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Planning Grants for the Highlands

Municipalities and Counties can apply for up to \$100,000 to prepare for Plan Conformance

CHESTER, N.J. – The Highlands Council last month created the 2009 Plan Conformance Grant Program, making available up to \$7.5 million in state funding to assist Highlands Region municipalities and counties with expenses related to conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

“At a time when many municipalities are trying to do more with less, the Highlands Council is ready to help pay for smart planning that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan,” Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said.

Under the program, any Highlands Region municipality or county that has filed a Notice of Intent to conform to the Regional Master Plan can apply for the grant. Municipalities and counties can then work with their own planning professionals on 2009 Plan Conformance issues and submit invoices for reimbursement. The program expects most municipalities to incur about \$50,000 in planning costs for this year, but they can apply for as much as \$100,000. As of today, 67 municipalities in the Highlands Region are eligible for the program after filing a Notice of Intent to conform to the Regional Master Plan.

Highlands Region municipalities and counties with lands in the Preservation Area must file a Notice of Intent to conform to the Regional Master Plan for those lands by February 1, 2009. Municipalities and counties with lands in the Planning Area, where conformance is voluntary, can choose to conform to the Regional Master Plan at any time. The deadline for Preservation Areas to come into conformance to the Regional Master Plan is December 8, 2009.

The 2009 Plan Conformance Grant Program has dedicated, non-lapsing funds, and municipalities and counties do not have to provide matching funds. For planning grants issued for lands in the

Planning Area, where Plan Conformance is voluntary, the Highlands Council does not require reimbursement for those grant funds.

“We believe that money spent on good planning is in the best interest of the Highlands,” Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said.

The 2009 Plan Conformance Grant program is intended to assist municipalities and counties in developing each of the components required to meet the December 8, 2009, deadline for basic conformance to the Regional Master Plan. For municipal Plan Conformance, the Highlands Council has developed seven Modules, each setting forth a specific scope of work with a base dollar amount. The first module is a municipal build-out analysis identifying developable lands, preserved lands and areas currently served with water supply and wastewater utilities. This information will be used by the Highlands Council to determine the municipality’s affordable housing obligation, provided the municipality conforms to the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

The Plan Conformance Grants Program is separate from the Initial Assessment Grants Program, which has distributed \$834,767 to 56 municipalities since its creation in February 2008. Municipalities that have received funding under the Initial Assessment Grants Program can apply for funding under the Plan Conformance Grants Program.

More information about the Plan Conformance program (including a January 2, 2009 mailing to all Highlands municipalities) can be found on the Highlands Council website at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/stake/municipalities.html>. The Highlands Council is encouraging municipalities to submit grant applications for this funding as soon as possible.