, ordinances and codes have been in place for years – long before the current administration’s tenure. If a town is faced with an application for a development they feel is not appropriate, they may be shocked to learn they legally can’t stop it.”

The resolution approved in January provides funding for up to 10 of these awards. Hope Township in Warren County is the first Highlands municipality to have an approved Scope of Work in the program.

“Hope is a rural community with a rich history and many wonderful natural, cultural and agricultural assets,” said a representative from the Hope Township Council. “We have done a great deal of planning to ensure all these resources are protected and maximized for the benefit of the town and our residents. We also have a portion of Route 80 and County Route 519 running through the Township, so it was important for us to be sure our zoning reflected our long-term vision for Hope.”

Upon completion of a local zoning review and analysis project, a municipality can seek additional funding from the Highlands Council to support any needed changes in municipal land use regulations. All Highlands Council planning grants are non-competitive and require no matching funds. Eligible expenses include planning, design, and engineering costs. Grants are reimbursement based and require an approved Scope of Work before beginning. Any Highlands region municipal government may apply.

The Highlands Council also intends to develop Highlands-specific siting guidance to augment the [guidance released by the State Planning Commission in September 2022](#).

“As stewards of a region that is the source of drinking water for most of New Jersey, it’s incumbent upon the Highlands Council to ensure we’re doing all we can to protect the unique and important resources of the region,” said Highlands Council Chairman Carl Richko. “We encourage our municipal partners to reach out and speak with us about how we may be able to assist them.”

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. Actions taken by the Council will take effect following the Governor’s review and consideration of meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of meeting minutes.

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