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**DRAFT – FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE NOVEMBER 8, 2007
MEETING OF THE HIGHLANDS COUNCIL**

RMP Program: Local Participation
Version: November 7, 2007

<p>Issue Overview</p>	<p>The local participation requirements in the Highlands Act call for the “maximum feasible local government and public input into the council’s operations, which shall include a framework for developing policies for the planning area in conjunction with those local government units in the planning area who choose to conform to the regional master plan.” (Section 11.a.(3)), including the establishment of opportunities for public input in the regional planning process, including coordination with county and local governments, stakeholders and the general public. Section 6 of the Highlands Act additional authorizes the Council:</p> <p><i>j. To appoint advisory boards, commissions, councils, or panels to assist in its activities, including but not limited to a municipal advisory council consisting of mayors, municipal council members, or other representatives of municipalities located in the Highlands Region; and</i></p> <p><i>k. To solicit and consider public input and comment on the council’s activities, the Regional Master Plan, and other issues and matters of importance in the Highlands Region by periodically holding public hearings or conferences and providing other opportunities for such input and comment by interested parties.</i></p> <p>Local participation is a critical aspect of any planning process and has been a priority for the Highlands Council in the development of the RMP. This type of public participation is frequently utilized in land-use planning in order to involve citizens in the decision-making process and to enhance outcomes and establish a better sense of stewardship. Moreover, citizen participation may add knowledge to the planning process regarding local conditions, needs, and concerns that might otherwise go unaddressed.</p> <p>To be successful, specific public participation strategies should be tailored to the needs of the individual planning effort and the relevant stakeholder groups. The Highlands Council has used a multi-faceted approach to involve stakeholders and interest groups in the development of the RMP. The Council will continue to encourage and enhance local participation in the implementation and refinement of the RMP, which in turn will enhance and maintain the natural, cultural and economic resources of the Highlands Region for years to come.</p>
<p>RMP Policies and Objectives</p>	<p>To promote the understanding and support for the various RMP policies and objectives at the local level, and in support of Plan Conformance , the Highlands</p>

<p>Addressed</p>	<p>Council shall take actions that include the following:</p> <p><u>Resource Protection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop or utilize existing educational programs on water conservation measures to reduce consumptive and depletive uses of water supplies; • Develop or utilize existing training and educational programs on methods for using water capacity thresholds in land use decision making; • Provide educational and technical training programs to promote understanding of the importance of and consistent standards for the protection, restoration and enhancement of Prime Ground Water Recharge Areas; • Provide educational and technical training program on Prime Ground Water Recharge Area protection measures through the use of municipal planning, zoning and other regulatory authority; • Provide training and educational programs on ground and surface water quality protection and restoration methods; • Develop a training and educational program on concepts, approaches and methods for wellhead protection; • Develop training and educational programs on septic system design and maintenance and the protection of water quality; • Review information with counties and municipalities regarding areas of ground water quality impairment known to exist, or that are suspected (e.g., lake communities with failing septic systems, public community water systems) and how best to protect or restore these resources; • Develop educational and technical training programs to promote consistent standards for the protection, restoration and acquisition of important waters and riparian areas of the Highlands Region; • Develop educational and technical training programs on resource protection standards, restoration and mitigation practices, and Low Impact Development Best Management Practices to minimize impacts from land development activities on Highland Open Waters and Riparian Areas; • Coordinate with municipal Environmental Commissioners and watershed organizations to encourage a comprehensive stream monitoring and riparian area assessment program within the Highlands Region; • Develop an educational program on methods to identify and protect steep slopes; • Develop an educational program on methods to develop a forest stewardship plan; • Establish an educational program on sustainable forest management practices; • Educate the public on the ecological, economic, cultural and recreational value of maintaining healthy forests in the Highlands; and • Develop educational program on methods to develop Habitat Conservation and Management Plans. <p><u>Land Preservation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the public on the economic, cultural and resource value of preserved open space in their communities; • Assist municipalities and counties in gathering open space information in order to update and track existing data; and • Develop educational and technical assistance on funding opportunities for land preservation, restoration and enhancement, and stewardship activities within the Highlands Region.
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	<p><u>Agricultural Sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop educational and technical training programs f to promote a viable and environmentally sustainable agricultural and horticultural industry in their communities and in the Highlands Region; • Educate the public on the economic, cultural and resource value of maintaining a viable and environmentally sustainable agricultural and horticultural industry in the Highlands; and • Promote, establish and use an Agriculture Advisory Committees as a resource to meet the goals of the RMP. <p><u>Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide educational and technical assistance to municipal and county officials regarding methods to identify and preserve the historic, cultural and scenic resources of their communities; and • Provide assistance to counties and municipalities interested in developing a heritage tourism component of their historic preservation and recreation planning efforts. <p><u>Future Land Use</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop educational and technical training programs for innovative/alternative development and redevelopment initiatives in support of the RMP's policies for development, infill development and redevelopment; • Support stakeholder understanding of balancing development and redevelopment with resource protection and restoration, urban parks and green spaces, housing, employment, transit opportunities and other smart growth principles; • Support economic improvement of the Highlands Region through development and redevelopment initiatives that balance housing, employment and quality of life; • Provide programs and materials to educate stakeholders regarding the vast array of affordable housing options; • Provide educational programs regarding residential green building features and rebates available for utilizing energy efficient construction elements for new development and home renovations; and • Provide educational opportunities for Highlands Region stakeholders to learn about innovative design concepts and elements related to natural resource protection, smart growth principles, green building practices and other measures to enhance quality of life in the Highlands. <p><u>Water Resources and Utilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop educational programs on water conservation, low impact development, recycling and re-use measures and methods to reduce demand of existing water supplies; • Develop training and educational programs for municipal utilities and public works departments to identify the adequacy or limitations of infrastructure for existing and future demands; • Develop educational programs on water conservation, recycling and re-use measures and methods to control infiltration and inflow to maximize available wastewater treatment capacity; and • Develop training and educational program for municipal and county planning boards and environmental commissioners on methods for using the RMP to revise and develop Wastewater Management Plans and in support of wastewater
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	<p>system maintenance.</p> <p><u>Transportation System</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources, technical support, education and outreach in order to implement the transportation, transit and related air quality protection policies. <p><u>Recreation and Tourism</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with tourism inventories to identify both public and private tourist attractions, such as historic, cultural, scenic and recreation sites, as well as facilities to support tourism, such as bed and breakfast inns, restaurants, bicycle rentals and provisioners; and • Assist municipalities to work cooperatively with counties and neighboring towns to approach tourism from a regional perspective. <p><u>Land Owner Fairness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a public outreach and education agenda for the Highlands TDR Program, and information on Highlands Exemptions and Waivers; • Establish a process for designating voluntary receiving zones within the Highlands Region and the seven Highlands counties, which process shall allow for significant public input; and • Develop and implement a Voluntary TDR Receiving Zone Feasibility Grant Program to encourage and support interested municipalities in their petition to the Highlands Council for approval of TDR Receiving Zones. <p><u>Regional Economic Sustainability</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a summary of the Cash Flow Timetable to the public on a periodic basis informing constituents regarding progress and expenditures related to the implementation of the RMP. • Assist municipalities in maximizing the efficiency of land development practices and opportunities for economic development and redevelopment in support of a sustainable regional economy. <p><u>Conformance and Implementation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist municipalities, counties and stakeholders in understanding the nature and extent of Plan Conformance and Project Reviews requirements.
<p>Program Summary</p>	<p>The Local Participation Component provides for a variety of approaches to meet requirements of the Highlands Act. Various outreach and communication efforts have taken place since the creation of the Highlands Act. Since its inception, the Highlands Council has coordinated outreach programs and events for a variety of audiences. The overall efforts can be categorized into three separate programs: the Partnership, the Technical Advisory Committees (TACs), and the Network. The approaches that the Highlands Council uses to deliver information to the public and addresses constituent matters include: regular public meetings, public presentations, and the provision of individual outreach and constituent services. The Highlands Council website will continue to serve as a communication tool and reduce the need for physical production, distribution or packaging of Highlands Council documents.</p> <p>The Highlands Council has utilized a variety of outreach approaches in order to provide details regarding the RMP, disseminate technical information, address individual comments and concerns, and meet the constituents of the Highlands Region. The Council operates in a transparent environment and will continue to promote and maximize public participation and stakeholder involvement.</p> <p>The existing outreach components will continue to be utilized to encourage local participation. Additional strategies will include the development of training and</p>

	<p>educational programs on various subjects, resources and technical support on specific issues, and assistance in coordinating with other government entities in promoting regional goals.</p>
<p>Partnership Program</p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The Partnership is a consortium of government representatives of the 88 municipalities and seven counties of the Highlands Region. It was formed to provide a forum for disseminating information on the RMP and implementation process, as well as to create a direct line of communication between the Highlands Council and its constituent governments to address any questions that may arise.</p> <p>This program was created to make certain that local and county representatives and officials continue to have an active role in shaping their future. Representatives of the constituent towns and counties provided information on local issues and visions that related to elements of the RMP. Subjects of importance were identified and prioritized based on feedback from local and regional officials, including environmental protection, open space and land preservation, agriculture and forestry, economic development, tax rates, affordable housing, infrastructure capacity, transfer of development rights, developing model ordinances, and potential legal issues and challenges. Partnership meetings also took place with Highlands municipalities on an individual basis. Workshops, luncheons and other meetings were also convened with municipal representatives.</p> <p>The Council adopted a data-sharing agreements with all of the seven Highlands Counties in order to facilitate the production of the RMP. These agreements allow the Council to collect and share data with counties, such as parcel data, which will be helpful to sister agencies and the individual municipalities. These agreements facilitate contact between the Council and the seven Counties and assists the Council and staff in creating a sound, data-rich plan. The data sharing agreements between will provide updated information and resources on a continual basis. The information generated from this process maintains an investment of benefit to the participating entities as well as the Council.</p> <p>The Council will conduct constituent forums in support of the RMP and stakeholder understanding. In addition, education and training sessions covering a variety of topics including natural resources, housing, economic development, variances and exemptions for fair land stewardship, and innovative technologies, within the Highlands Region.</p>
<p>Technical Advisory Committees</p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The Technical Advisory Committees (TACs), consisting of technical experts and practitioners from a variety of relevant fields, including but not limited to planning, science, engineering, agriculture, transportation, real estate appraisal, and business, were convened to serve as resources to the Council and Highlands Council staff on specific subject matters. This outreach program was convened by the Highlands Council in order to gain a range of expertise in areas related to the development of the RMP.</p> <p>The 18 committees focused on subject matters that the Highlands Act mandated the Council to address as part of the RMP. Topics included water resources; land use planning; ecosystem management; land preservation; green construction; sustainable agriculture and forestry; eco-tourism; recreation; housing; community investment; regional development; brownfields; redevelopment; transportation; cultural, historic, and scenic resources; utility capacity; and transfer of development rights.</p>

	<p>The TACs, acting in the capacity of "volunteer consultants" have had meetings where individual issues to be dealt with in the plan were discussed amongst the experts and Highlands staff where information pertaining to the scientific and technical basis for sections of the RMP was exchanged and expert opinions offered on a course of action for each topic. A two-day workshop forum (or charrette) was held by the Highlands Council. The objective of the TAC Charrette was for Highlands Council staff and the participants to discuss and record a spectrum of approaches and strategies for addressing the goals of the RMP.</p> <p>The Highlands Council plans to continue outreach with the TACs, particularly in the development of the TDR Program and economic development and redevelopment initiatives. This process will allow the Highlands Council to gain different perspectives and will keep the TACs informed of the Highlands Council's program approaches. In some cases, multiple TACs will be combined to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the process.</p>
<i>The Network</i>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The Network was created in order to open the door to stakeholders, including the general public, to share information about progress on the RMP, gain local insight and comments on significant issues, address individual questions of concern, host special stakeholder events, conduct public availability sessions and provide web access.</p> <p>To address their concerns, the Council has produced programs to inform citizens and business interests about the process surrounding the RMP and accept comments on any issues they may offer. The Council has participated in constituent meetings, received phone calls and responded to inquiries. The Highlands Council has also made numerous presentations to municipalities, interest groups and at conferences. Several times throughout the planning process, the Council proactively reached out to the Network in order to provide notice of the availability of new and updated information in the form of draft RMP data releases.</p> <p>Public Availability or Open House sessions held at the Highlands Office will continue to be scheduled and serve as a means to invite the public to ask questions about the RMP in an informal setting. The dates for these meetings will be available periodically at the Council's website. Repositories containing hardcopies of the RMP will be located at several local libraries and community colleges in order for the public to have enhanced public access to the documents for review. Currently, a repository for all hardcopy data released exists at the Highlands Council Headquarters in Chester, New Jersey and is available for public viewing upon request.</p> <p>The Highlands Council will continue outreach to the general public in order to inform the conformance process and implementation of the plan as well as to benefit stakeholders. Information will be presented on the ecological, economic, cultural and recreational value of maintaining healthy forests in the Highlands and of preserved open space in their communities. The Council seeks to achieve an understanding of balanced development and redevelopment with resource protection and restoration, urban parks and green spaces, housing, employment, transit opportunities, and other smart growth principles with the public, additional public outreach through the Highlands TDR Program.</p>
<i>Regular Public Meetings and</i>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The Highlands Council meets on a regularly scheduled basis at the Highlands Council Office in Chester, New Jersey. The numerous committees of the Council</p>

<p><i>Presentations</i></p>	<p>meet on an as-needed basis. These meeting forums are open to the public and include opportunities for public comment. In fulfillment of the requirements set by the Act, the Council held hearings regarding the draft PMP to receive public comments, and also held Council meetings in each of the seven constituent counties to inform the public about the goals of the Highlands Council.</p> <p>The Council provides information to the public about a variety of topics related to the development of the RMP at regularly scheduled meetings of constituent municipalities and counties. Local concerns and comments are received at these meetings and will continue to be addressed on an individual basis.</p>
<p><i>Individual Outreach and Constituent Services</i></p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>Outreach is also addressed by the Highlands Council on a case-by-case basis. Beyond the larger meeting forum, citizens may have general concerns, questions, or request a follow-up after Highlands Council meetings by either visiting, writing to, or calling the Council offices. Depending on the subject matter and availability of information, Highlands Council staff will offer an immediate response or acknowledge the request and provide a reply within a reasonable timeframe. Additionally, the Council is bound by the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and have an established procedure for responding to any requests submitted via this procedure.</p> <p>Additionally, the Council is available to meet with representatives of constituent municipalities and counties regarding aspects of the Highlands Act, the PMP and Plan Conformance process, and any local concerns or information that these entities have to offer. There have been numerous meetings organized and/or attended by staff to interact and engage with property owners to provide specific information related to individual properties. Meeting handouts and other written documents have been prepared and distributed in an effort to educate the general public about the Highlands Region, the role of the Council, the RMP and NJDEP's Highlands Rules. This important outreach component will continue to be a service rendered to individuals and organizations by Highlands Council Staff.</p>
<p><i>Special Stakeholder Events</i></p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>Open meetings and special events geared toward addressing individual topics and/or stakeholder groups are another avenue for disseminating information to groups of constituents. This format was employed to inform Highlands landowners, particularly those in the Preservation Area, about the Highlands Act in order for them to make educated decisions regarding the future of their land. The "Landowner Forum" convened early in the process, advised this special stakeholder group about landowner rights and options. More than 100 participants attended the forum which consisted of presentations by Highlands Council staff, the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), and Green Acres. The public was afforded the opportunity to meet with the various state, county and non-profit land preservation entities, including Morris Land Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, Passaic River Coalition, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance, as well as representatives from Morris, Passaic, and Warren Counties to discuss preservation opportunities. Another special stakeholder event was a bus tour for Highlands Council members and staff to view a variety of farms in the region with members of the New Jersey Farm Bureau and Highlands farmers to learn about local farmers needs.</p> <p>Educational programs and technical training which will be developed as part of the plan implementation will be presented at the Highlands Office. The dates for these meetings are available at the Council's website.</p>

<p><i>Web Access and data sharing</i></p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The Highlands Council has maintained a website since shortly after adoption of the Highlands Act (http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/). The site contains document releases, maps, frequently asked questions, legal requirements of the Act, and other information for stakeholder groups including the Council’s calendar, agendas, meeting minutes, public comments and press releases. Summary reports from the initial TAC meetings as well as the TAC Charrette Workbooks are available at the Highlands Council website. This is an important method of public education as many of the public releases and relevant documents provided by the Council have been posted to the website, as will be the release of the RMP.</p> <p>The stakeholder page provides specific information for many groups including homeowners, landowners, municipalities, counties, grassroots organizations, and farmers. A “hot topics” section contains timely issues and recent public information. There are also links to other State websites that deal with Highlands issues or that might affect the stakeholders in the Highlands Region. An important tool for stakeholders is the interactive mapping application which allows the public to determine if their property - by street address or specific block and lot designation - is in the Highlands Preservation or Planning areas. The property search tool will be enhanced with Land Use Capability Zone Map and Highlands resource data as they become available.</p>
<p><i>Training and Education for Municipal and County Officials and Staff</i></p>	<p>Program Description</p> <p>The RMP includes requirements and recommendations for municipal and county implementation through the Plan Conformance process, many of which require specialized knowledge regarding technical, scientific and planning fields. The Highlands Council will prepare and provide technical training and education for elected and appointed officials and their staff to ensure that Plan Conformance activities are implemented with the greatest possible understanding of the issues, effectiveness and efficiency. In most cases, these training and education opportunities will be provided at the regional level, and may be provided in cooperation with professional and municipal organizations.</p>