



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
100 North Road (Route 513)
Chester, New Jersey 07930-2322
(908) 879-6737
(908) 879-4205 (fax)
www.nj.gov/njhighlands



PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

CARL J. RICHKO
Chairperson

LISA J. PLEVIN
Executive Director

October 8, 2020

Donna Rendeiro, Executive Director
Thomas Wright, Chairman
State Planning Commission
NJ Business Action Center
Office of the Secretary of State
33 W. State Street, 4th Floor
PO Box 820
Trenton, NJ 08625-0820

Re: **Highlands Regional Master Plan – Petition for Plan Endorsement**

Dear Ms. Rendeiro & Mr. Wright:

On behalf of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council), I am pleased to submit herewith our Petition for Plan Endorsement of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP). All materials are provided electronically (most via weblinks as listed in the attachment), including the RMP, all RMP amendments, technical reports, and the first (periodically required) RMP monitoring report. This submission is a follow up to a series of meetings, discussions and review by the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA), which has assisted Highlands Council staff in every step of this process. We are grateful for OPA's guidance and direction in moving our petition forward.

The RMP is a comprehensive planning document for the 860,000-acre Highlands Region, a special resource area, as identified in the 2001 *New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan* (State Plan). The RMP was designed specifically to address both the requirements of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) and the goals and policies of the State Plan.

The OPA has twice provided comments to the Highlands Council concerning the consistency of the RMP with the State Plan. The first review occurred before the RMP was adopted in 2008 (OPA then being the Office of Smart Growth), allowing the Highlands Council to fully align the document with State planning maps, goals and policies before it ever became effective. The second occurred only recently and included examination of all amendments and monitoring efforts undertaken by the Highlands Council since the date of RMP adoption. We were pleased to learn following the latter review, that OPA staff found the RMP and all supporting materials consistent with the State Plan. OPA staff also recommended that the Highlands Council address certain areas in future updates of the RMP, which the Highlands Council is fully committed to doing and, in fact, has already begun work toward. These include updates to better address environmental justice particularly in light of recent passage of landmark legislation regarding the issue (S232/A2212) as well as Executive Order No. 23, and to incorporate climate change and resiliency planning pursuant to Executive Order No. 89.

It is important to note that development of the RMP and each subsequent amendment and report involved extensive state agency coordination and public participation. The Highlands Council shared drafts of all RMP

policies and technical analyses prior to moving forward with each component of the plan and incorporated the input and expertise of agency partners, municipal and county representatives, educators, professionals, land use practitioners, residents, and a wide variety of interest groups. The process has consistently remained transparent, participatory, and open to the public. It clearly addresses the Plan Endorsement requirement for community visioning.

As you know, the Highlands Council did previously submit the RMP for endorsement in accordance with Section 8.b of the Highlands Act, which required such submission within 60 days of its adoption. For reasons beyond the control of either the Highlands Council or the SPC, the process was never completed. We very much look forward to seeing it brought to conclusion. With the generous assistance of representatives from OPA, we are confident that we will move ahead together to accomplish all that the State Plan aspires to, and more.

We look forward to your review and thank you in advance for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly should you have questions or require any additional information to proceed.

Sincerely,



Lisa J. Plevin
Executive Director

c: Chairman Richko and Members, Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council

Attachments:

Weblinks to Petition Materials

Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP), Adopted 2008

RMP Technical Reports

RMP Addendum A – Acreage Update, Adopted 2011

RMP Addendum 2018-1 Highlands Plan Amendment Procedures

RMP Addendum 2019-1 Highlands Redevelopment Area Designation Procedures

RMP Addendum 2019-2 Plan Conformance Procedures

RMP Monitoring Program Recommendation Report, 2018

2008 Submission Items (PDFs)

Highlands RMP – Self Assessment Report (8.18.08)

Letter to OSG re Endorsement of Highlands RMP (8.18.08)