

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF JUNE 18, 2026

PRESENT

CARL J. RICHKO	)	CHAIR
MARY AMOROSO	)	COUNCIL MEMBERS
JOSEPH BASRALIAN	)	
WILLIAM KIBLER	)	
TAMMY KOOP	)	
MATTHEW OSWALD	)	
DANIEL J. VAN ABS, PhD	)	
JAMES VISIOLI	)	

VIA TELECONFERENCE:

DANIEL BUSH	)
HELEN LE FROIS	)
MELONIE MARANO	)

ABSENT:

KURT ALSTED	)	VICE CHAIR
TIMOTHY DOUGHERTY	)	
BRUCE JAMES	)	
KELLEY SMITH	)	

CALL TO ORDER 219TH meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council was called to order at 4:00 pm at the Highlands Council Offices in Chester, NJ.

ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken. Members Alstede, Dougherty, James, and Smith were absent. All other Council Members were present. Members Bush, Le Frois and Marano were present via teleconference. *The following staff members were present: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Neda Hartman, Sarah Friend, Tom Tagliareni, Carole Dicton, Diana Swiderski, and Annette Tagliareni. Present via teleconference: Jill Denyes, Deputy Attorney General's (DAG's) office and Azeem Chaudry, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU).*

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT was recited.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chair Richko announced there was no Chairman's Report and added that it was Administrative Assistant Diana Swiderski's debut and wished her good luck.

Member Le Frois was present at 4:02 pm.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Spinelli reported on the following items:

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1. Drought continues. Entire Highlands region is still in a moderate to severe drought, for a total of 27 months now. A long-term drought has serious impacts on agriculture and drinking water supplies, and ground water levels can take years to reverse. It is not a demand problem, but a supply problem that can best be addressed by properly funding the Highlands Council so we may do what is necessary to provide an adequate supply of drinking water to 70% of the state.
2. Recent meeting with American Farmland Trust (AFT) on June 16, 2026, which resulted in an exciting proposal regarding supporting sustainable agriculture within the Highlands region and the state. Partnering with AFT would offer us the benefit of having an agricultural specialist on staff, which is something Mr. Spinelli has been advocating for some time.
3. Open Space & Recreation Plan continues to move forward. We will have a version and presentation ready for the Council most likely at our July meeting.
4. Climate project data collection and analysis continue to move forward.
5. Mr. Spinelli and Planning Manager Maryjude Haddock-Weiler presented at the New Jersey American Planning Association Conference on June 12, 2026, which was very well received.
6. Met with representatives of Bernards Township, a 100% planning area town, on June 16, 2026, to discuss plan conformance.
7. Two pending bills are currently impacting the Highlands. One is a new Affordable Housing bill that would provide for the use of religious and non-profit properties to be used for affordable housing. It was amended to include a provision to respect the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The second bill is a proposal to provide enhanced school funding to municipalities in the Highlands region.
8. Difficult budget year for New Jersey. The Highlands Council is still operating on a 2011 budget. A modest additional investment is needed to add critical staff and access existing sources of funding for Open Space Preservation and Land Stewardship.
9. Committee meetings will be scheduled before our July Council meeting to discuss our Monitoring Program and Recommendations Report (MPRR), redevelopment procedures based on Council's concerns during our May meeting, as well as a new quarterly grant program.
10. Mr. Spinelli and Highlands Council science staff have been invited to join NJDEP Commissioner Ed Potosnak and his staff for a tour of Sparta Mountain.
11. Personnel – Offers were made to two candidates regarding open positions for Environmental Specialist 2 (Resource Management Specialist/Forester) and a part-time IT position. We are aiming for a start date during the week of July 27, 2026.

At this time, Chair Richko asked if any Council members had questions or comments on the Executive Director's report.

There were no questions/comments.

Member Van Abs was present at 4:04 pm.

APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MINUTES OF MAY 21, 2026

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Minutes of May 21, 2026.

Member Oswald made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Minutes of May 21, 2026. Member Kibler seconded it.

A roll call was taken. The Highlands Council Minutes of May 21, 2026, were APPROVED 11-0.

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PLAN CONFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Resolution – Approval of Petition for Plan Conformance and Highlands Center Designation for the Town of Boonton, Morris County

Committee Chair Kibler reported that Council staff will provide an overview. Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager, provided a presentation on the Town of Boonton's Petition for Plan Conformance and Highlands Center Designation for Council's consideration. The presentation may be found on Council's website:
https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calendar/2026/06_june/HCMtg_jun2026.pdf

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Kibler moved the resolution. Member Visioli seconded it.

At this time, Chair Richko acknowledged representatives attending today's meeting on behalf of this application.

Town of Boonton Mayor James Lynch – Mayor Lynch acknowledged Town Council President, Ben Weisman and Town Planner, Chris Colley. Mayor Lynch expressed his excitement and appreciation for this opportunity and hopes for the motion to pass.

Council Comment

There was no Council comment.

Public Comment

Julia Somers, New Jersey Highlands Coalition – Ms. Somers congratulated the Town of Boonton and mentioned there are many things the town can take advantage of in this endorsement process with the Council.

A roll call was taken. The Resolution was APPROVED 11-0.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

There was no old/new business.

Chair Richko opened the meeting for public comment and noted the 3-minute limit.

Public Comment

Mike King, Phillipsburg Riverview Organization – Mr. King stated his opposition to Council's approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Guy Citron, Tewksbury Township – Mr. Citron stated his opposition to Council's approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Neil Moorcraft, Bloomsbury Coalition Against Warehouse Sprawl – Mr. Moorcraft stated his opposition to Council's approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

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Raquel Torres, Tewksbury – Ms. Torres stated her opposition to Council’s approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Alicia Weigel, Tewksbury – Ms. Weigel stated her opposition to Council’s approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Anne Rogers, Phillipsburg – Ms. Rogers stated her opposition to Council’s approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Susan Sica, Alpha – Ms. Sica stated her opposition to Council’s approval of the Lopatcong Redevelopment Area during the May meeting.

Member Kibler made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Oswald seconded it. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 pm.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council.

Date: 7/16/2026 Name: Diana Swiderski
Diana Swiderski, Administrative Assistant

Vote on the Approval of Minutes	Motion	Second	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
Councilmember Alstede			√			
Councilmember Amoroso			√			
Councilmember Basralian			√			
Councilmember Bush	√		√			
Councilmember Dougherty						√
Councilmember James						√
Councilmember Kibler			√			
Councilmember Koop			√			
Councilmember LeFrois			√			
Councilmember Marano						
Councilmember Oswald		√	√			
Councilmember Smith					√	
Councilmember Van Abs						
Councilmember Visioli			√			
Chairman Richko			√			