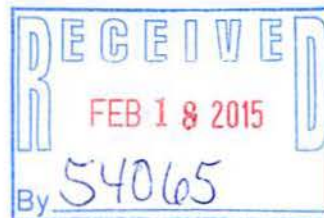




Warren County Regional
Chamber of Commerce
CREATING VALUE IN MEMBERSHIP

445 Marshall Street
Phillipsburg, NJ 08865
Phone: 908.835.9200
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February 10, 2015

VIA FACSIMILE (908-879-4205)
& FIRST CLASS MAIL

New Jersey Highlands Council
Attn: 2014 RMP Monitoring Program
100 North Road (Route 513)
Chester, New Jersey 07930-2322

**RE: 2014-15 Regional Master Plan Monitoring Program Evaluation of the
Highlands Regional Master Plan**

Dear Council Members:

The Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Public Policy Committee of the Warren County Chamber appreciate the opportunity to submit the following joint comments for your consideration as part of the New Jersey Highlands Council 2014-15 Regional Master Plan ("RMP") Monitoring Program wherein the Council is evaluating the effectiveness of the RMP, adopted in 2008, in fulfilling the goals and objectives of the 2004 Highlands Water Planning and Protection Act ("Highlands Act").

We respectfully submit that the Highlands RMP has failed to achieve a very critical element of the stated goals of the Highlands Act. Namely, the RMP fails to permit opportunities for economic growth in the Region where it is most appropriate, along the State and county roads, and railways, that were zoned for such commercial activity. Accordingly, we call upon the Council to focus its attention on restoring the economic viability of the commercial corridors traversing the Highlands Region which are a critical element underpinning the sustainability of the local financial infrastructure.

The Highlands Act expressly provides that development, redevelopment, and economic growth in certain appropriate areas of the Region are in the best interests of all citizens of the State, providing innumerable social, cultural, and economic benefits and opportunities. The long term integrity of the Highlands Region requires economic and fiscal vitality as well as the preservation of natural resources." RMP, Chap. 4, Part. 8. The economic development was aimed, in part, at increasing the local tax base and providing employment opportunities to the Region. *Id.* "Appropriate patterns of compatible residential, commercial, and industrial

development, redevelopment, and economic growth should be encouraged in certain areas of the Highlands, specifically in or adjacent to areas already utilized for such purposes.” RMP, Chap. 3, Part. 8 (internal quotations omitted).

Thus, it is clear from the Act itself, that the legislature intended to achieve a balance between conservation and economic vitality, or at least economic sustainability. Unfortunately, the pendulum remains out of balance in favor of the conservation element as efforts to achieve economic sustainability have been repeatedly stymied as if they were, by their very nature, environmentally unfriendly in every respect. That is not the case. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the economic development goals of the RMP have not been met and, in fact, the economic viability of the Region has suffered as evidenced by a declining tax base and lack of employment opportunities.

An impediment toward more desired sustainable economic development is prevalent along the Region’s commercial corridors where local governing bodies have thoughtfully zoned such areas for commercial use, but have been prohibited from developing such uses by the RMP. For example, there is a project in Independence Township, Warren County, that was approved by the local governing body for development of a 52,000 square foot commercial development involving a CVS Pharmacy, a branded day care center and a regional bank. The property is zoned for commercial use and has access to public water and sewer. Despite that, the project was halted by the Highlands Act as the property upon which it was to be built was designated for the Preservation Zone - on the wrong side of the street from an existing shopping center and a recently developed Quick Check convenience store gas station, both of which are located in the Planning Area. This project highlights the real, and undisputable, economic impact of the Highlands RMP that must be addressed. A model that is out of balance is not sustainable.

Certainly we acknowledge that broad economic factors have impacted the Region as well, but the Highlands restrictions have unnecessarily added high hurdles for businesses to overcome. As a result, we have witnessed businesses flee or not enter the Region leaving its residents with less job opportunities and a heightened real estate tax burden to pay for county, municipal and school budgets. Further, the above mentioned project would have certainly generated much needed income tax and sales tax revenue to the state of New Jersey, and would have been built had it been on the “other side” of the street.

Two bills, S1240 and A2852, were introduced in the first quarter of 2014 that are narrowly focused on this very issue of facilitating thoughtful development along commercial corridors in order to revitalize the Region. We respectfully request that the Council support the legislature’s attempt to restore some balance between the environmental elements of the Act and the expressly stated economic elements which have been largely ignored. This legislative initiative is in the best interests of all citizens of the State and will help sustain and encourage social, cultural, and economic benefits and opportunities to everyone located within the Region and the State. We appreciate the Council’s efforts and leadership as it strives to achieve the sustainable economic development goals of the Highlands Act and improve the overall economic health of Highlands Region.

Respectfully submitted,
Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce



Betty Schultheis, Chairman of the Board

Warren County Regional Chamber of Commerce
Public Policy Committee



Glenn J. Williams, Esq., Chairman

**TOWNSHIP OF INDEPENDENCE
COUNTY OF WARREN
RESOLUTION # 15-18**

**A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF AND JOINING IN ON COMMENTS SUBMITTED
BY THE WARREN COUNTY PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE TO THE NEW JERSEY
HIGHLANDS COUNCIL FOR CONSIDERATION AS PART OF THE NEW JERSEY
HIGHLANDS COUNCIL 2014-2015 REGIONAL MASTER PLAN MONITROING
PROGRAM**

WHEREAS, the governing body has reviewed the comments provided on behalf of the Warren County Public Policy Committee to the New Jersey Highlands Council for its consideration as part of the Council's 2014-15 Regional Mater Plan ("RMP") Monitoring Program wherein the Council will be evaluating the effectiveness of the RMP in fulfilling the initial goals and objectives of the 2004 Highlands Water Planning and Protection Act ("Highlands Act"); and

WHEREAS, the governing body of the Township of Independence is also of the opinion that the Highlands RMP does not currently permit viable opportunities for economic growth within the Township in areas where such growth is appropriate and has been zoned for commercial activity; and

WHEREAS, the governing body likewise concurs that the Highlands RMP does not account for areas outside the Township in the Region where growth is most appropriate, along the State and county roads and railways; and

WHEREAS, the governing body shares the opinion of the Public Policy Committee that the two bills, S1240 and A2852, which focus on facilitating development along commercial corridors in order to revitalize the Region, further the goals of the Highlands Act which find development and economic growth in certain appropriate areas of the Region to be in the best interests of all citizens of the State, and therefore encourage the Council's support of the proposed legislation;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Mayor and Committee of the Township of Independence that the Township of Independence supports and joins in the comments provided by the Warren County Public Policy Committee to the New Jersey Highlands Council, a copy of which is annexed hereto.

TOWNSHIP OF INDEPENDENCE



ROBERT GIORDANO, MAYOR