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Planning Together

*Planners attend joint session at Highlands Council with League of Municipalities;
Highlands Council awards \$195,000 in grants at today's meeting*

CHESTER, N.J. – Dozens of planners and professionals representing two-thirds of the municipalities in the Highlands Region attended an information session last week at the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council, held in coordination with the New Jersey League of Municipalities.

“It was a great team effort from the Highlands Council and the League of Municipalities to address the 88 municipalities that are affected by the Highlands Act,” said Mount Arlington Borough Mayor Arthur Ondish, an executive board member of the League of Municipalities who attended the joint session. “On behalf of the League of Municipalities, I’d like to thank Eileen Swan for helping to make this happen, and we look forward to continued efforts together to help municipalities understand the impacts of the Highlands Regional Master Plan and make the appropriate changes to meet the new requirements where beneficial and appropriate.”

Attendees at the joint session, held November 10 at the Highlands Council office in Chester, were given CDs and DVDs specified tailored to their municipalities, as well as general information about the Highlands Regional Master Plan, Executive Order 114, the Permit Extension Act, Chapter 46 (the July 17, 2008, amendment to the Fair Housing Act), and the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Highlands Council and the Council on Affordable Housing. There also were presentations from Highlands Council staff regarding next steps for plan conformance, the project review process, online mapping and planning tools, and grant funding available from the Highlands Council.



“We plan on offering more joint sessions in the future as needed,” said Michael Cerra of the League of Municipalities.

The joint session is part of an ongoing outreach campaign to the 88 municipalities and seven counties in the Highlands Region. Most Highlands municipalities have to take action before December 31, 2008, in order to be eligible for an extension of the deadline to bring their local ordinances in compliance with Council on Affordable Housing. Executive Order 114, signed by Governor Jon S. Corzine on September 5, 2008, allowed for a “reasonable extension of deadlines” to adjust municipal master plans to conform to the Highlands Act and the Fair Housing Act. Under the Memorandum of Understanding, Highlands Region municipalities can extend the deadline to submit their affordable housing plans to the Council on Affordable Housing until December 8, 2009. (The current deadline is December 31, 2008.) In order to be eligible for the extension, municipalities must adopt a non-binding resolution stating their intent to bring lands in the Planning Area into conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan, and a resolution that requests an extension of the deadline from COAH and provides notice of intent to petition COAH on or before the new deadline of December 8, 2009. However, those resolutions must be adopted by December 31, 2008.

In addition, the Memorandum of Understanding also allows conforming Highlands Region municipalities to have their Third Round affordable housing projections adjusted to ensure the Region’s water and other resources are protected. Each conforming municipality’s projection will be determined by a local build-out analysis to be performed in accordance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.



The Highlands Council has also been making presentations at municipal meetings upon the request of any Highlands municipality to inform governing bodies and their land use boards about the need to act quickly in order to receive the deadline extension and Third Round affordable housing projections adjustment.

“We are getting the word out to municipalities that they have just five more weeks to take action in order to get an extension for their affordable housing planning and to get adjusted projections consistent with the RMP for lands that conform to the Highlands Plan,”

said Eileen Swan, Executive Director of the Highlands Council.

Seventeen municipalities – Alpha Borough, Bedminster Township, Bernardsville Borough, Bethlehem Township, Byram Township, Clinton Township, Far Hills Borough, Hampton Borough, Mahwah Township, Montville Township, Oakland Borough, Ogdensburg Borough, Pequannock Township, Phillipsburg Township, Pohatcong Township, Tewksbury Township and Wanaque Borough – already have adopted non-binding notice of intent resolutions to bring their rules and regulations into conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan. (Under the Highlands Act,

municipal rules and regulations regarding lands in the Preservation Area must conform to the Highlands Regional Master Plan, but conformance for lands in the Planning Area is voluntary.) More information about Plan Conformance and the Memorandum of Understanding, including sample resolutions for the Highlands Council and COAH, are available on the Highlands Council website at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/implementation/plan/>.

Highlands Council Meeting

The Highlands Council met today and voted to approve nine Initial Assessment Grants, two Municipal Partnership Project (MP³) grants and one Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Feasibility grant, a total of \$195,000.

Initial Assessment Grants were awarded to Oakland in Bergen County; Chester Borough, Mendham Township, Mount Arlington and Washington Township in Morris County; Far Hills in Somerset County; Ogdensburg in Sussex County; and Allamuchy and Pohatcong in Warren County. Each grant was for an amount not to exceed \$15,000, with Washington Township to receive up to \$5,000 in additional funding if it can demonstrate need.

MP³ grants were awarded to Bedminster Township in Somerset and Clinton Township in Hunterdon County. Each grant was for an amount not to exceed \$15,000.

Chester Borough was awarded the TDR Feasibility Grant, for an amount not to exceed \$25,000.

The Initial Assessment Grant program reimburses municipalities for expenses associated with conforming to the Highlands Regional Master Plan for lands in the Preservation Area, where conformance is mandatory; or for expenses associated with determining whether to conform to the Regional Master Plan for lands in the Planning Area, where conformance is voluntary. Municipalities that receive Initial Assessment planning grants are not required to conform to the Regional Master Plan for Planning Area lands, and do not have to pay back the grant if they ultimately decide not to conform for those lands. To date, more than 40 of the 88 municipalities in the Highlands Region have been awarded Initial Assessment grants, totaling more than \$600,000. The municipalities that have been awarded grants total more than 50 percent of the total acreage of the Highlands Region.

More information about the Highlands Council grants program, including a map of which municipalities have applied for Initial Assessment Grants, can be found on the Highlands Council website at <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/njhighlands/stake/municipalities.html>.

The Highlands Council also voted to name Scott Whitenack of Morristown chairman of the Highlands Development Credit Bank.