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What's Next For The Highlands?

With Governor's Support, Regional Master Plan Moves Forward

CHESTER, N.J. – Following today's endorsement by Governor Jon Corzine, the Regional Master Plan has been posted on the Highlands Council web site at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us>. The Plan contains only minor copy editing changes from the draft version that was previously available on the Highlands Council's web site.

Governor Corzine announced his support for the Plan today at a press conference at the Spruce Run Reservoir and also issued Executive Order 114 to further protect the Highlands Region.

Municipalities and counties that have lands in the Preservation Area have up to 15 months to bring their master plans and development regulations, for those lands, into conformance with the Regional Master Plan. Municipalities, for lands in the Planning Area, can voluntarily conform with the Plan at any time. In order to provide initial grant funds to municipalities and counties to assess the implications of the Highlands Regional Master Plan, the Highlands Council created \$1.5 million grant program. Municipalities and counties may apply for up to \$15,000 in Initial Assessment Grants from the Highlands Council to assist with this process. In addition, the Highlands Council has over \$21 million in grant funding available to assisting conforming municipalities and counties.

On September 17th, the Highlands Council is scheduled to formally present the Regional Master Plan to the State Planning Commission. Upon endorsement, municipalities and counties in the Planning Area that have master plan and development regulations approved by the Highlands Council would automatically receive the same benefits as endorsement from the State Planning Commission.

Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart praised Governor Jon Corzine for his support of the Regional Master Plan through Executive Order 114.

"I know that the entire Council as well as virtually every person who testified before us in our many meetings and public hearings will applaud the Governor's actions to increase the funding and

tools available for preservation of especially valuable Highlands resources,” Chairman Weingart said. “Particularly important is the provision of seed money for the Highlands TDR Bank and the Governor's commitment to advance the reauthorization of the Garden State Preservation Trust and support both a statewide TDR bill to allow Highlands credits to be used anywhere in the state and extension of the dual appraisal method for farmland preserved in the Highlands.”

Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan thanked the Governor for his support but noted there is still much work ahead for the Highlands Council.

“The Plan the Governor ratified today is not the end, but the beginning,” Ms. Swan said. “We now have a framework in place to not just preserve the Highlands as it is today, but restore and enhance it for tomorrow for the benefit of the State of New Jersey.”

Executive Order 114 and an accompanying press release from the Office of the Governor can be found at <http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/2008/approved/20080905a.html>.