

New Jersey Highlands Council **Letter 58**

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Web Response

At the Highlands Regional Master Plan Workshop in Sparta, Senator Oroho observed, "The issue of sustainable economic development has not been addressed" If you look at the list of Technical Stakeholder Meeting held in the Fall 2014, "Sustainable Economic Development" is not listed. Both the "Land Use" and "Real Estate and Housing" meetings addressed "uncertainties" affecting the ability to obtain bank loans. Other Targeted Stakeholders meeting summaries contained numerous comments regarding economic development: "RMP policies do not sufficiently support woodland owners and woodland management" "One challenge of ecotourism is transportation. The existing network facilitates travel from the suburbs to New York City and back out, but not necessarily from NYC to the outskirts and back" "The discussion then turned to agricultural economic development. While the Highlands RMP refers to this as a prospect for the Highlands Region, it does not convey the entirety of agriculture economic development opportunities" "Further, the RMP lacks sufficient recognition of the value of cultural resources." "Regarding State Parks Service, many parks and campsites in the Highlands Region contain gaining infrastructure that needs to be replaced. There is concern that larger capital projects cannot be completed within the confines of the Highlands regulations." Given the primary purpose of the Highlands Act is to assure the environmental integrity of region to preserve water supply; I offer the following recommendations regarding "Sustainable Economic Development". Recommendation 1: Develop valuation for natural resources and ecosystem services provided by the Highlands Region. The Highlands Conservation Act of 2004 recognizes "the importance of the water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources of the Highlands region, and the national significance of the Highlands region to the United States". The contribution the Highlands Region includes value of goods and services exchanged in the market plus the value of ecosystem services such as water purification, carbon sequestration, and habitat for species, seed dispersion, and other contributions that are not readily accounted. This metric could serve as a basis for decision making, and measuring health of the region. Development of this metric improves "engagement and dialogue between the Highlands Council and users of Highlands water who are located outside of the region". Recommendation 2: Adopt Sustainable Economic Development Goals and Objectives. The Highlands Act Section 10.c.(9) encourages "economic development in an orderly way while protecting the Highlands environment from the individual and cumulative adverse impacts thereof;". The traditional strategies for economic growth rely on "consumerism" and unlimited consumption models depleting resources over a period of time. The demise of Highlands iron industry is a prime example. Sustainable Economic Development Goals support ways for people to create wealth without harming natural systems. The following Sustainable Economic goals are suggested: A. Promote economic instruments for efficiency, and commit to promoting energy efficiency for buildings, devices, motors, transportation systems and in the energy sector itself. B. Sustainable buildings: Around 27 % of final energy is consumed by private households, and much could be done with existing technologies to improve the energy performance of buildings. The energy demands of buildings can be covered to a significant extent by using renewable energies. Industry in the Highlands previously relied in part on "water wheels". Consideration of policy to promote "micro-hydroelectric generation" is recommended as well as "community" solar projects. C. Efficient transport and alternative fuels: Within the next 50 years, technology will likely develop innovative engine concepts with energy efficiency standards, alternative fuels and integrated transport systems. Communities should begin to plan ways to incorporate this technology. Growth centers within the region need to consider ways to reduce congestion as they increase land use intensities. D. Promote understanding of climate issues and encourage necessary changes within the Highlands to improve resiliency. Inventory and redesign of bridges particularly on rural roads need assessment. (Reference Reports prepared on behalf of the New Jersey Climate Adaptation Alliance available @ <http://njadapt.rutgers.edu/resources/njcaa-reports>). Recommendation 3: Develop a "Sustainable Business Strategy" based on "Cradle to Cradle" approach. Communities still choose to destroy natural resources as a means to increase revenues at the expense of the town's long term economic viability; yet, across the state of New Jersey, many agencies such as NJ Future, Regional Plan Association (RPA), and NJ Transportation Planning Authority champion Smart Growth policies. From a National and State perspective, the preservation of the Highlands as an important region for water and biodiversity embodies the "Smart Growth" Model. The challenge for the Council is to encourage "Sustainable Business Strategy" based on continuous Improvement. By optimizing positive impacts and minimizing negative impacts with an emphasis on water stewardship, this approach should emphasize the continuous flows of biological and technical resources, values materials for safe, continuous cycling, and reliance on renewable energy. These are fundamental principles of "Cradle to Cradle" approach for product and community development. (Reference: The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability—Designing for Abundance by William McDonough & Michael Braungart 2013 or see TEDx presentation @ <http://makeitright.org/c2c/>). Some examples as to what could be done in the Highlands include: Community Solar Projects, equipping gas stations with electric car charging stations, establishing "trail guide services", establishing a database of local food producers to connect with local and regional restaurants and grocers, The waterways of the Highlands once had mills powered by water, "Are micro hydro electric generators feasible today? These are possibilities that promote regenerative growth and enhance the value of the region.

The suggested metrics or indicators are tailored from Sustainability Communities Catalog- <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/indicators>)

- Economic growth in previously-developed areas in terms of income, changes in property value, and number of new businesses.
- Access: Percentage of people within walking distance of key destinations: jobs and schools, Safe Parks & Recreation Areas, and/or transit service
- Commuting distances to place of employment in terms of miles, distance, and mode (auto, bus, train) Percentage of population served by transit
- Travel Time to Work
- Vehicle Miles Traveled Per Capita
- Fuel Consumption/Energy Use by land use and vehicles.
- Renewable energy generation: Solar, wind, geothermal, and micro hydroelectric.
- Access to Healthy Food Options
- Redeveloped/Remediated Acreage: Brownfields, forests,
- Residential Energy Use
- Residential Unit Vacancy Rate
- Number of New Residential Units Permitted
- Number of existing Home Improvements permitted
- Acres of Parks and Protected Open Space per Capita
- Bike Infrastructure: Bike Land and Trail Mileage
- Bike Parking per Capita
- Arterial Roads with bike lanes
- Pedestrian Infrastructure
- Percent of population that lives within ¼ miles of a bike lane/trail

Respondent

Organization Type Individual
Organization Conservation Chair, NJ Sierra Club Chapter
Email Address [REDACTED]
Name Greg Gorman
Address 1 [REDACTED]
City Hamburg
State NEW JERSEY
Zip 07419-1701
Country UNITED STATES
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