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Chester Township Is First In Morris

Highlands Council approves Chester Township's petition for Plan Conformance

CHESTER, N.J. – At its regular meeting today the New Jersey Highlands Council approved Chester Township's Petition for Plan Conformance, making it the first municipality in Morris County – and the second in the seven-county Highlands region – to qualify for the benefits and protections of the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

“Conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan recognizes the efforts of several administrations, many citizen volunteers and countless hours of work over the past 20 years. The residents of Chester Township benefit not only from great open space, preserved farm land and parks, but from the economics of sound planning, environmental protection and the rejection of sprawl. We are driven on the road to conformance by our residents,” said Chester Township Mayor Bill Cogger, who as a member of the Highlands Council today recused himself on all matters pertaining to his municipality's petition. “Today's approval is a way to preserve our way of life and partner with the Highlands Council to continue to protect our resources.”

“This is a significant day not only for Chester Township, but also for Morris County,” said Highlands Council Acting Chairman Jack Schrier, who also is a Morris County freeholder. “It demonstrates that in Morris County, the county with more towns in the New Jersey Highlands than any other, we are able to have a vibrant residential community, a healthy agricultural industry as well as the protection of our critical natural resources. These are desirable goals, and with proper planning, they can go hand-in-hand. The Highlands Council works to ensure protection of resources and economic vitality for the region.”

Chester Township has lands in both the Preservation Area (24.7 square miles), where conformance to the Regional Master Plan is mandatory, and the Planning Area (4.5 square miles), where conformance is voluntary; the township petitioned to conform for both areas. Nearly 40 percent of the Township – 11.3 square miles – is preserved open space, including 809 acres of preserved farmland. Approximately 61 percent of the township is forested, and 11 percent is used for farming.

Chester Township also is home to several major state, county and municipal parks, including Hacklebarney State Park, the Black River Wildlife Management Area and Black River Greenway and Black River Park, Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, Tiger Brook Park and Chubb Park.

On December 7, 2009, Chester Township submitted a petition for Plan Conformance for both its Preservation Area and Planning Area. The petition was deemed administratively complete by the Highlands Council on February 4, 2010, and posted to the Highlands Council website five days later. On June 17, the Highlands Council sent a draft consistency report to the township for its review; the final draft of the report was posted to the Highlands Council website on September 29, and a 14-day public comment period began the following day. The final report was posted on October 18, and the Highlands Council voted today to approve the Petition.

“The Highlands Council is continuing to build on relationships forged with municipalities in order to implement the Highlands Regional Master Plan,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “The people of New Jersey will look back in years to come and recognize that these partnerships wisely protected essential water resources for the future of our state.”

During the Council’s public hearing, strong support for Chester Township’s Petition for Plan Conformance was expressed by the Highlands Coalition and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

More information about Chester Township’s Petition for Plan Conformance can be found on the Highlands Council website:

http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/chester_twp.html

Today’s actions by the Highlands Council do not take effect until 10 business days after a copy of the minutes of the meeting have been delivered to the Governor to allow for his review and consideration of the minutes.