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*Executive Director*

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Budget & Finance Committee  
**From:** Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director  
**Subject:** Committee Meeting Minutes – October 4, 2022  
**Date:** October 13, 2022

A Budget and Finance (B&F) Committee meeting was held on Thursday, October 4, 2022 at 9:00am via Teams.

*Committee Chair Holtaway opened the meeting at 9:00am. A roll call was taken. The following participants were present:*

Committee: Committee Chair Holtaway, Council Chair Richko, and Members James and Visioli.

Highlands Staff: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kelley Curran, Judy Thornton, Corey Piasecki, Allison Bittner, Herb August, Ranji Persaud, and Annette Tagliareni.

Governor's Authorities Unit: Jeffrey Nielsen, Associate Counsel

Committee Chair Holtaway announced the first agenda item and turned the meeting over to Highlands Council Grants Manager, Herb August for his summary.

#### **Highlands Council FY2023 Highlands Protection Fund Budget:**

Mr. August reported that the FY2023 Highlands Protection Fund Budget is an estimate of potential Highlands Council expenditures from July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023 on tasks required by the Regional Master Plan (RMP), the Department of Environment Protection (NJDEP), and the Highlands Act, the latter specifically in regard to Highlands municipal and county conformance. The State re-appropriation funds total \$2,182,352 for new Plan Conformance initiatives. Council staff has estimated the need for FY2023 to be approximately \$1,877,352 for municipalities and \$305,000

for county Plan Conformance Grants. All grants are reimbursement-based with final budgeted amount to be determined by approved scopes of work and deliverables.

Mr. August added that Highlands Council staff will be recommending additional grant requests for Council's October 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. Mr. August also noted that the Highlands Council intends to extend/close approximately \$100,000 for inactive grants as well as \$1,400,000 in existing contracts within this fiscal year. Mr. August provided a summary and historical sheet to the committee.

Committee Member Visioli asked for clarification regarding the unexpended encumbrances. Mr. August responded that the Department of Treasury holds these encumbrances until an approved scope of work is provided by the municipality/county.

*Committee Chair Holtaway asked for a motion to move the Highlands Council FY2023 Highlands Protection Fund Budget to the Council for consideration. Member James made a motion and Member Visioli seconded it. A roll call vote was taken, and all were in favor.*

Committee Chair Holtaway announced the next agenda item and turned the meeting over to staff to provide summaries for grant recommendations.

### **Highlands Council FY2023 Highlands Protection Fund Grant Recommendations:**

#### **Township of Allamuchy (Warren County) – Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) - \$8,000**

Corey Piasecki, Principal Planner, reported that Allamuchy Township is looking to adopt a new ERI using the recently completed Highlands Interactive ERI. Mr. Piasecki added that the Township will be the first municipality to use the Interactive ERI instead of an individually prepared plan. Funding will pay for finalization of the mapping and document, as well as local adoption.

Ben Spinelli, Executive Director, asked how a “living” ERI will help municipalities. Mr. Piasecki responded that the Interactive ERI pulls new data from the most reliable sources electronically, thus providing the most current information available on any given topic at the moment it is sought. Municipalities will have access to a continually updated ERI database, rather than relying upon a static document containing information gathered at the time of the last ERI preparation.

Committee Chair Holtaway recommended that staff work closely with the Township since they are the first to implement this process. Mr. Piasecki added that the ERI has been tested so he does not anticipate issues with the Township's scope of work.

#### **Washington Borough (Warren County), Land Use Plan Element and Sustainable Economic Development Plan - \$75,000**

Corey Piasecki, Principal Planner, reported that Washington Borough plans to update/prepare a Land Use Plan Element which will be the basis of the comprehensive zoning ordinance revisions to review the existing zoning and land uses, incorporate the required climate change vulnerability assessment, as well as explore the feasibility of an intra-municipal TDR program. Mr. Piasecki noted

that the Borough will be the first municipality in the State to address climate change assessment as required in the Municipal Land Use Law. The estimated cost for this grant is \$35,000.

The Borough also plans to implement a Sustainable Economic Development Plan to bolster its downtown. This will be a proactive tool to create the foundation for long-term economic viability. The cost for this plan is estimated at \$40,000.

There was some discussion regarding the Council's region-wide Economic Sustainability Plan and the Borough's plan. It was also noted that costs have increased since the region-wide plan was developed.

### **West Milford Township (Passaic County), Master Plan Update, Trails/Open Space Planning, Redevelopment Study, and Ordinance Updates - \$139,000**

Judy Thornton, Principal Planner, reported that West Milford plans to update its Master Plan, most significantly to incorporate the findings and recommendations of its recently adopted Sustainable Economic Development Plan. In addition, the Township intends to follow up on recent updates to its Open Space and Recreation Plan, by furthering efforts toward establishment of trails and acquisition of open space. As a Preservation Area-only community, it is also important to the Township to continue with Highlands Redevelopment Area studies for underutilized existing developments, including now, a vacant school building. Last, the Township anticipates needing funding to complete ordinance updates that will be required following the updates to its Master Plan.

1. Master Plan Update - \$44,000
2. Trail and Open Space Planning - \$40,000
3. Highlands Redevelopment Area studies, including a vacant school building - \$30,000
4. Ordinance updates - \$25,000

Member James noted that Passaic County is partnering with schools so anything that helps the economy is good.

### **Bethlehem Township (Hunterdon County), Master Plan Reexamination, Farmland Preservation Plan, and Interactive ERI Update - \$40,000**

Ms. Thornton reported that Bethlehem Township, a fully conforming Planning/Preservation area municipality is getting active again and needs to conduct the following:

1. Master Plan Reexamination - \$15,000
2. Update to Farmland Preservation Plan - \$20,000
3. Interactive ERI Application - \$5,000

### **Vernon Township (Sussex County) – Master Plan Update and Sustainable Economic Development Plan –\$55,000**

Allie Bittner, Regional Planner/Land Preservation Coordinator reported that Vernon Township plans to update its Master Plan to be consistent with the RMP; and at the same time develop a

Sustainable Economic Development Plan which will be a proactive tool to create the foundation for long-term economic viability. Director of Planning, Science & GIS, James Humphries noted that the Township is a center for outdoor recreation in the Highlands.

### **Green Township (Sussex County) – Farmland Preservation Plan - \$15,000**

Ms. Bittner also reported on Green Township's plan to update its Farmland Preservation Plan. Ms. Bittner noted that this will be a great way to develop a relationship with the Township.

### **Mountain Lakes Borough (Morris County) – Initial Assessment Grant - \$15,000**

Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager, reported that Highlands staff has had discussions with Mountain Lakes Borough over the past five years. The Borough Council passed a resolution to do an Initial Assessment Grant to explore the potential for partnering with the Highlands Council. Mountain Lakes Borough, a 100% Planning Area municipality, is interested in plan conformance. The first step in the process for the municipality is to conduct a self-assessment.

*Committee Chair Holtaway asked for a motion to move the Highlands Council FY2023 Highlands Protection Fund Grants to the Council for consideration. Member Visioli made a motion and Member James seconded it. A roll call vote was taken, and all were in favor.*

### **FY2023 Highlands General Operating Budget**

Ranji Persaud, Manager of HR, Fiscal and Office Services, reported that the Council received \$2,429,000 in State Appropriations. With a carryover bank balance of \$590,302.24 and miscellaneous revenues projected at \$1000.00, the Council is expected to have an FY23 General Operating Budget of \$3,020,302.34.

Mr. Persaud noted that the carryover bank balance was unusually high due to staff separation and rehiring, as well as a delay in salary increases for CWA employees. Items of significant importance to the FY23 budget include: (a) all unexpended FY22 funds set aside for salary expenses (\$265,400) were returned to the Council by the Dept. of Treasury and rolled into the FY23 budget, (b) the budget accommodates anticipated hiring of two additional, full time staff; (c) the reserve includes a set aside for CWA contractual salary increases and non-CWA employees; (d) the small increase in insurance line item is due to cost; (e) the legal fees line item increased, with reserve set aside for any litigation and counsel fees; and (f) all other line items remain the same or were adjusted slightly for rising costs in materials and services.

*Committee Chair Holtaway asked for a motion to move the FY2023 General Operating Budget to the Council for consideration. Member James made a motion and Member Visioli seconded it. A roll call vote was taken, and all were in favor.*

*The meeting was adjourned at 9:36am.*