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Michael Francis Joins Highlands Council

Hopatcong Councilman also serves on Sussex County Planning Board

CHESTER, N.J. – Michael Francis attended his first Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council meeting today, bringing his experience as a Hopatcong Borough Council member and Sussex County Planning Board member.

“Michael’s background in planning at the municipal and county level will be a great asset to the Highlands Council as we near our statutory deadline of December 8, 2009, for the initiation of Plan Conformance in the Preservation Area,” Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said.

Mr. Francis also serves as Chairman of the Hopatcong Borough Council Finance Committee and as a member on the Hopatcong Borough Planning Board, and has a particular interest in land use issues, transportation planning, and the protection of Lake Hopatcong.

“I believe that we are still in our infancy. There’s a lot more work to be done to meet the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act,” Mr. Francis said. “I believe it’s a worthwhile endeavor and I look forward to being a positive influence on future decisions of the Council.”

He was nominated last month to the Highlands Council by Governor Jon Corzine and appointed after being confirmed by the State Senate. He replaces Debbie Pasquarelli, whose final Highlands Council meeting was June 25.

Council members Kurt Alstede and Tahesha Way also were confirmed by the Senate and were reappointed to new terms on the Highlands Council. Three other nominees and one current member were not confirmed by the Senate before the end of the 2008-2009 legislative session, leaving the Highlands Council with 13 members until the Senate reconvenes in fall.

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 other new nominees who have not completed the confirmation process are Robert Holtaway of Bedminster; Sylvia Kovacs of Hackettstown; and Julie O'Brien of Ramsey.

Tracy Carluccio was nominated by the Governor to serve a new term but was not confirmed by the Senate. However, she will continue to serve on the Highlands Council, along with Janice Kovach, Mimi Letts, and Jack Schrier.

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

Glen Vetrano and Elizabeth Calabrese previously announced their intension to step down from the Highlands Council, but would continue to serve in their positions until replacement members are appointed.