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Highlands Council Approves Conformance of Another Town, County, to Regional Master Plan

Municipalities continue to submit petitions for Conformance of Planning and Preservation area lands

CHESTER, N.J. – At its meeting in Chester Township today the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council continued to advance implementation of its Regional Master Plan. Lopatcong Township in Warren County won approval for their Petition for its lands in the Preservation Area, where conformance is mandatory, as well as for its lands in the Planning Area where conformance is voluntary. The Council also approved Somerset County's Petition for its Preservation Area lands and for an implementation plan for continuing collaboration in the entire portion of the county in the Highlands Region.

Highlands Council Acting Chairman Jack Schrier said "We are seeing increased interest in conformance in the Planning Area where municipalities want to preserve their natural and agricultural resources while creating development and redevelopment opportunities in appropriate areas. I believe this demonstrates that, working with towns, the Council is able to meet the mandates of the Highlands Act to encourage growth in the Planning Area, consistent with infrastructure capacity in, or adjacent to, already developed areas".

Lopatcong, the municipality approved today, is a 4,721 acre Warren County township which is conforming for 1,049 acres in the Preservation Area and 3,672 acres in the Planning Area. The Council approved grant funding to implement conformance and encourage both natural resource protection and appropriate development and redevelopment. These grants included: funding for a Sustainable Economic Development Plan to enhance and provide for continuing economic viability and optimization of the Township's limited growth capacity; a Highlands Redevelopment Area Plan to examine potential for redevelopment areas; a Habitat Conservation and Management Plan; and a Stream Corridor Protection Restoration Plan.

The Council also approved Somerset County's Petition for the Preservation Area and approved grant funding for continued collaboration with the Highlands Council for all 46,000 acres of the county in the Highlands Region. Future projects include: an inventory and mapping of conservation easements; development of a Sustainable Economic Plan Element; and a collaborative effort to examine the potential for Transfer of Development Receiving Areas in the County outside of the Highlands Region.

To date, the Highlands Council has approved 17 Petitions for Plan Conformance from municipalities and two Petitions from Highlands counties. In the Planning Area, interest in conforming to the Regional Master Plan continues to grow as Petitions are being submitted to the Council from municipalities wishing to work with the Council to plan collaboratively. Many Planning Area towns are focusing on planned centers for sustainable growth that protects the environs and provides a focus for economic development. The Highlands Council will also work with conforming municipalities to prepare wastewater management plans to be included as chapters in the county plans. "This assistance from the Council is seen as a great benefit in this process," according to Acting Chairman Schrier.

Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said, "We are pleased to see this growing conformance to the Regional Master Plan. It is indicative of a positive shift in interest now that the Council has proven to be able to assist municipalities in protecting resources and promoting capacity-based planning such that towns have appropriate growth opportunities. We are committed to continue partnering with municipalities and counties to deliver success in the Highlands Region consistent with the Highlands Act"

More information about the municipal and county petitions approved today can be found on the Highlands Council website:

Lopatcong Township (Warren County):

<http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/lopatcong.html>

Somerset County:

http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/somerset_county.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 time for his review and consideration.