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A ‘Smart’ Plan for the Highlands

Highlands Regional Master Plan sent to Office of Smart Growth

CHESTER, N.J. – The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council has sent its Regional Master Plan to the state Office of Smart Growth for endorsement, it was announced at last week’s Highlands Council meeting.

The petition for plan endorsement and related documents – as well as the Highlands Regional Master Plan itself – can be viewed on the Highlands Council Web site, <http://www.highlands.state.nj.us/master/conform/osg.html>.

Endorsement review by the State Planning Commission is required by the Highlands Act, and on July 24th – one week after voting to adopt the Regional Master Plan – the Highlands Council passed a resolution directing its staff to petition the Commission for plan endorsement.

The Highlands Council is scheduled to formally present the Regional Master Plan at the State Planning Commission’s September 17th meeting. The petition materials include a detailed analysis demonstrating that the Highlands Regional Master Plan is consistent with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan). In the 2001 State Plan, the State Planning Commission identified the Highlands Region as a special resource area. This important action set in motion the protection of the Highlands Region.

The Plan’s contents won’t come as a surprise to the State Planning Commission, Highlands Council Executive Director Eileen Swan said.

“The Highlands Council has been working closely with the Office of Smart Growth and state agency members of the State Planning Commission throughout the development of the Regional Master Plan,” she said. “The Regional Master Plan was designed to meet the resource protection requirements of the Highlands Act and the focus on center-based development in the State Plan.”

“Protecting the resources of the Highlands is a major goal of the State Plan,” said Benjamin Spinelli, Executive Director of the Office of Smart Growth. “The creation of the Highlands Regional Master Plan required a great deal of hard work, a tremendous investment of resources, and the dedication of the Highlands Council and staff in an effort to meet that goal. We look forward to working with the Highlands Council to evaluate the Regional Master Plan. This marks a significant milestone in regional planning and the protection of resources with state-wide importance, and we are pleased to have the chance to participate in this endeavor.”

Upon endorsement, municipalities and counties in the Planning Area that have master plan and development regulations approved by the Highlands Council would automatically receive the same benefits as endorsement from the State Planning Commission.