

Special Resource Areas

Three Special Resource Areas maintain their own regional Master Plans that are outside of the jurisdiction of the State Planning Commission. Municipalities in these regions are encouraged to utilize this guidance; however, if any guidance in these documents conflicts with the Master Plans for the Special Resource Areas below, those Master Plans will prevail.

NJ Highlands

The Highlands Region is at a critical crossroads for the location of warehousing, as three major interstate highways cross it (I-80, I-287, and I-78). There likely are appropriate locations for warehousing in the Region, but the Highlands Council's authority to affect locations or address regional traffic implications is limited as most land use planning authority rests with municipalities. Where municipalities are in conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP), local land-use decisions have significantly improved alignment with Highland's goals and objectives. For conforming municipalities and counties, the Council is authorized to provide grant funding that could assist in the traffic and feasibility analyses needed to identify the most suited locations in the Region for warehouse and distribution facilities. In general, terms, the RMP would steer such projects away from lands in the Highlands Preservation Area, favoring sites in the Highlands Planning Area. These areas have no (or minimal) Highlands Resources, are in designated sewer service areas, have proximate access to highways and highway entry points (to avoid/minimize impacts to local roads and scenic byways), and do not significantly affect or eliminate the Region's prime farmland or prime farmland soils.

Large areas of prime farmland in the Region are at risk in the face of the demand for warehousing. They are often the least encumbered areas in terms of Highlands Resources, meaning they have little or no forest cover, steep slope area, wetland area, stream/riparian habitat area, etc., and are thus targeted for development. Prime farmland and prime farm soils must be protected in the Region, however, along with the agricultural communities built around them. These are the goals of the Highlands RMP. It should be noted that the Highlands Council is also working to strengthen farmers and farming communities since a thriving agricultural economy may be its own best defense.

NJ Pinelands

The Pinelands Area is comprised of 938,000 acres, spread across seven counties and 53 municipalities. Development in the Pinelands Area is subject to the land use and environmental standards set forth in the Pinelands Commission's Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). All development in the Pinelands Area must comply with the minimum environmental standards of the CMP, including standards for the protection of wetlands, water quality, and threatened and endangered species. All master plans, land use ordinances, and redevelopment plans adopted by Pinelands municipalities are required to be in conformance with the CMP and must be approved by the Commission before they may take effect. The Commission's approval process includes consideration of potential inter-municipal conflicts that could arise as the result of a municipal ordinance amendment.

The Commission has experienced increased interest in the siting and development of large warehouses in the Pinelands Area, although perhaps not to the degree seen in the rest of the State. In 2021, the Commission received numerous inquiries and new applications for warehouses ranging in size from 50,000 square feet to over 1,000,000 square feet. The CMP does not permit the development of large nonresidential uses, such as warehouses, in approximately 75% of the Pinelands Area. This includes the most environmentally sensitive areas (the Preservation Area District and Forest Area) and the Agricultural Production Area, where most of the prime farmland and prime farm soils in the Pinelands Area are located. However, in other portions of the Pinelands Area, such as Regional Growth Areas, Rural Development Areas, and Pinelands Towns, municipalities can establish nonresidential zoning districts and permit a wide variety of nonresidential uses, including warehouses. An overall regional framework is thus in place to provide opportunities for the siting and development of warehouses in appropriate portions of the Pinelands Area.

Hackensack Meadowlands District

The New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA) is the Authority of the State of New Jersey responsible for the regional planning and zoning of the Hackensack Meadowlands District (District), a 30.3-square-mile area encompassing portions of fourteen municipalities in two counties, Bergen, and Hudson. The District, located approximately five miles west of New York City in northern New Jersey, is a unique landscape, composed of an amalgam of natural and developed areas bisected by the Hackensack River and crisscrossed by major transportation corridors. The network of transportation routes through the District, as well as its proximity to New York City, the Port of New York and New Jersey, Newark Liberty International Airport, and various freight rail facilities, have established the District as a key location for the siting of warehouse and distribution facilities. Transportation-related and industrial land uses cover more than one-third of the District's land area, second only in prevalence to natural areas, such as waterways and wetlands, in the District.

The NJSEA maintains a professional staff of engineers, planners, and construction code officials to administer land use and construction code regulations within the District. In accordance with the planning goals of the Hackensack Meadowlands District Master Plan Update 2020, new warehouse development in the District is directed toward brownfield and redevelopment sites, and away from natural areas. The NJSEA's review process includes the evaluation of traffic impacts of proposed warehouse uses.