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Highlands Council Lauds Extension of ‘Dual Appraisal’ for Highlands Property Owners

CHESTER, N.J. — On Thursday, February 5, Governor Chris Christie signed a bill extending the special appraisal process that provides greater equity for Highlands Region property owners seeking to preserve lands under the state’s Green Acres and Farmland Preservation programs.

The “Dual Appraisal” method of appraising property calls for the use of the greater of two appraisals – one based on current assessed value and one based on local zoning and state regulations in place before adoption of the Highlands Act – as a starting point for negotiation with landowners interested in restricting development of their property. Dual appraisal was written into the Highlands Act with an original expiration date of June 30, 2009. It was extended by the Legislature in 2010, but expired on June 30, 2014. A bill introduced by the Senate in January 2014 was unanimously passed on December 1, 2014 with a vote of 36-0, and an identical bill passed the Assembly on December 18 with a vote of 74-0.

“The dual appraisal process was intended to provide a level of fairness for property owners in the Highlands Region interested in pursuing preservation options in the state,” explains Highlands Council Chairman Jim Rilee. “At the time the Highlands Act was passed, no dedicated source of funding was made available for Highlands landowners, which is why dual appraisal is so important. As we pass the 10-year mark since enactment of the Highlands Act, it is clear this process is still a critical component of landowner equity and we are pleased that members of the Legislature and the

Governor have affirmed their support for compensating property owners in the Highlands Region in this way.”

Property owners interested in the state’s Green Acres and Farmland Preservation programs should visit the program websites (www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/ and www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/farmpreserve/). The open space ballot question approved by voters in November provides long-term funding that will help ensure the state’s ability to preserve property under these two programs. For property owners that do not qualify for Green Acres or Farmland Preservation, the Highlands Council’s Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program, may be a viable option.

“In January, the Highlands Council announced a new Land Owner Equity and Land Preservation program that will leverage mitigation funds received by the Council in support of TDR and open space acquisitions,” explains Highlands Council Executive Director Margaret Nordstrom. “At the same time, the committee is also exploring other sources of funding to support preservation efforts, while we work toward establishing a stronger TDR program.” Additional information is available by contacting the Highlands Council office.

The Senate bill, S1050, was sponsored by Senator Bob Smith and Senator Christopher Bateman, with co-sponsors Senator Steven V. Oroho, Senator Michael J. Doherty, and Senator Anthony R. Bucco. The Assembly bill, A3058 was sponsored by Assemblyman John F. McKeon, Assemblywoman Alison Littell McHose, Assemblyman Parker Space, and Assemblyman Anthony M. Bucco, with co-sponsors Assemblyman Erik Peterson, Assemblywoman Donna M. Simon, Assemblywoman L. Grace Spencer, Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Assemblyman Patrick J. Diegnan Jr., Assemblyman Jack M. Ciattarelli, Assemblyman John DiMaio, and Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi.

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The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency, established in 2004 with the passing of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands.