



New Jersey Pinelands Commission PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Paul Leakan

Phone: 609.894.7300

E-mail: info@njpines.state.nj.us

Pinelands Commission to help municipalities with costs to implement clustering rules

NEW LISBON, N.J. – During its meeting today, the Pinelands Commission voted to help 37 Pinelands municipalities offset costs they will incur to implement recent rule changes that will better protect the Pinelands' unique environment.

The Commission dedicated a total of up to \$305,000 in funds that it will offer to municipalities for expenses associated with adopting amendments that require the clustering of residential development in Pinelands-designated Forest Areas and Rural Development Areas.

"Pinelands municipalities play a critical role in helping to preserve and protect a million-acre region that supplies clean air and water for residents and sustains a fragile ecosystem," said John C. Stokes, Executive Director of the Commission. "We are pleased to provide financial assistance to municipalities for an effort that will keep large expanses of forested land from being disrupted and degraded by scattered and piecemeal development."

Pinelands municipalities are required to incorporate clustering provisions into their zoning ordinances as a result of amendments to the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan, the rules that guide land-use, development and natural resource in the Pinelands Area. The Commission adopted the amendments on January 16.

Clustering is a style of development that allows reduced minimum lot sizes in exchange for the preservation of open space or other desirable features of a property. Development can be directed toward appropriate locations of a property, such as areas close to roads and other infrastructure, while natural resources such as critical habitat for rare plant and animal species can be protected. The rule changes require clustering of residential development in the Pinelands-designated Forest Areas and Rural Development Areas on one-acre lots. The open space created as a result of clustering will be permanently protected through deed restriction.

The changes became effective on April 6, 2009, and Pinelands municipalities are required to revise their certified master plans and land use ordinances to be consistent with the amendments by April 6, 2010. The Commission will provide each of the affected municipalities with a sample ordinance for consideration and adoption in response to the amendments.

The Commission will offer a maximum of \$10,000 to municipalities with large Forest and/or Rural Development Areas or whose existing zoning plans are more complex. It will offer a maximum of \$5,000 to those municipalities whose Forest and/or Rural Development Areas are

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small or for whom the adoption of a clustering ordinance will be a relatively simple matter due to existing zoning, the amount of remaining, privately-owned vacant land, and other similar factors.

Municipal expenses that could be eligible for reimbursement include the cost of notifying affected property owners, consultant assistance in preparing master plan amendments or re-examinations, legal advertising for public hearings, codification of the adopted clustering ordinance, copying and other miscellaneous administrative costs.

The Commission will provide the money from the Community Planning and Design component of the Pinelands Conservation Fund. The Fund was created in 2004 as part of an agreement with the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to permit the construction and upgrade of an electric transmission line through eastern portions of the Pinelands. Under the agreement, the fund was established to further the Pinelands protection program and ensure a greater level of protection of the unique resources of the Pinelands Area. The utility that built the transmission lines, Atlantic City Electric (formerly Conectiv), provided \$13 million to establish the Fund.

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