

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 1, 2022

**PRESENT**

CARL J. RICHKO	)	CHAIR
KURT ALSTEDE	)	VICE CHAIR
TIMOTHY DOUGHERTY	)	COUNCIL MEMBERS
MICHAEL FRANCIS	)	
BRUCE JAMES	)	
DAN VAN ABS	)	
MICHAEL SEBETICH	)	
JAMES VISIOLI	)	
RICHARD VOHDEN	)	

**VIA TELECONFERENCE:**

ROBERT HOLTAWAY	)
MICHAEL DRESSLER	)

**CALL TO ORDER** 193<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council was called to order at 4:02pm at the Highlands Council Offices in Chester, NJ.

**ROLL CALL**

Roll call was taken. All Council Members were present. Members Dressler and Holtaway were present via teleconference. *The following staff members were present: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kelley Curran, Judy Thornton, Allie Bittner, Neda Hartman, Herb August, Annette Tagliareni, Carole Ann Dicton, and Tom Tagliareni. Others present: Jeffrey Nielsen, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities Unit. Deputy Attorney General's (DAG's) office: Jason Kane via teleconference.*

**OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT** was recited.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** was recited.

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Chair Richko reported that he will give his report after the affordable housing presentation.

*Member Dressler was present at 4:05pm.*

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Mr. Spinelli provided a number of updates:

- Highlands Council Staff salary adjustments are progressing.
- Current staff openings: GIS Specialist 2 is in the final stage of candidate selection; Environmental Scientist 2 interviews are being scheduled; Receptionist position will be posted soon.
- New Jersey League of Municipalities presence – made good contacts.

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- Congratulated staff member Allison Bittner – passed her A.I.C.P.
- Met with State Climatologist to talk about data collection and setting up a weather station in the Highlands.
- Met with Jeanne Herb, Rutgers to discuss a process to incorporate climate policies into Highlands work.
- Met with I-Bank to discuss increased collaboration and getting more I-Bank funding connected to Highlands projects.
- Met with Jeffrey Vasser, NJ Tourism to discuss possibilities for branding and marketing the Highlands region.
- Met with Jeff Everett, Rutgers to discuss agriculture policies and economic sustainability. This will help inform our agricultural policies and programs and will also assist in the preparation of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Marketing and Branding Program early next year due to the importance of agriculture to the region's economic sustainability.
- Warehousing Issues – sent a letter to municipalities promoting a \$5,000 grant to evaluate local zoning as it relates to warehousing and impacts on Highlands resources.
- Accessing Corporate Business Tax (CBT) Funding for Highlands Open Space and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Programs - this topic will be addressed during a Plan Conformance Committee meeting and Council will consider a resolution to directly request that CBT funding be allocated to the Council.
- Highlands Forest Management Plan – staff is currently working on developing a Highlands-specific plan to support the mission of the Highlands Council. Met with NJ State Forest Service and a meeting is scheduled with the Pinelands Commission which has a similar plan.
- Affordable Housing presentation for Council at this meeting will focus on need to produce a set of policies to assist municipalities with their planning and affordable housing obligations for the next round.

Lastly, Mr. Spinelli noted that all other staff's activities may be found in his Executive Director's report.

At this time, Chair Richko asked if any Council members had any comments or questions on the Executive Director's report.

#### Council Comments

Vice Chair Alstede commented on the delicate balance between wildlife and forest management. Is there a component for wildlife population? Mr. Spinelli responded that there needs to be something put in place on any recommendations we make. Wildlife protection will be a component.

#### **APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MINUTES OF OCTOBER 20, 2022**

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Minutes of October 20, 2022

*Member James made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Minutes of October 20, 2022. Member Dougherty seconded it.*

*A roll call vote was taken. The Highlands Council Minutes of October 20, 2022 were APPROVED 11-0.*

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**AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRESENTATION**

At this time, Mr. Spinelli gave an overview on the importance of affordable housing in the Highlands Region moving forward.

James Humphries, Director of Planning, Science & GIS gave a presentation about Affordable Housing in the Highlands. The presentation may be found on Council's website at the following link: [www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2022/dec1/preso\\_dec2022.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2022/dec1/preso_dec2022.pdf)

**Council Comments**

Member Van Abs had several questions and comments regarding affordable housing in the Highlands.

It was noted that there has not yet been any information from the State regarding the 4<sup>th</sup> round.

Vice Chair Alstede asked if affordable housing for rural communities will be considered. Mr. Spinelli responded that it will be considered.

In closing, Mr. Humphries commented that Council needs to prepare a plan, identify the policies of the Council, and make sure each step is supportable. Member Van Abs agreed with the step-wise approach, and added that Council needs to consider all the "what ifs" during this process.

At this time, Chair Richko expanded the Affordable Housing Committee to five members to include Members Francis and Dougherty. Chair Richko noted that currently Member Visioli is the Chair, and Member James and himself are members.

Chair Richko also reminded Council that the Election of Vice Chair and Treasurer will be considered at Council's next meeting.

**BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

**Resolution –Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget for Plan Conformance Funding Grants**

Committee Chair Holtaway reported that the Budget and Finance Committee is recommending the approval of grants to four Highlands municipalities totaling \$318,050. All grants are reimbursement-based with final budgeted amounts determined by approved scopes of work.

1. Montville Township is requesting a grant of \$124,800 for a Floodplain Reconnection for Enhanced Groundwater Recharge Demonstration Project. The floodplain reconnection will promote greater infiltration and recharge to the aquifer supplying drinking water to Township residents.
2. The Township of Vernon is requesting a grant of \$18,000 to prepare an updated Housing Element & Fair Share Plan.

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3. The Township of Vernon is also requesting a grant of \$28,000 for an Online Marketing & Branding Plan to highlight their recreational assets to boost economic health and grow their tourism industry.
4. Byram Township is requesting a grant of \$122,250 for a Park Improvement Project. The Township seeks to restore and upgrade various components of a park facility. The project will promote the use of Low Impact Development Best Management Practices in stormwater management to protect ground and surface water quality.
5. Bethlehem Township is requesting a grant in the amount of \$25,000 to conduct a Planning Feasibility Study of the recently preserved Vliet Farm property, which it proposed for adaptive reuse as a Historic Museum and Farm site.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

*Member Holtaway moved the resolution. Member Visioli seconded it.*

Council Comment

Member Van Abs asked for more detail about the Montville project. Member Van Abs added that he is a great fan of floodplain reconnection but is a little uncertain of the relationship of that to aquifer recharge.

**Vincent Uhl, PH, PG, UHL & Associates, Inc., Groundwater Resource Consultants**

In response to Member Van Abs comments, Mr. Uhl stated that the project's goal is to reconnect a stream to its floodplain. The floodplain provides recharge to the prime aquifer which is the sole source aquifer for Montville Township's three drinking water production wells (a constrained aquifer, about 1 square mile in size). The objective is to recharge the aquifer with the high-quality (low Total Dissolved Solids) water found west of I-287. The methodology would be using modeling and natural materials to raise the water level up and spread the water out onto the floodplain. It will serve as a demonstration project for possible application in other locations that have entrenched streams below where they can flood out and recharge groundwater. Mr. Uhl noted that it is in the valley area and the geology underlying the floodplain consists of glacial deposits.

Public Comment

David Kirkham, Director of Water & Sewer for Montville Township - Mr. Kirkham commented that he sees the value of this project regarding the connection with affordable housing and need for reliable resources (water and sewer) for the residents of Montville. Mr. Kirkham commented that the more he hears about the Highlands Council, the more he is impressed by what the Council does for the region.

There were no further Council comments.

Chief Counsel Ms. Gallagher noted that there are no recusals for this resolution.

*A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 11-0.*

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

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**Resolution – Open Space Partnership Program, Approval of Extension of Time, County of Passaic (applicant)**

Mr. Humphries gave some background about this proposed preservation project and noted that this resolution will provide an extension to close/complete a previously approved Highlands Open Space project.

Ms. Gallagher noted that Member James will need to recuse himself from voting.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

*Member Van Abs moved the resolution. Member Dougherty seconded it.*

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment

There was no Public Comment.

*Member James recused himself from this resolution.*

*A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.*

**OLD/NEW BUSINESS:**

Member Visioli commented as Chair of the Affordable Housing Committee, requesting that a kick-off meeting be scheduled in December to familiarize the committee with this matter.

At this time there was much discussion about the issue of affordable housing. Ms. Gallagher noted that Jason Kane, DAG and herself will be available to the committee regarding any legal questions.

Chairman Richko opened the meeting to the public for any other comments.

Public Comment

**George Cassa, Tewksbury, NJ** – Mr. Cassa commended the Council's courage in deciding to take on the affordable housing issue and noted his support for the effort of the Council. Mr. Cassa also asked if the affordable housing presentation would be available to the public.

Communications Manager Carole Ann Diction responded that the presentation will be posted on the Council's website.

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**Julia Somers, New Jersey Highlands Coalition** – Ms. Somers commended the items mentioned in the Executive Director’s report and looks forward to the work the Council is doing for the forests.

Chair Richko asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

*Member James made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Dougherty seconded it. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.*

**CERTIFICATION**

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council.

Date: 1/19/2022 Name: Annette Tagliareni  
Annette Tagliareni, Executive Assistant

Vote on the Approval of Minutes	Motion	Second	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
Councilmember Alstede		√	√			
Councilmember Dougherty			√			
Councilmember Dressler			√			
Councilmember Francis			√			
Councilmember Holtaway	√		√			
Councilmember James			√			
Councilmember Sebetich			√			
Councilmember Van Abs			√			
Councilmember Visioli			√			
Councilmember Vohden			√			
Chairman Richko			√			