

RESOLUTION 2012-
NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
TENNESSEE GAS PIPELINE COMPANY - TENNESSEE GAS NORTHEAST
UPGRADE PROJECT
HIGHLANDS ACT CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council); and

WHEREAS, in Section 2 of the Highlands Act, the Legislature declared that the protection of the New Jersey Highlands, because of its vital link to the future of the State's drinking water supplies and other key natural resources, is an issue of State level importance;

WHEREAS, in Section 2 of the Highlands Act, the Legislature further recognized that the Highlands Region is an essential source of drinking water, provides clean and plentiful drinking water for one-half of the State's population, contains other exceptional natural resources such as clean air, contiguous forest lands, wetlands, pristine watersheds, and habitat for fauna and flora, includes many sites of historic significance, and provides abundant recreational opportunities for the citizens of the State; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act creates two areas within the Highlands Region – the Preservation Area, an area of the New Jersey Highlands with exceptional natural resource value that should be subject to stringent water and natural resource protection standards, policies, planning and regulation and the Planning Area, the area outside of the Preservation Area that should be part of a comprehensive planning approach that serves to protect the water and other significant resources of the entire Highlands Region while also accommodating appropriate patterns of development, redevelopment and economic growth; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act created the Highlands Council as a regional planning and protection entity, to develop, adopt and periodically revise a Regional Master Plan, with a primary goal of protecting and enhancing the significant values of the resources of the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act required that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) adopt stringent water and natural resource protection standards governing major development in the Preservation Area;

WHEREAS, NJDEP has adopted Preservation Area rules at N.J.A.C. 7:38-1.1 et seq. governing the NJDEP's review of projects in the Highlands Region; and

WHEREAS, Section 30 of the Highlands Act includes seventeen exemptions (N.J.S.A. 13:20-28) and qualification under this section specifies that the project or activity is exempt from the provisions of the Highlands Act, the Regional Master Plan (RMP), any rules or regulations adopted by NJDEP pursuant to the Act, or any amendments to a master plan, development regulations, or other regulations adopted by a local government unit to specifically conform with the RMP; and

WHEREAS, exemption #11 in Section 30 (N.J.S.A. 13:20-28.a (11)) specifies that the following

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activity is exempt from the Highlands Act: “(11) the routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility, provided that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of this act”; and

WHEREAS, NJDEP has adopted rules at N.J.A.C. 7:38-2.3 governing the NJDEP’s review of exemption determinations in the Preservation Area; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council has adopted Objective 7F1f in the RMP which specifies that “[a]ctivities authorized under exemptions #9 and #11, which require a finding that the activity is consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act, shall be based upon a finding that the proposed activities are consistent with Highlands Act, the RMP, any rules or regulations adopted by the NJDEP pursuant to the Highlands Act, or any amendments to a master plan, development regulations, or other regulations adopted by a local government unit specifically to conform them with the RMP”; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council approved by Resolution 2009-56 on November 12, 2009 a project proposed by Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company (TGPC), known as the 300 Line Project. The 300 Line Project was designed to increase the capacity of the existing natural gas pipeline system located in both the Planning Area and Preservation Area. The Highlands Council determined that the 300 Line Project including the implementation of a Comprehensive Mitigation Plan constitutes “routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility” and that the project “is consistent with the goals and purposes” of the Highlands Act; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee Gas Pipeline Company (TGPC) submitted an application for a Highlands Applicability Determination for Exemption #11 on July 8, 2011 to NJDEP, with a copy to Highlands Council, for TGPC’s proposal for a related project, known as the Northeast Upgrade project, to increase the capacity of the existing natural gas pipeline system through construction of approximately 7.6 miles of new 30-inch underground natural gas pipeline (Project), in the Preservation Area; parallel to the existing line; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council and NJDEP initiated a coordinated review of the Project due to the fact the Project involves construction in the Preservation Area; and.

WHEREAS, on December 21, 2011, the Highlands Council completed an analysis of the Project using a Highlands RMP Consistency Determination (CD) template as a tool to examine whether the Project is consistent with the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act as required by N.J.S.A. 13:20-28.a.(11) and in accordance with Objective 7F1f; and

WHEREAS, on December 21, 2011, the Highlands Council posted its draft CD for the proposed Project on its website for public comment period through January 6, 2012; and

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WHEREAS, the Highlands Council staff analyzed the Project and the extensive public comments received during the public comment period and, on January 17, 2012, posted the following documents on the Council’s website for the regularly scheduled January 19, 2012 Highlands Council meeting: 1) the December 21, 2011 CD showing changes made in response to public comment, and 2) a summary of and responses to public comments received during comment period ending January 6, 2012; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council, at the meeting of January 19, 2012, heard extensive public comments, discussed the Project, and decided to postpone a vote on the matter until the February 16, 2012 regularly scheduled meeting of the Highlands Council; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council staff, on February 13, 2012, posted the following documents on the Council’s website for the regularly scheduled February 16, 2012 Highlands Council meeting: 1) a summary of and responses to public comments and Council Member comments received during the Council meeting on January 19, 2012; and 2) the December 21, 2011 CD showing changes made since the January 17, 2012 version; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council duly considered the Project, the Highlands Council staff draft CD, staff summaries and responses to comments, all testimony and comment at Council meetings and determined that the Project constitutes “routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility” and that the proposed Project “is consistent with the goals and purposes” of the Highlands Act; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Highlands Council hereby finds that the amended Project constitutes “routine maintenance and operations, rehabilitation, preservation, reconstruction, repair, or upgrade of public utility lines, rights of way, or systems, by a public utility” and that the proposed Project in the Preservation Area “is consistent with the goals and purposes” of the Highlands Act;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED by the Highlands Council that the Executive Director is hereby authorized, consistent with the Council’s deliberations, to: 1) issue a final RMP Consistency Determination for this Project and 2) enter into any agreements necessary to implement these determinations.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its meeting held on the 16th day of February, 2012.

Jim Rilee, Chairman