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Centers of Attention

Warren County's Alpha, Phillipsburg apply for Highlands conformance, Center designations

CHESTER, N.J. – Two Warren County municipalities have submitted petitions to the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council for Plan Conformance and have asked for Highlands Center designations, following in the footsteps of Byram Township.

Phillipsburg and Alpha Borough, whose petitions were received last month by the Highlands Council, are entirely in the Planning Area of the Highlands Region, where conformance to the Regional Master Plan is voluntary.

“Through collaboration with the Highlands Council, municipalities are seeing that Plan Conformance can be a ‘one-stop shop’ to meet their desires of protecting the environment while planning for economic development in areas that have the infrastructure in place to support it,” Highlands Council Acting Chairman Jack Schrier said.

Last month, the Highlands Council approved petition for Plan Conformance and Highlands Center designation for Byram Township, allowing the Sussex County municipality to protect its extensive natural resources and rural community character while adding a mixed-use development project to provide jobs, homes and a park along Route 206.

Phillipsburg officials have requested a Town Center, replacing an expired center designation under the State Plan. Under their proposal, the entire town would be recognized as a Highlands Town Center, with commercial, residential and civic use development incorporating historic features, streetscape, bicycle and pedestrian access, and transportation.

“A Town Center would allow Phillipsburg to use transportation and economic planning to pursue local development/redevelopment initiatives in a key area of the Warren County region,” said Eileen Swan, Executive Director of the Highlands Council. “This is consistent with the Highlands Act goal

of encouraging economic growth in the Planning Area in or adjacent to areas already utilized for such purposes.”

Alpha Borough is asking for a center designation to support its existing, zoned industrial district. Through the center designation, Alpha Borough could apply for state grants to pay for economic development planning as well as changes to its master plan and land use ordinances.

The Highlands Council unanimously approved Byram Township’s petition for Plan Conformance and Highlands Center at its September 23 meeting; it is scheduled to hold a public hearing on Chester Township’s petition for Plan Conformance at its meeting on October 21 at 10 a.m. In addition, the Highlands Council is seeking public comments on the petition submitted by Hampton Borough, for consideration at the Council’s November 19 meeting.

Adding Alpha Borough and Phillipsburg brings the total number of petitions filed with the Highlands Council to 64 (59 from municipalities and five from counties). The 59 municipal petitions cover 395,660 acres (95 percent) in the Preservation Area and 157,150 acres (35 percent) in the Planning Area, for a total of 552,810 acres (64 percent) in the entire Highlands Region.

Of the 64 petitions received, 45 municipal petitions and two county petitions have been deemed administratively complete and posted to the Highlands Council website. The Highlands Council continues to work with the other petitioning municipalities, as well as with the 17 municipalities that have filed a Notice of Intent to conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan but have yet to submit their petitions.

More information about the plan conformance process, including the Plan Conformance Tracking Sheet with information on each petitioning municipality and county, can be found on the Highlands Council website:

<http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/planconformance/>