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Highlands Council Approves Two Redevelopment Projects

Business, municipal projects strike balance between redevelopment, protection

CHESTER, N.J. – The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council gave the green light to two redevelopment projects in the Highlands Preservation Area at today’s meeting.

“We believe these projects are precisely what the legislature had in mind when they specified the type of redevelopment that should be allowed in the Preservation Area,” Acting Chairman Jack Schrier said.

The first project approved was in Mansfield Township, where Borealis Compounds – a plastic manufacturing facility – is intending to make a series of upgrades to improve its materials storage and handling capability. In order to maintain and improve their operations and economic viability, Borealis is proposing to build a container staging area facility on a portion of a lot off Thomas Road. In addition, Borealis plans a new building, additional storage silos, and the construction of additional railroad tracks. The facility is serviced by county roads and an adjacent freight line. The Highlands Act allows for relief from the Act’s protective standards where redevelopment is proposed to expand existing disturbed areas. In its consistency determination report, the Council found the proposed project will require waivers from the 300-foot Highlands Open Waters buffer and the requirements to protect critical habitat.

The Highlands Council found that the proposed project “enhances and promotes economic development in the Region,” and that without the ability to expand, Borealis Compounds would be forced to relocate outside the Highlands Region. Not only would this mean a loss of jobs, but it also would create a vacant industrial site.

“In the current economic climate, saving these jobs is critically important, but it is just as important to protect our drinking water and other natural resources. This mitigation plan allows us to do both,” Acting Chairman Schrier said.

The Council’s approval is conditioned upon the development of a mitigation plan to ensure no net loss of water quality, buffer quality, or habitat value. The next step is for the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to review a Highlands permit application, consider the requested waiver relief authorizing the redevelopment, and protect the remainder of the property through a deed restriction.

In fact, Borealis has a long-standing commitment to the protection of water – its *Water for the World* project is aimed at creating sustainable water and sanitation projects to address the global problem of water scarcity.

The other project approved by the Highlands Council today is a redevelopment of the municipal complex and construction of a public library in West Milford. The project, on Ridge Road and Union Valley Road, would include a new 25,500-square foot three-story public library, a new septic disposal system, and parking. The new library would replace an outdated existing library, which township officials said has little room for computers, reading desks, or even seating.

“This is smart planning as dictated in the Highlands Act – making better use of an already disturbed site and using shared parking,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said. “West Milford needs this library and we were delighted to work with them to assist them in providing this much needed facility while protecting their environment.”

More information about each project can be found on the Highlands Council’s project review page, <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/projectreview/>.