



## New Jersey Pinelands Commission **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Commission Approves Zoning Changes in Jackson's Toms River Basin** *Amendments implement key recommendations of the Toms River Corridor Task Force*

SOUTHAMPTON, NJ - The Pinelands Commission today approved sweeping amendments to Jackson Township's land use and development ordinance aimed at bolstering protection of the town's natural resources. The changes, which include re-zoning of important ecological lands, are the result of a special sub-regional conservation planning project coordinated by the Pinelands Commission.

"Today's action by the Commission is the culmination of two years of cooperative work by Jackson Township officials, Commission staff and a team of representatives from non-profit, county, state and federal agencies," said Pinelands Commission Chairman James J. Florio. "The success of the Toms River Task Force, established by the Commission in April 2003, has set a high standard for future sub-regional conservation planning efforts, designed to address areas where potential conflicts exist between Pinelands development and resource-protection standards."

The changes approved by the Pinelands Commission implement some of the key recommendations of the February 2004 Regional Natural Resources Protection Plan for the Toms River Corridor. Among them, is a significant reduction of the Township's three Pinelands Villages - Cassville, Legler, and Vanhiseville - by some 1,100 acres to make them more proportionate to their existing size and character. The re-zoned areas will be re-designated as lower-density Pinelands Forest Area and Rural Development Area.

In addition to the Villages, approximately 760 acres of land will be re-zoned from Rural Development to Forest Area and about 350 acres along the Toms River will be re-zoned from Regional Growth to Rural Development.

"These zoning changes not only reflect existing land uses, but also the presence of wetlands systems and other environmental conditions," explained Pinelands Commissioner Candace Ashmun, who spearheaded the project as Chair of the Pinelands Commission Permanent Land Protection Committee. "The Toms River Corridor was identified as a priority by the Commission because of potential threats to high-quality ecosystems and habitat to rare plants and animals. We now have zoning in place that will better protect these important resources and provide increased predictability for landowners."

Overall, the amended ordinance will result in a net increase of 1,450 acres in the Pinelands Forest Management Area, a net decrease of 350 acres in the Regional Growth Area and a net decrease of 1,100 acres in the Pinelands Village areas. Viewed together, the zoning changes authorized today could result in a reduction of up to 1,500 future housing units in the impacted districts.

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Another significant change is the implementation of the Task Force recommendation to require mandatory clustering of residential development in a number of zoning districts. Clustering on one-acre lots will be required as part of subdivision plans. Development will be directed to the most appropriate locations so that important environmental attributes on a site are protected. Undeveloped portions of sites will be permanently protected through the imposition of conservation easements.

“Clustering is an important component of this conservation plan,” Ashmun said. “It promotes the creation of greenways and wildlife corridors, maximizes contiguity of protected lands, protects habitat for rare and endangered species, provides development opportunities in the appropriate locations and minimizes fragmentation of the natural landscape.”

Pinelands Commission Executive Director John Stokes said, “Jackson Township officials are to be commended for stepping up to the plate and making these vital improvements to their local zoning. Bold changes which protect the environment are never easy decisions to make and require a lot of detailed analysis, deliberation and consensus-building. The outcome here will be more sustainable natural resources and a more livable community.”

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