



New Jersey Pinelands Commission PRESS RELEASE

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Pinelands Commission advances proposal to require clustering of residential development in Pinelands-designated Forest and Rural Development Areas

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its regular meeting today, the Pinelands Commission advanced a proposal aimed at better protecting Pinelands resources by mandating the clustering of residential development in Pinelands-designated Forest Areas and Rural Development Areas.

The proposal would amend the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), the rules that govern land-use, development and natural resource protection in the million-acre Pinelands Area, by requiring municipalities to incorporate the clustering provisions into their zoning ordinances.

“These changes will go a long way toward reducing the potential negative impacts that residential development may have on areas that contain high water quality resources and wetlands, and provide habitat for many rare plants and animals,” said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Pinelands Commission. “By requiring the clustering of residential development in Forest and Rural Development Areas, we can help to preserve and maintain the essential character of the Pinelands environment while discouraging scattered and piecemeal development.”

Clustering is a style of development that allows reduced minimum lot sizes in exchange for the preservation of open space or other desirable features of a property. Clustering does not necessarily change the number of homes, but the individual lot sizes are smaller than that which would occur under a conventional lot layout. Development can be directed toward appropriate locations of a property, such as areas close to roads and other infrastructure, while natural resources such as critical habitat for rare plant and animal species can be protected.

The Commission proposes to require the clustering of residential development in the Pinelands-designated Forest Areas and Rural Development Areas on one-acre lots. The open space created as a result of clustering would be permanently protected through deed restriction. Generally, the protected land will be owned by a homeowners association, a nonprofit organization or the municipality.

The amendment also would establish bonus density provisions for clustered development in the Forest and Rural Development Areas in order to encourage the consolidation of small lots and the protection of larger areas of open space. Permitted residential densities average one unit per 28 acres in the Forest Area and one unit per 5 acres in the Rural Development Area. The proposed density bonuses depend on the size of the tract and the municipal zoning designation.

(MORE)

Pinelands Press Release

Page 2...

In those rare cases where agricultural lands exist within that portion of the property to be protected through clustering, an agricultural easement may provide for continued agricultural use and expansion of that use up to 50 percent if certain conditions are met.

The proposed amendments are a major outgrowth of the Pinelands Commission's comprehensive, five-year review of the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). The CMP has guided land-use and development in the state-designated Pinelands Area since it took effect on January 14, 1981.

Today's vote authorizes Pinelands Commission staff to begin the rule amendment process. A rule proposal is expected to be published in the New Jersey Register in September, which will be followed by a 60-day public comment period and a public hearing.

A copy of the proposed rule amendments will be available for review on the Commission's Web site: www.nj.gov/pinelands/cmp/amend.

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