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Governor Recharges Highlands Council

Adds four new members, reappoints three to new terms

CHESTER, N.J. – Governor Jon Corzine yesterday announced four new appointments and three reappointments to the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council.

The new members could be confirmed before next month's meeting, scheduled for Thursday, July 16, at 10 a.m.

“Thanks to the Governor’s leadership, the Highlands Council will continue to meet the challenge of implementing the Regional Master Plan and protecting the drinking water supply for more than half the state’s residents,” Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said. “The next six months are a critical period for us as we near our statutory deadline of December 9, 2009, for Plan Conformance for the Preservation Area.”

The Highlands Act sets specific requirements for Highlands Council membership and must include property owners and elected officials from the Highlands Region. The nearly 860,000-acre region supplies drinking water to more than 5 million of the state’s residents – the great majority of whom live outside the Highlands Region.

“The Highlands Council represents many constituents, and a diverse Council ensures that every stakeholder is represented,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said.

The four new appointments announced last night are:

Michael Francis (Hopatcong, Sussex County): Mr. Francis is a member of the Hopatcong Borough Council and the Sussex County Planning Board. He also serves as Chairman of the Hopatcong Borough Council Finance Committee and as a member on the Hopatcong Borough Planning Board. Mr. Francis has a particular interest in land use issues, transportation planning, and Lake Hopatcong.

Robert Holtaway, P.E. (Bedminster, Somerset County): Mayor Holtaway has served on the Bedminster Township Committee since 2004. He is the former chairman of the Bedminster Township Planning Board and the Open Space Assessment Committee, and was a member of the Bedminster Township Open Space Committee and the Somerset County Economic Development Incentive Program. He also has served on the Board of Trustees for the Jacobus Vanderveer House in Bedminster Township.

Sylvia Kovacs (Hackettstown, Warren County): Ms. Kovacs, an author and organic farmer, is a trustee on the New Jersey Highlands Coalition and the Warren County Solid Waste Advisory Committee, and is a former member of the Municipal Land Use Board, the Warren County Environmental Commission and the Warren County Municipal and Charitable Conservancy Trust Fund Committee.

Julie O'Brien (Ramsey, Bergen County): Ms. O'Brien has been a member of the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders since 2006 and was chosen by her colleagues to serve as Freeholder Vice-Chairwoman in 2009. She serves as chair of the Parks Committee and the Cultural & Historic Affairs Sub-Committee, as well as liaison to the Bergen County Environmental Council and Utilities Authorities, and also serves on the board of the Bergen County Community Action Partnership.

In addition to the four new members, three members were reappointed to new terms: Kurt Alstede, Tracy Carluccio, and Tahesha Way. Janice Kovach, Mimi Letts, and Jack Schrier will continue to serve.

Four other members will continue to serve in unexpired terms: Bill Cogger, Eric Peterson, Scott Whitenack, and Chairman John Weingart.

Elizabeth Calabrese, Debbie Pasquarelli, and Glen Vetrano will leave the Highlands Council once the new members are confirmed. The three, along with former Highlands Council member Tim Dillingham – who left in December – were thanked by Chairman Weingart for their service to the Highlands Council.

“This is a volunteer position requiring a commitment above and beyond our monthly meeting,” Chairman Weingart said. “I thank Liz, Debbie, Glen and Tim for their exemplary service to the current and future residents of Highlands Region and the State of New Jersey.”