

PUBLIC COMMENTS SUBMITTED AT HIGHLANDS
COUNCIL MEETING ON JANUARY 19, 2017

Date: 19 January 2017
To: New Jersey Highlands Council
From: Wilma Frey, Sr. Policy Manager, New Jersey Conservation Foundation
RE: Procedure for Considering Proposals to Amend the Highlands Regional Master Plan

1. Since these procedures are a matter of substantial interest to the public, we take issue with the proposal only having been released two days prior to today's meeting. The "Introduction" to the document states that it sets for the process the Highlands Council will follow to review and update the RMP in a manner that is consistent with the Highlands Act "and ensures robust public participation." Releasing documents of importance to the public two days prior to a Council vote is not conducive to public participation.

2. The Executive Summary states that the council will consider amendments to the RMP only after proposed changes have "ample opportunity for public comments on proposed amendments." The Introduction states that "This document sets forth the process the Highlands council will follow to review and update the RMP in a manner that is consistent with the Highlands act *and ensures robust public participation.*"

Unfortunately, the "Public Participation" as proposed (pg. 4) is inadequate. Although at least six public hearings are proposed, all but one are to be held in "various locations in the Highlands Region," plus one (or more) in Trenton. However, planning and management of land uses in the Highlands is not solely or even primarily for the benefit of Highlands residents: the major impetus of the Highlands Act was to ensure the protection of the essential Highlands water supply for the industries and the two-thirds of New Jersey's population that rely on it, most of whom reside outside of the Region. Residents from elsewhere in the State also rely on the Highlands for its wildlife, recreational, scenic and historic resources, as well as its farms and public forest lands. Therefore, it is imperative that public hearings be held in locations outside the Highlands, particularly in places that depend on the region for their water supply.

3. The Draft "Procedure" proposes that "upon the [RMP Amendment] Committee review and recommendation and the Council's approval, the draft Recommendation Report will be published on the Highlands Council website for public review and comments for a period of 30 days..." Again, 30 days is not conducive to "robust public participation." The Recommendation Report is likely to be of some length and complexity. It will deserve careful and reasoned consideration and discussion by the public. The Council "will accept written comments on all aspects, as well as suggestions for additional or different changes to the RMP..." Any proposed changes must be accompanied by not only the text of the proposed amendment, but also "a summary of how the amendment is consistent with the Highlands Act and other applicable law," and "data supporting the suggested amendment." These are truly laudable objectives and

reasonable requirements, which we appreciate and support. However, the 30-day time frame would be entirely inadequate to accomplish such tasks, and the comment period would wisely be extended to ~~60~~ days, a change that we strongly urge the Council to make.

a minimum of

4. Regarding "Review of RMP Amendment by the Committee: The Draft proposes that "any meeting of the Committee at which it is anticipated the Committee will take action on a proposed RMP amendment shall be open to the public, but the public shall not be entitled to participate or make comments at the Committee meeting." We appreciate and strongly support that the Committee meetings be open to the public; however, we urge that all the meetings of the Committee be open, so that the public can hear the discussion of items, not simply be present for a final vote, at which time there might be no discussion, but simply a vote.

Thank you for consideration of my comments.

N.J. HIGHLANDS COALITION

RESOLUTION OF CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR THE GOALS AND PURPOSES OF THE 2004 HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING ACT

WHEREAS, New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (The Highlands Act) was enacted in order to protect the State's water supplies and other significant resources and

WHEREAS, The Highlands Act was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both the New Jersey State Senate and New Jersey State Assembly; and

WHEREAS, subsequently in 2008, the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council adopted the New Jersey Highlands Regional Master Plan, and proceeded with a program for its implementation through a Plan Conformance process.

WHEREAS, (insert name of municipality) is a municipality that receives all or a portion of its drinking water from sources within the Highlands Region; and that (insert name of municipality) relies on the resources of the Highlands to meet the current and future needs of its residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the governing body of (insert name of municipality here) wishes that it be known that we strongly support the goals, policies and objectives of the 2004 Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

SIGNEES

Essex Freeholders, Essex County Environmental Commission, Belleville, Bloomfield, Caldwell, Fairfield, Maplewood, Millburn/Short Hills, Montclair E.C., Montclair, North Caldwell, Nutley, Irvington, Newark. Carteret, Cranbury E.C., Dunellen, Milltown, Metuchen, South Brunswick, Woodbridge, South Plainfield, Edison, South River, Montgomery E.C., Middlesex Twp.. Alpine, Bergen County Freeholder Board, Cliffside Park, Carlstadt, Closter, Elmwood Park, Fair Lawn, Franklin Lakes, Garfield, Glen Ridge, Harrington Park, Leonia, Montvale, Wallington, New Milford, Wood-Ridge, Paramus, Fort Lee, Clifton E.C. Hillsdale E.C., Dumont, Northvale, Demarest. Union County Freeholder Board, Cranford, Garwood, Hillside, Plainfield, Rahway, Union, Elizabeth, Springfield E.C., Kenilworth, Fanwood, Summit E.C., Scotch Plains. Winfield twp., East Hanover, Florham Park, Madison E.C., Madison, Lincoln Park. Hudson County Freeholders, East Newark, Kearny, Seacaucus, West New York, Jersey City E.C. No. Bergen, Harrison, Bayonne, Jersey City. Passaic Board of Freeholders, Clifton E.C., Haledon, North Haledon, Pompton Lakes, Totowa, Wayne, Woodland Park. Manville, North Plainfield, Watchung, Franklin E.C..Readington, Raritan., Readington E.C.. Princeton. Princeton E.C., Lawrence, Ewing, Mercer County Board of Freeholders, City of Trenton and Burlington City.