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DRAFT CONSISTENCY REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE AMENDED PETITION FOR HIGHLANDS CENTER DESIGNATION

Prepared by the State of New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and
Planning Council in Support of the Highlands Regional Master Plan

APRIL 16, 2026

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Borough of Bernardsville Amended Petition for Highlands Center Designation
Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

INTRODUCTION

The Borough of Bernardsville is a 100% Planning Area municipality located in Somerset County. The New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (“Highlands Council”) approved the Borough of Bernardsville’s Petition for Plan Conformance by adoption of Resolution #2024-34 on December 12, 2024.

The Borough’s Initial Assessment Report (IAR) prepared in September 2023 identified a preliminary Highlands Center boundary. However, the Center designation was not included in the Borough’s December 2024 Petition for Plan Conformance. The Highlands Council approval of the Borough’s petition identified a Highlands Center Feasibility Study as a plan conformance task in the Implementation Plan and Schedule (IPS).

In August 2025, the Highlands Council approved the Borough’s scope of work to prepare a “Highlands Center Feasibility Study.” The Borough completed the feasibility study in November 2025 with a request that the Highlands Council amend the previously approved Petition for Plan Conformance to include the Highlands Center. The feasibility study can be found in Appendix C.

The feasibility study proposes a Highlands Center to focus future development and redevelopment in the Borough’s transit-accessible downtown and surrounding area, while safeguarding the Borough’s surrounding natural resources from development. See Appendix A for a map of the proposed Highlands Center. Bernardsville became New Jersey’s 37th Transit Village in August 2025.

This draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report (“Report”) has been prepared by Highlands Council Staff for consideration by the Highlands Council as to the consistency of the Center Designation with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (“RMP”). The Staff recommendation is for approval of the amendment to the Petition to incorporate the Highlands Center Designation as proposed by the Borough.

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REPORT SUMMARY

Municipality: Borough of Bernardsville, Somerset County

Date of Original Petition: September 23, 2024

**Date of Amended
Petition Submission:** November 21, 2025

**Highlands Center
Proposal:** Downtown and surrounding area

Staff Recommendation: Approval subject to conditions

A. REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUBMITTALS

1. Highlands Center Feasibility Study, Borough of Bernardsville, November 2025 (Appendix C).

B. SUBSTANTIVE REVIEW

The goals of the proposed Highlands Center are designed to strengthen the Borough's downtown, advance affordable housing, and protect resources while capitalizing on existing infrastructure and redevelopment opportunities. The stated goals of the Center study are:

- **Goal 1:** Catalyze Economic Activity in the Downtown through Strategic Partnerships and Redevelopment
- **Goal 2:** Promote Bernardsville's Cultural, Natural, and Civic Assets to Attract Visitors and Investment
- **Goal 3:** Use Zoning and Redevelopment Tools to Attract Context-Sensitive Investment
- **Goal 4:** Encourage Mixed-Use, Walkable, and Compact Development Patterns
- **Goal 5:** Expand the Supply of Inclusionary and Affordable Housing to Meet Regional Needs
- **Goal 6:** Align Infrastructure Investment with Targeted Growth Areas
- **Goal 7:** Improve and Expand Access to Recreational and Open Space Resources
- **Goal 8:** Enhance Multimodal Transportation Networks and Safety
- **Goal 9:** Protect Critical Environmental Features Within the Center and at its Edges

The Borough's goals for Center Designation are consistent with the goals, policies, and objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP). As a regional center, Bernardsville is well-positioned to provide housing, transportation, jobs, and services for the surrounding areas. Additionally, the proposed Borough center offers several redevelopment opportunities and contains relatively few environmental constraints.

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Highlands Center Designation

A Highlands Center is an area within a municipality, or an entire municipality, where development and redevelopment is encouraged and fostered. Highlands Centers are intended to support economic balance in the Highlands Region, providing for sustainable economic growth, while protecting critical natural and cultural resources.

With the implementation of a Highlands Center, the Land Use Capability Zones within the Center are replaced by zones that result from a comprehensive planning process, designed to identify the goals and best uses for the lands within the Center. The process is community-driven, allows flexibility in creating a tailored development plan for the Center, and should result in a healthy, active community with opportunities for growth and development consistent with the goals and principles of the Highlands Act and the RMP. Lands within a Highlands Center benefit from the detailed site-specific planning associated with center planning. The concept of Highlands Centers is similar to State Plan Centers but are not subject to expiration. Highlands Centers remain intact unless a specific action by the municipality causes their elimination. Like other land within the municipality, Highlands Centers may receive grant funding to implement important aspects of the center plan.

Upon approval to amend the Borough's Petition for Plan Conformance to include a Highlands Center designation, Bernardsville will undertake the appropriate center planning steps to develop a land use plan specific to the relevant needs and regional opportunities within the Borough. As noted in the Highlands Center Designation Procedures, the process of center planning is intended to be community driven and public outreach is a critical component of the process. Ultimately the Highlands Center will adopt zoning and regulations that are in alignment with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

Land Use Capability Zones

The Land Use Capability Zones (LUCZ) played a foundational role in shaping the proposed Highlands Center boundary for Bernardsville. The proposed Center boundary includes significant portions of the Existing Community Zone, aligning with areas that are generally more suitable for infill and redevelopment and generally excludes areas within the Existing Community Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone. No areas within the Conservation Zone are included in the proposed Center. See Appendix A for a map of the proposed Highlands Center with the underlying LUCZ.

The area surrounding the quarry is designated Lake Community Sub-Zone and Protection Zone. However, the current level of disturbance and proximity to existing community infrastructure are why it is included in the proposed Center area.

Environmental Resources

The feasibility study included a review of environmental resources within the Borough. The location of environmental resources helped delineate and support the proposed Highlands Center boundary. The proposed Highlands Center boundary largely excludes both severely and moderately constrained steep slope areas and critical habitat and avoids C-1 waterways and prime groundwater recharge areas.

Historic Resources

Bernardsville Borough is rich in historic and cultural resources, which are essential components of the community's identity and heritage. The proposed Highlands Center boundary incorporates the entirety of the Olcott Avenue Historic District, which is closely tied to the downtown core. It also includes the portion of

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the Gladstone Branch of the DL&W Railroad Historic District nearest to the downtown area.

The proposed boundary purposefully excludes the other historic districts, including the Morristown National Historical Park, Hardscrabble Road, and Pleasant Valley Historic Districts, as these are located on the northeastern and northwestern edges of the Borough, beyond the feasible scale of the Highlands Center.

Zoning and Land Use

At the heart of the Highlands Center is Bernardsville's Downtown, which includes the entirety of the Downtown Core (D-Core), Downtown Corridor (D-Co), Downtown Claremont (D-Cl), and Downtown Gateway (D-G) subdistricts. These areas represent the Borough's civic, commercial, and cultural center, and they offer the most intensive mix of land uses, pedestrian activity, and redevelopment potential. Surrounding this core, the boundary incorporates the Borough's most concentrated residential neighborhoods. The proposed boundary also includes Bernardsville's key redevelopment sites and most of the Borough's affordable housing projects.

Low-density residential zones and environmentally sensitive areas, primarily located on larger lots without utility access, were intentionally excluded from the Center to ensure future growth occurs where it is most efficient and sustainable.

Transportation

The Borough is serviced by NJ Transit Rail service at the Bernardsville station via the Gladstone branch which provides direct trains into New York Penn Station. Commuter parking is provided at the station. In addition, Lakeland Bus Lines provide daily commuter service to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. In August 2025, the Borough was designated as the 37th Transit Village in the state. Bernardsville's objective with its Transit Village designation is to create a pedestrian-friendly, vibrant downtown.

Critical Infrastructure

A critical factor influencing the delineation of the proposed Highlands Center boundary is the availability and capacity of municipal infrastructure.

Sewer Service Area – The sewer service area serves as the primary organizing framework for defining the Highlands Center boundary. The proposed boundary includes nearly the entirety of Bernardsville's designated sewer service area. The Bernardsville Sewer Department provides service for almost 1,600 residences (approximately 55%) in the Borough. The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) has a permitted flow of 0.8 million gallons per day (MGD). The average flow is 550,000 gallons per day, leaving an available capacity of 250,000 gallons per day.

Public Water – The proposed Highlands Center boundary also encompasses most of the Borough's public water service area. Water is provided by New Jersey American Water – Short Hills System. This is a public community water system consisting of 25 wells, 4 surface water intakes, 12 purchased ground water sources, and 3 purchased surface water source(s). This system serves 30 municipalities.

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C. CONSISTENCY DETERMINATION

In accordance with the adopted Plan Conformance Procedures (2019), the following criteria are used to determine if a proposed center is consistent with the goals, policies, and objectives of the RMP. Findings related to each criteria are provided below.

- 1) The proposed Highlands Center is located in an area with sufficient water availability, water supply, wastewater, and transportation capacity and is appropriate for increased land use intensity;
 - 2) The proposed Highlands Center is consistent with the resource protection standards of the Regional Master Plan, in accordance with the intent and purpose of the Highlands Act;
 - 3) The proposed Highlands Center is consistent with the Smart Growth and Low Impact Development (LID) standards of the Regional Master Plan; and
 - 4) There is a need for land uses within the community that may be met by the Highlands Center, particularly those that complement local and regional (or sub-regional) socio-economic needs, provide for affordable housing, increased transit opportunities, and the potential use of Highlands Development Credits.
- 1) Sufficient Infrastructure Finding – The Borough of Bernardsville has sufficient existing infrastructure capacity regarding water & wastewater service areas, transportation, and other resources to serve existing development and the approved development projects in the proposed center designation.

One of the goals of the Center Designation is to align infrastructure investment with targeted growth areas. To achieve this goal, the Borough will prioritize infrastructure upgrades, especially water, sewer, and stormwater systems, within the Highlands Center to accommodate projected growth, improve system reliability, and support compact, efficient development patterns.

The Borough will coordinate with water and sewer providers to plan for capacity and upgrades and pursue infrastructure funding through the NJ Water Bank. The Borough will also prioritize projects within the Center boundary in the municipality's adopted Capital Improvement Plan.

The Borough will conduct a Complete Streets assessment to improve pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure and enhance transit access and walkability near the train station and along major corridors.

The Borough will also update the Open Space and Recreation Plan to identify gaps within the Highlands Center and improve trail connectivity and park access from surrounding neighborhoods.

- 2) Resource Protection Standards Finding – As noted above, the Borough has limited natural resource constraints within the proposed Highlands Center boundary. The boundary strategically concentrates future development and redevelopment within areas that are less environmentally constrained, ensuring

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that growth does not encroach on the Borough's most ecologically sensitive lands. Additional resource protection standards will be incorporated as necessary into the land use regulations for the Center.

- 3) Smart Growth/Low Impact Standards Finding – The downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods serve as a commercial and civic center for the municipality and surrounding area. The designation and implementation of downtown Bernardsville as a Highlands Center will further the smart growth and low impact development standards of the Regional Master Plan, while safeguarding the Borough's more rural and environmentally sensitive areas from development.
- 4) Community Land Use Needs Finding – The proposed Center incorporates the Bernardsville Train Station and the surrounding area, which was designated a Transit Village by NJ Transit in August 2025. This walkable and well-served Transit Village is an ideal location for center-based development and redevelopment in the Highlands Region. The proposed Highlands Center includes three designated Redevelopment Plan areas, three affordable housing zones, and two proposed 100% affordable housing projects that will provide 105 affordable units.

D. STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND CONDITIONS

Based on the components of the Highlands Center Feasibility Study described above, Highlands Council staff recommends that designation of the Highlands Center in Bernardsville be approved and incorporated into the Borough's Petition for Plan Conformance as an amendment with conditions as outlined below and listed in the updated Implementation Plan and Schedule (IPS) (Appendix B). Bernardsville will be considered a fully conforming municipality after adoption of an approved Master Plan Highlands Element and Re-examination Report and the adoption of a land development ordinance that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and the Highlands Act. The Highlands Council is available to provide technical assistance and guidance through the adoption of any of the below listed plans. Other conformance tasks may arise in future years, such as updates to Master Plan elements. The Highlands Council is committed to providing financial support for all Plan Conformance activities.

- 1) **Approval of Highlands ERI.** The Borough shall review the Highlands Interactive Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) and update the Borough's 2019 ERI Report to include Highlands resources as necessary. The ERI functions as the basis for development of natural resources protection ordinances and will inform development of the Master Plan Highlands Element and Re-examination Report. Upon Highlands Council approval of the ERI, the municipal environmental commission shall provide for and complete the required process of formal approval. At the conclusion of the process, a copy of the minutes of the meeting(s) or resolution shall be provided to the Highlands Council.
- 2) **Center Planning.** The Borough of Bernardsville shall undertake the full process of center planning for the designated Center. As noted above, center planning is intended to be community driven with a significant public outreach component. Upon completion of the center planning, relevant master plan updates and zoning updates shall be adopted.

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- 3) **Adoption of Approved Re-examination Report, Master Plan Highlands Element, and Highlands Center Master Plan Element.** The Borough shall prepare the Highlands Master Plan Re-examination Report, the Master Plan Highlands Element, and the Highlands Center Master Plan Element and submit it to the Highlands Council for final approval. Upon receipt of final Highlands Council approval, the municipal planning board shall arrange for the required process of scheduling, notice, public hearing, consideration, and formal adoption of the documents by the municipal planning board. At the conclusion of the process, certified copies of the adopted documents shall be provided to the Highlands Council.
- 4) **Adoption of Highlands Conformance Ordinance and Highlands Center Land Use Ordinances.** The Borough shall adopt the Highlands Conformance Ordinance, implementing the Land Use Capability Zones of the Highlands Regional Master Plan outside the Highlands Center along with other Highlands resource protections. Adoption of the Highlands Conformance Ordinance also meets the requirement for the adoption of a Planning Area Petition Ordinance as required under Section 15 of the Highlands Act. The Highlands Center Land Use Ordinance implements the Highlands Center Plan. The ordinance may include land use designations, densities, and design standards.
- 5) **Preparation and Adoption of Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.** On June 26, 2025, the Borough adopted a municipal Housing Element and Fair Share Plan in accordance with the requirements of the Fair Housing Act (N.J.S.A. 52:27D-301 et seq.) and Municipal Land Use Law. In accordance with the Fair Housing Act, all newly constructed residential development within the Highlands Region is required to reserve for occupancy by low- or moderate-income households at least 20 percent of the residential units constructed. As the 20% requirement is found in the Fair Housing Act, not the Highlands Act, all municipalities located in the Highlands Region are responsible for the 20 percent requirement, irrespective of plan conformance status or if the project is exempt from the Highlands Act.
- 6) **Stormwater Management Plan.** The Borough shall revise and adopt a municipal Stormwater Management Plan that includes: a) Highlands-specific amendments; b) revisions required by the Stormwater Management Rules at N.J.A.C. 7:8; and c) Stormwater Mitigation Plan. Additional work under the Program to include requirements of the current Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit. This may include: ordinance(s) revision and adoption; stormwater facilities mapping; new/updated storage and maintenance plans; training activities; and development of a Watershed Improvement Plan.
- 7) **Water Use and Conservation Management Plan.** In collaboration with the Highlands Council, the Borough shall undertake completion and adoption of a municipal wide Water Use and Conservation Management Plan.

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- 8) **Stream Corridor Protection/Restoration Plan.** The Borough will complete a Stream Corridor Protection/Restoration Plan for the Mine Brook that will be used as a basis for development review and restoration activities.

E. INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

In accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA), the Highlands Council provided a copy of the Borough of Bernardsville's amended Petition for Plan Conformance to the OPA for comment. OPA had no formal comment and supports approval of the Petition.

F. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report was posted to the Highlands Council website and made available at the Highlands Council offices in Chester, NJ, for review and comment by the general public between December 22, 2025 and January 22, 2026. Three comments were received. The comment/response document is attached to this document, at Appendix D.












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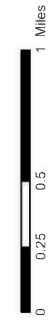
APPENDIX A

MAPS OF THE PROPOSED HIGHLANDS CENTER BOUNDARY
Amended Petition for Center Designation
Bernardsville Borough, Somerset County

Figure 1: Highlands Center Boundary

Bernardsville Borough

-  Highlands Center
 -  Municipal Boundary
 -  Lakes Greater Than 10 Acres
 -  Parcel Boundaries
- Roads
-  Interstates
 -  US Highways
 -  State Highways
 -  County Highways
 -  Local Roads
 -  Alleys
 -  Interstate Ramps



Map Created: 12/17/2025

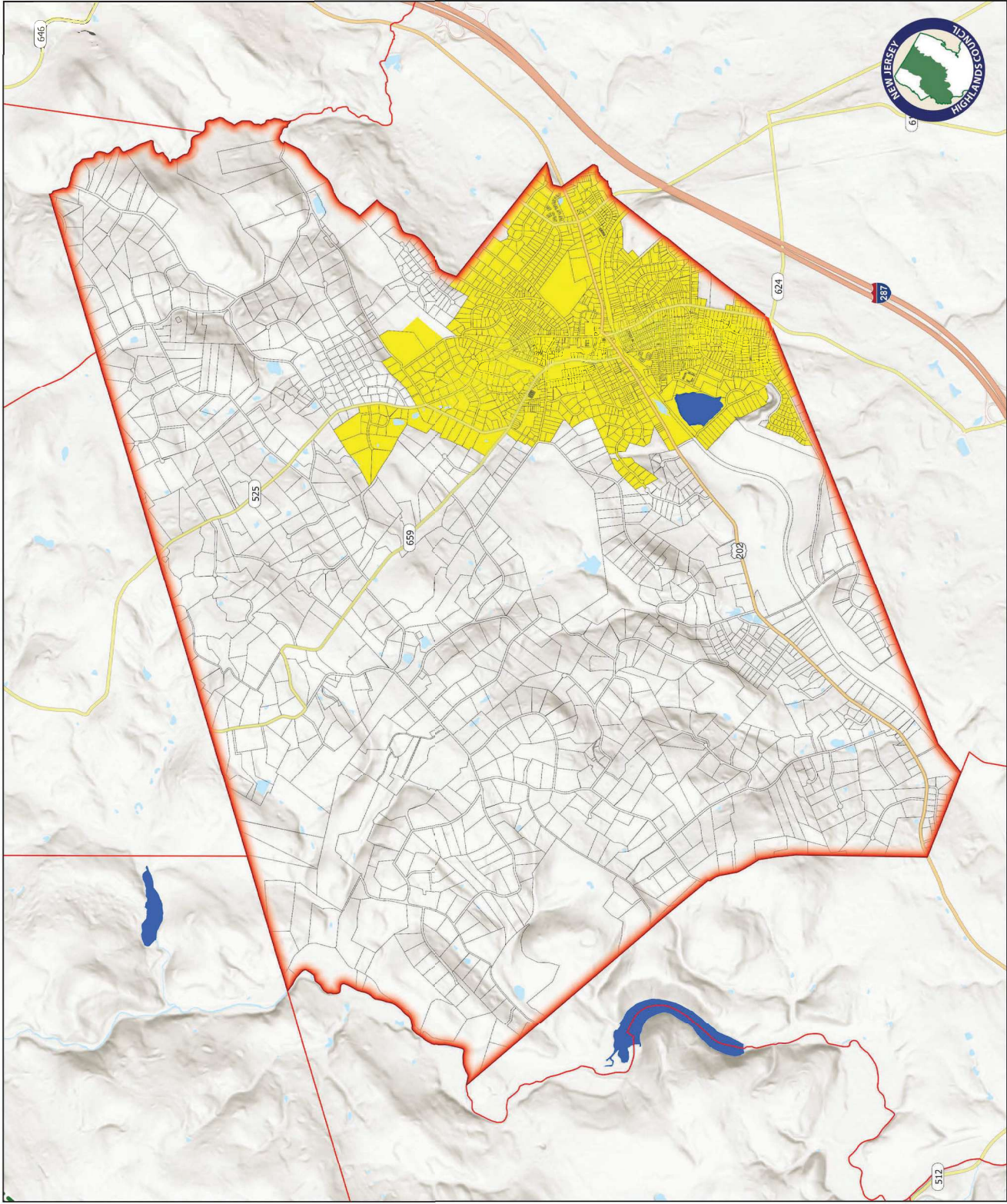
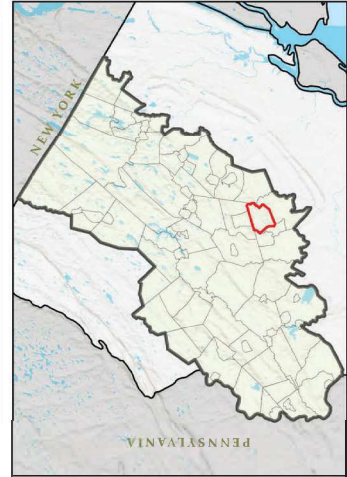
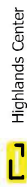


Figure 2 Highlands Center with Underlying Land Use Capability Zones

Bernardsville Borough



Highlands Center

Land Use Capability Zones

Protection Zone

Existing Community Zone

Land Use Capability Sub-Zones

Conservation - Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone

Existing Community - Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone

Lake Community Sub-Zone

Municipal Boundary

Lakes Greater Than 10 Acres

Parcel Boundaries

Roads

Interstates

US Highways

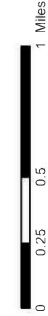
State Highways

County Highways

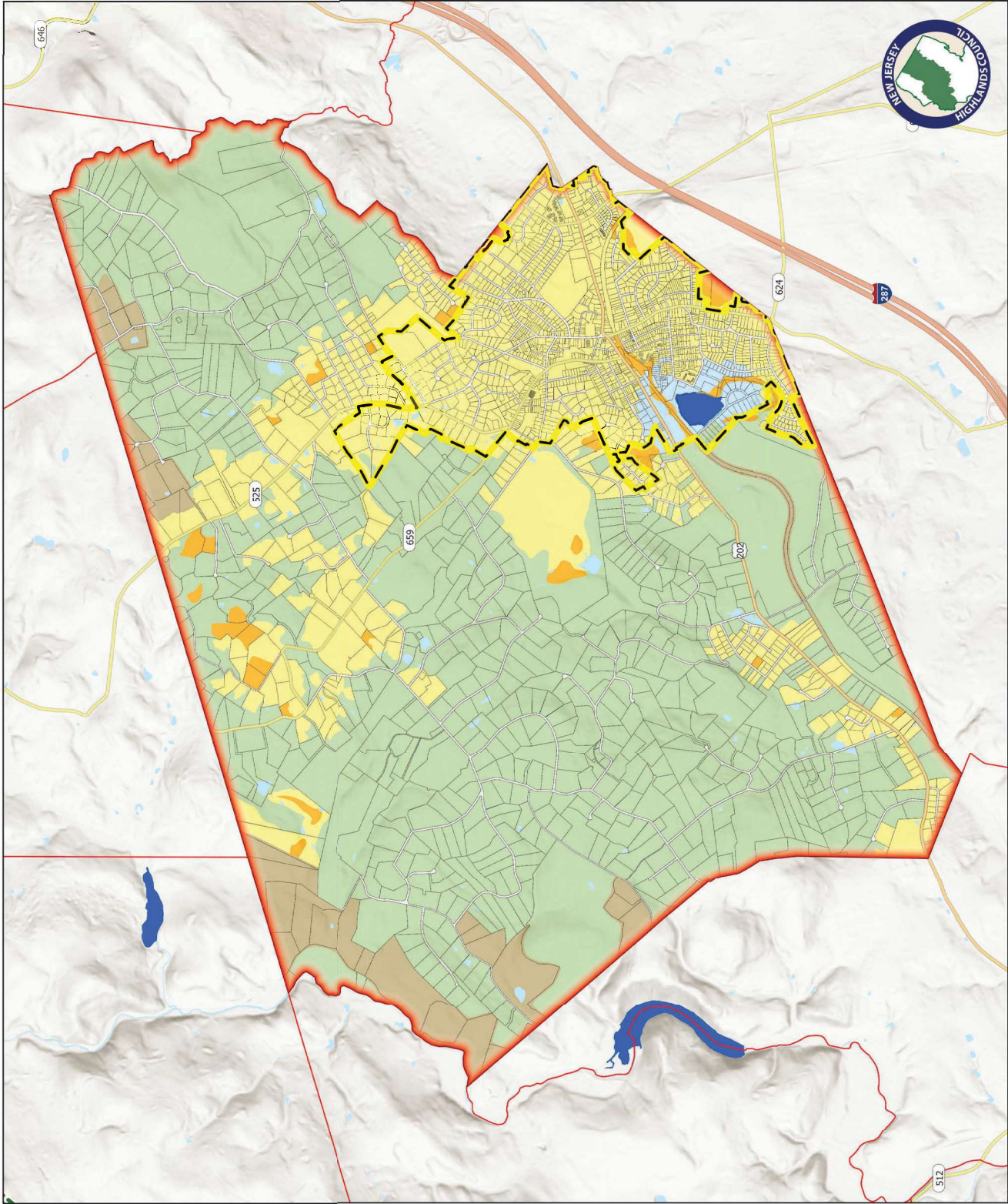
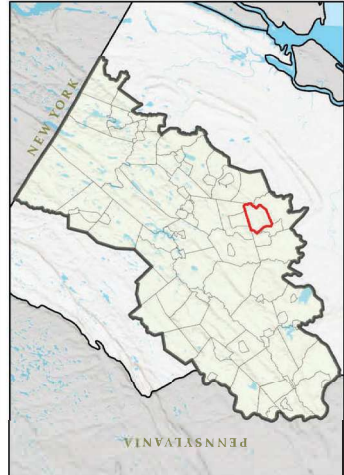
Local Roads

Alleys

Interstate Ramps



Map Created: 12/17/2025



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APPENDIX B

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND SCHEDULE
Amended Petition for Center Designation
Bernardsville Borough, Somerset County

Borough of Bernardsville, Somerset County, New Jersey
Highlands Implementation Plan and Schedule

PLAN CONFORMANCE TASK	Proposed Cost Fiscal Year 2026	Future Projects (requires future HC Approval)	Status and Comments
Highlands Interactive Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI)	\$ 3,000.00		Review Highlands Interactive ERI, propose amendments to the Borough's 2019 ERI as necessary, and adopt.
Highlands Center Planning	\$ 30,000.00		The Borough will undertake the appropriate center planning steps to develop a land use plan specific to the relevant needs and regional opportunities within Bernardsville. The center planning will be community driven and incorporate extensive public outreach.
Reexamination Report, Highlands Element, and Highlands Center Element of Municipal Master Plan	\$ 5,000.00		Preparation and adoption of Highlands element and re-examination report to ensure the Borough's Master Plan is aligned with the Highlands RMP
Highlands Land Use Ordinances			Adoption of Highlands Conformance Ordinance serves to protect municipal resources; Adoption of Highlands Center Ordinance implements the Center
Highlands Conformance Ordinance / Highlands Center Ordinance		TBD	
Exemption Ordinance	\$ 500.00		Attend training provided by the Highlands Council; Adopt ordinance to set forth the requirements by which the municipality may issue Highlands Act Exemption Determinations
Housing Element and Fair Share Plan		TBD	Housing Element and Fair Share Plan adopted June 26, 2025
Municipal Master Plan Elements (as applicable)			
Land Use Plan Element		TBD	Update to include a climate change related hazard vulnerability assessment and to reflect Highlands Center designation
Circulation Plan Element / Complete Streets Assessment		TBD	IAR note - Last completed in 2004, needs revisions to bring it to current standards Center Feasibility Study - Conduct a Complete Streets assessment
Conservation Plan		TBD	IAR note - Contained in the ERI (2019), may need updating to Highlands RMP Standards.
Utility Plan		TBD	IAR note - Last completed in 2004, needs revisions to bring it to current standards
Farmland Preservation Plan		TBD	IAR note - Contained in the ERI (2019), may need updating to Highlands RMP Standards.
Open Space and Recreation Plan		TBD	Center Feasibility Study action item - focus on gaps, improve trail connectivity, and park access
Sustainable Economic Development Plan		TBD	
Historic Preservation Plan Element		TBD	IAR note - Some references in the 2004 Master Plan, walking tours were established in 2017, formal plan is still outstanding
Zoning Map Update		TBD	Update municipal zoning map to reflect Highlands Center Designation and Land Use Capability Zones (LUCZ)
Resource Management Plans and Programs			
Stream Corridor Protection/Restoration Plan		TBD	To be used as a basis for both development review and restoration activities
Water Use and Conservation Management Plan		TBD	To ensure efficient water use through conservation and Low Impact Development, and to avoid the creation of new deficits in Net Water Availability
Municipal Stormwater Management Plan	\$ 25,000.00		Preparation of Stormwater Management Plan including MS4 Requirements
Estimated Subtotal	\$ 58,000.00		

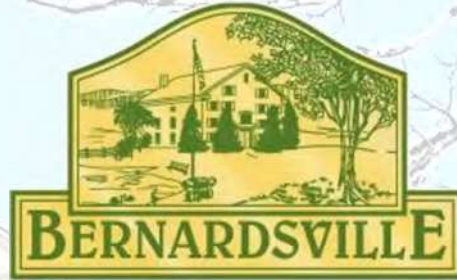
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APPENDIX C

HIGHLANDS CENTER FEASIBILITY STUDY
Bernardsville Borough, Somerset County
November 21, 2025

HIGHLANDS CENTER FEASIBILITY STUDY

BERNARDSVILLE BOROUGH, SOMERSET COUNTY



November 21, 2025



J Caldwell
& Associates, LLC
Community Planning Consultants

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Mary Jane Canose | Mayor
Christine Zamarra | Council President
Rich Traynor | Council Member
Jena McCredie | Council Member
Jeffrey Roos | Council Member
Al Ribeiro | Council Member
Ross Zazzarino | Council Member

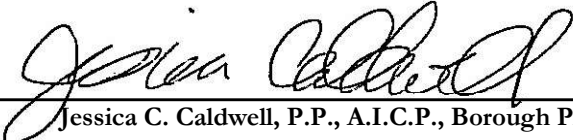
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This study was paid for by a grant from the New Jersey Highlands Council.
The original of this report was signed and sealed pursuant to N.J.A.C. Section 13:41-1.3.b:



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1. Introduction

Location Overview

Bernardsville Borough is a historic and picturesque community located in northern Somerset County, New Jersey. Known for its rich history, natural beauty, and small-town character, Bernardsville lies within the Somerset Hills (a subregion of the Raritan Valley) and is surrounded by several other historic communities, including Peapack-Gladstone Borough, Far Hills Borough, and Bernards Township. Located along the Gladstone Branch of the Morris and Essex NJ Transit Rail lines, Bernardsville is 35 miles northeast of New York City. Bernardsville has a historic and small-town charm, shaped largely by its landscape, heritage, and longstanding environmental values.

Bernardsville Borough is located within New Jersey's Highlands Region, a federal- and State-recognized area of critical ecological and hydrological importance that spans parts of seven counties and 88 municipalities in northern New Jersey. The Highlands Region provides vital drinking water to over 70 percent of New Jersey's population. It contains some of the state's most sensitive natural resources, including forested ridgelines, steep slopes, wetlands, and critical wildlife habitats. Bernardsville's position within this region underscores its role in regional conservation efforts and highlights the importance of sustainable planning and land use practices in shaping its future.

Highlands Plan Conformance

Bernardsville Borough is entirely located within the Planning Area of the New Jersey Highlands Region, as defined by the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act. Unlike municipalities in the Preservation Area, where stricter regulatory oversight applies, towns in the Planning Area retain full local authority over land use and zoning decisions. However, municipalities like Bernardsville may choose to voluntarily align their local plans and ordinances with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) through a process known as Plan Conformance. Bernardsville received Highlands Council approval of its Petition for Plan Conformance in 2024, reflecting the Borough's interest in thoughtful, conservation-minded planning that supports both environmental stewardship and community goals. By pursuing Plan Conformance, the Borough aims to ensure that its future development is compatible with regional efforts to protect resources, while also addressing local needs for economic vitality, infrastructure planning, and quality of life.

Highlands Center Designation

A key element of Plan Conformance for municipalities in the Planning Area is the opportunity to pursue a Highlands Center Designation. This designation is intended to focus development and redevelopment in areas that are already served by infrastructure, such as sewer and water service, and that can accommodate growth without compromising sensitive environmental features. For Bernardsville, a Highlands Center Designation would formalize designating a strategic area within the Borough, such as its downtown, which is a transit-accessible zone, where smart growth principles can be applied to guide investment, revitalization, and economic development. Bernardsville Borough became New Jersey's 37th Transit Village in August 2025. The designation centers on the Bernardsville Station, served by the Gladstone Branch of NJ Transit's Morris and Essex Rail Lines. The Highlands Center designation proposes to focus future development and redevelopment in this transit-friendly downtown, while safeguarding the Borough's surrounding natural resources from sprawl development outside of the Center. Through a Highlands Center designation, Bernardsville would gain access to planning support and technical assistance from the Highlands Council, helping to implement a shared vision that balances growth, sustainability, and the Borough's distinct community character.

2. Planning Context

Bernardsville Borough Planning Programs and Policies

Bernardsville Master Plan

Bernardsville Borough adopted a Master Plan in 2000, with an Amendment in 2004. The Master Plan was reexamined in 2017 and 2020, and a Land Use Element Amendment was adopted in 2020. Goals and objectives listed in the 2000 Master Plan, as amended in 2004, which the 2017 and 2020 Reexamination Reports affirmed, are as follows:

2020 Master Plan Land Use Element Amendment

Goals and objectives listed in the 2020 Land Use Element Amendment (and the 2017 and 2020 Reexamination Reports), which are of particular relevance to downtown development, are as follows:

To promote the downtown as the commercial and civic center of Bernardsville;

To enhance the physical characteristics of the downtown through sign, façade, and streetscape improvements;

To encourage architectural design that is consistent with the historical character of Bernardsville;

To create a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere in the downtown; and

To provide sufficient parking in the downtown.

Additionally, the following goal was added in the 2020 Land Use Element Amendment:

To provide affordable housing opportunities to low and moderate-income families in a manner that is consistent with the borough's obligation as identified in the Borough's adopted 2018 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.¹

2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

The Borough prepared an update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan on October 26, 2016, which included updated goals for the open space program. The following updated goals reflect the Borough's commitment to protecting its landscape and the resources upon which it relies for its community's health, recreation, and quality of life:

Promote the permanent conservation of the Borough's unique and exceptional scenic, agricultural, and recreational lands;

Preserve the integrity of the Borough's sensitive environmental resources and ecosystems;

Provide opportunities for "active" (facility-based) and "passive" (resource-based) recreational facilities to meet the needs of present and future Borough residents;

Protect the ecological integrity of the Borough's landscape by stewarding and managing open space and recreation lands to ensure their long-term viability, health, and sustainability; and

In partnership with others, support the protection of greenways and blueways to expand contiguous open space lands.

¹ The Borough has since adopted a 2025 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, prepared by J. Caldwell & Associates, LLC, and adopted June 26, 2025.

2005 Stormwater Management Plan

The Borough adopted a Municipal Stormwater Management Plan (MSWMP) to address stormwater-related impacts. The MSWMP addressed groundwater recharge, stormwater quantity, and stormwater quality impacts by incorporating stormwater design and performance standards for new major development. These standards are intended to minimize the adverse impact of stormwater runoff on water quality and water quantity and the loss of groundwater recharge that provides baseflow in receiving water bodies. The MSWMP describes long-term operation and maintenance measures for existing and future stormwater facilities. Furthermore, the MSWMP stated that a "build-out" analysis will be included in the future, which will be based upon existing zoning and land available for development. The goals of the MSWMP are as follows:

Reduce flood damage, including damage to life and property;

Minimize, to the extent practical, any increase in stormwater runoff from any new development;

Reduce soil erosion from any development or construction project;

Assure the adequacy of existing and proposed culverts and bridges, and other instream structures;

Maintain groundwater recharge;

Prevent, to the greatest extent feasible, any increase in non-point pollution;

Maintain the integrity of stream channels for their biological functions and drainage capabilities;

Minimize pollutants in stormwater from new and existing development to restore, enhance and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the waters of the state, to protect public health, to safeguard fish and aquatic life and scenic and ecological values and to enhance the domestic, municipal, recreational, industrial and other uses of water; and

Protect public safety through the proper design and operation of stormwater basins.

Highlands Planning Area Conformance History

Bernardsville Borough is located entirely within the Highlands Planning Area, where conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) is voluntary. In pursuit of alignment with the RMP, the Borough completed an Initial Assessment on September 29, 2023, prepared by Van Cleef Engineering. This assessment served as a foundational step in the Borough's Highlands Plan Conformance process, providing a comprehensive review of local conditions and identifying opportunities for consistency with the Highlands goals and regulations. The Initial Assessment identified a preliminary proposed Highlands Center, of which the boundary has been expanded and amended as part of this Highlands Center Feasibility Study.

As part of the conformance process, Bernardsville submitted its petition for conformance to the Highlands Council, which was subsequently approved in 2024. This formal recognition demonstrates the Borough's commitment to harmonizing its land use policies and planning efforts with the objectives of the RMP.

The Borough has engaged in community involvement as part of the Highlands Plan Conformance process. The Highlands Initial Assessment Report was made available for public review through the Highlands Council and Borough channels, allowing stakeholders and residents to provide feedback.

The goals and objectives in Bernardsville's Master Plan, including the 2020 Land Use Element Amendment, closely align with the RMP's emphasis on environmental protection, sustainable growth, and the preservation of community character. The Proposed Highlands Center boundary and its supporting policies reflect these shared priorities, underscoring Bernardsville's dedication to responsible development, infrastructure alignment, and natural resource stewardship.

3. Highlands Environmental Resources and Protections

By integrating data from the Highlands Land Use Capability Zones (LUCZ), environmental inventories, and relevant regulatory frameworks, the Borough has carefully considered its natural landscape in shaping future growth strategies.

This section begins with an overview of the LUCZ mapping, which categorizes the Borough's landscape into different zones based on their ecological significance and development potential. These zones, such as the Protection Zone and the Existing Community Zone, guide the Borough's land use decisions, ensuring that growth occurs in areas with existing infrastructure while safeguarding sensitive environmental resources like steep slopes, critical wildlife habitats, Category 1 waterways, and prime groundwater recharge areas.

In addition to ecological resources, the Borough's historic and cultural assets are also highlighted, acknowledging their role in shaping Bernardsville's identity. The integration of these natural and cultural factors into the planning process supports a balanced approach to development, which respects Bernardsville's environmental integrity while fostering sustainable growth.

Highlands Land Use Capability Zones

According to the 2024 Land Use Capability Zone (LUCZ) mapping prepared by the New Jersey Highlands Council, Bernardsville Borough includes a diverse set of landscape typologies, each carrying different implications for planning and development. The majority of the Borough (approximately 5,085.3 acres or 61.5%) is located within the Protection Zone, which encompasses lands of the highest resource value, such as headwaters, steep slopes, and intact forested ecosystems. These areas are critical to regional water quality, habitat connectivity, and overall ecological health, and are therefore subject to the most stringent land use limitations under the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP).

In contrast, the Existing Community Zone comprises 2,036.7 acres (24.6%), primarily concentrated around the Borough's established neighborhoods and downtown core. These areas tend to have existing infrastructure and fewer environmental constraints, making them more suitable for context-sensitive development and redevelopment. A smaller portion of 135.3 acres (1.6%) falls within the Existing Community Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone, where environmental sensitivity (such as wetlands or critical habitat) limits development despite the presence of prior disturbance. Similarly, 512.2 acres (6.2%) of the Borough are designated as the Conservation Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone, reflecting largely undeveloped areas with high ecological value, where non-agricultural development is strongly discouraged. Finally, 81.3 acres (1.0%) fall within the Lake Community Sub-Zone, a designation applied to compact residential and previously disturbed areas surrounding surface water bodies, which are subject to enhanced watershed and lake protection policies.

These designations are illustrated in **Figure 1** on the following page, which visually depicts the spatial distribution of the zones across the Borough.

Relationship to Proposed Highlands Center Boundary

The Land Use Capability Zone framework has played a foundational role in shaping the proposed Highlands Center boundary for Bernardsville. The Highlands Center designation intends to focus future development and redevelopment within areas that are already disturbed or served by infrastructure, while avoiding expansion into sensitive environmental areas. Accordingly, the proposed Center boundary includes significant portions of the Existing Community Zone,

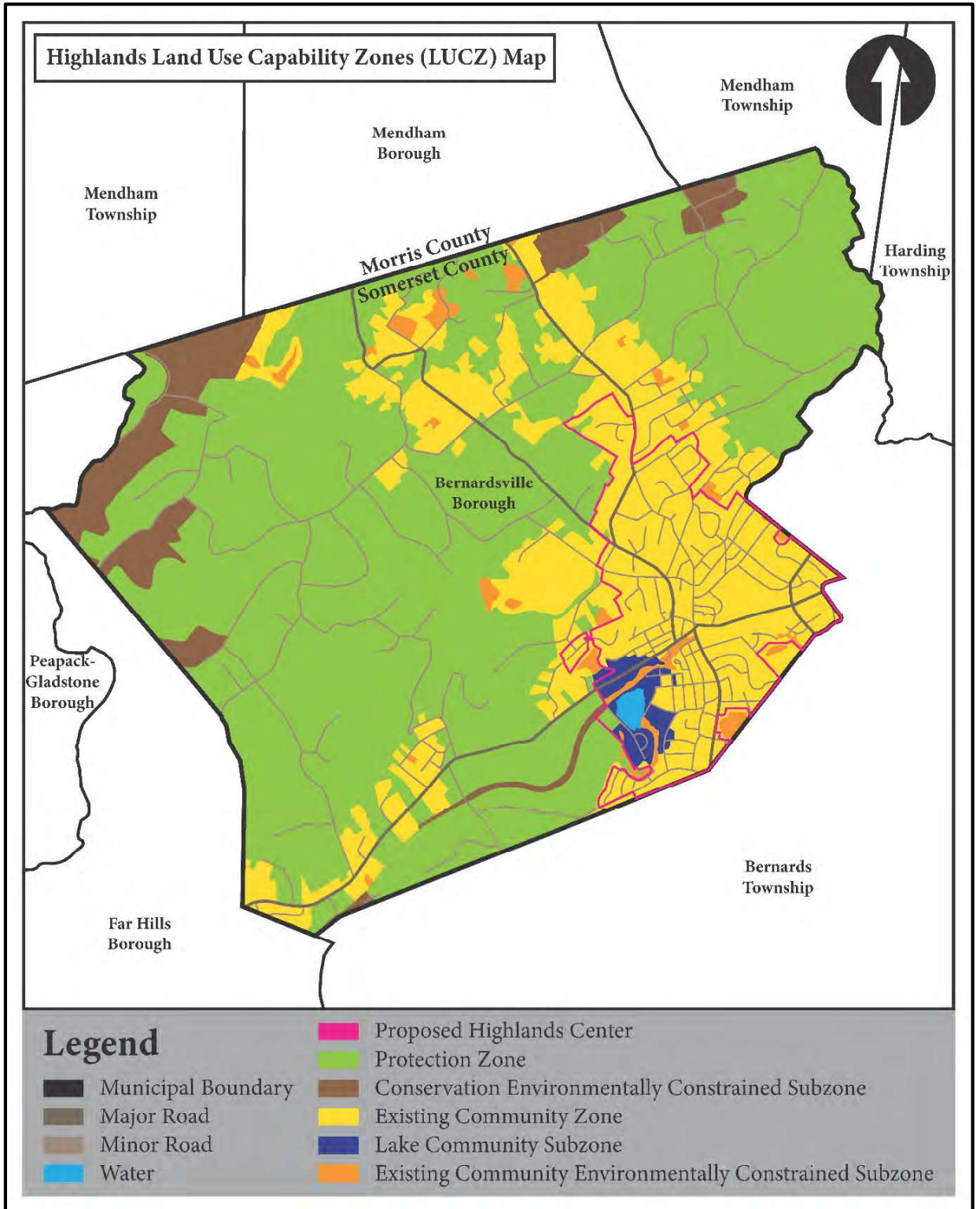
aligning with areas that are generally more suitable for infill and revitalization under smart growth principles.

Notably, the proposed boundary generally excludes areas within the Existing Community Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone, recognizing that even within built environments, some parcels contain critical environmental features that warrant protection. Similarly, no areas within the Protection Zone or the Conservation Environmentally Constrained Sub-Zone are included in the proposed Center boundary, ensuring that the most environmentally sensitive lands remain safeguarded from intensive development.

An exception to this otherwise constrained boundary is the inclusion of the Lake Community Sub-Zone surrounding an existing quarry site, which is being considered as a future location for affordable housing. Although this area is proximate to water resources, its current level of disturbance, proximity to existing community infrastructure, and planning priority for housing justify its inclusion in the proposed Center area. This reflects the Borough's balanced approach of seeking to accommodate critical community needs like affordable housing, while remaining grounded in the Highlands Act's environmental goals.

This feasibility study comprises a review of planning data and considerations, including infrastructure capacity, zoning, housing needs, environmental resources, and climate hazards, which further refines and supports the logic of the proposed Highlands Center boundary. However, the Land Use Capability Zone mapping provides a critical early framework that ensures the Borough's growth strategies are environmentally responsible and aligned with regional resource protection objectives.

Figure 1. Highlands Land Use Capability Zones



Sensitive Environmental Resources

Bernardsville Borough's landscape is characterized by a diversity of sensitive environmental resources and natural features that are critical to maintaining regional ecological health, water quality, and community resilience. These resources also present important considerations and constraints for development and land use planning within the Borough. This section discusses four key categories of sensitive environmental resources: 1) steep slope protection areas; 2) critical wildlife habitats; 3) Category 1 (C-1) waterways; and 4) prime groundwater recharge areas. These draw on Highlands Council mapping, the Highlands Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), and relevant regulatory frameworks. The role of these resources in shaping and supporting the proposed Highlands Center boundary is also highlighted.

Steep Slope Protection Areas

Steep slopes are a defining characteristic of the Bernardsville landscape, covering approximately 2,798.1 acres or 33.8% of the Borough (see **Figure 2**). These slopes are classified into severely constrained areas (29.1%) and moderately constrained areas (4.8%), reflecting variations in slope steepness, soil conditions, and riparian proximity. Steep slopes and ridgelines contribute significant ecological, recreational, and scenic value to the region. They provide habitats for specialized plant and animal species, support outdoor recreation such as hiking and wildlife observation, and create the distinctive rural character of the Highlands.

Disturbances to steep slopes can lead to erosion, sedimentation, and land instability, threatening water bodies and aquatic habitats, particularly trout streams protected under New Jersey's highest water quality standards. Accordingly, the Highlands Council has identified these protection areas to guide land use and mitigate development impacts.

The proposed Highlands Center boundary largely excludes both severely and moderately constrained steep slope areas. This exclusion aligns with existing development patterns, where the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods have historically expanded on more feasible terrain with gentler slopes. By avoiding steep slope areas, the proposed boundary helps to minimize erosion risks, protect soil stability, and preserve scenic and ecological values integral to the Borough's character.

Critical Wildlife Habitat

Bernardsville contains significant tracts of Critical Wildlife Habitat, encompassing approximately 6,073.7 acres or 73.5% of the Borough (see **Figure 3**). This habitat supports numerous endangered, threatened, and special concern species, including the Bald Eagle, Indiana Bat, Bobcat, and Eastern Box Turtle, among others. The Highlands Council utilized the NJDEP Endangered and Nongame Species Program's Landscape Project dataset to delineate these

habitats, which are essential to maintaining biological diversity and ecological integrity in the region.

Most critical wildlife habitats are located in the northern, western, and central portions of Bernardsville, areas generally outside the proposed Highlands Center boundary. The boundary's focus on the southeastern part of the Borough inherently limits potential impacts on these sensitive habitats. This spatial separation reinforces a conservation-based approach, directing growth and redevelopment towards areas with fewer ecological constraints and reducing pressures on wildlife corridors and habitats critical to species survival.

Category 1 (C-1) Waterways

Bernardsville Borough includes 22 miles of C-1 waterways, a designation reflecting exceptional ecological, fisheries, water supply, and recreational significance (see **Figure 4**). These waterways include the North Branch Raritan River and its tributaries, Indian Grove Brook, Mine Brook, and the Passaic River, among others. The C-1 classification represents the highest level of surface water protection under New Jersey's Surface Water Quality Standards and is critical to maintaining the water quality and habitat integrity of the Highlands Region.

Importantly, all C-1 waterways lie outside the proposed Highlands Center boundary, thereby minimizing any direct impacts from new development within the designated Center. This spatial configuration supports the Borough's goal of focusing growth within existing developed areas while safeguarding its most sensitive water resources. It also aligns with the Highlands Act's intent to direct development away from high-quality surface waters to maintain water quality and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas

Groundwater recharge is vital to sustaining the aquifers that supply drinking water throughout Bernardsville and the broader region. Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas (PGWRA) cover approximately 3,802.1 acres, or 46.0% of the Borough (see **Figure 5**). These areas represent the most effective landscapes for replenishing groundwater, providing roughly 40% or more of recharge volume within local watersheds. Recharge effectiveness depends on a combination of soil, geological, ecological, and hydrological factors, all of which are influenced by land use patterns.

Similar to other sensitive resource areas, prime groundwater recharge zones are predominantly located outside the proposed Highlands Center boundary. The proposed boundary's emphasis on previously developed or disturbed areas helps to reduce the risk of negatively affecting groundwater infiltration rates and water quality. Protecting recharge areas from intensive

development supports the long-term availability of clean groundwater supplies and promotes regional water security.

Climate Change-Related Hazards

Climate change-related hazards for Bernardsville Borough include the potential for increased flooding, heavier precipitation, and more frequent and severe storms, including strong winds. Severe weather, including heat waves and droughts, may also lead to the threat of wildfires. Bernardsville is vulnerable to flooding due to its proximity to rivers like the Mine Brook and the Passaic River. The State of New Jersey 2024 All-Hazard Mitigation Plan, Chapter 4.1 “State Risk Assessment,” identified the highest threat rankings for Somerset County from dam/levee failures, extreme/high winds, floods, hailstorms, hurricanes and tropical storms, lightning, Nor’easters, thunderstorms, and tornadoes. Medium-level threat rankings were identified from drought, extreme temperatures, ice storms, severe winter weather, wildfires, and winter storms.

Integration with Highlands Center Planning

Together, these sensitive environmental resource considerations have directly informed the delineation of the proposed Highlands Center boundary within Bernardsville Borough. The boundary strategically concentrates future development and redevelopment within areas that are less environmentally constrained, ensuring that growth does not encroach on the Borough’s most ecologically sensitive and valuable lands.

The exclusion of severely and moderately constrained steep slope areas, critical wildlife habitat zones, Category 1 waterways, and prime groundwater recharge areas from the Highlands Center boundary reflects both practical and regulatory considerations. It acknowledges existing development patterns, particularly around the downtown and southeastern neighborhoods, that have historically avoided these sensitive areas due to feasibility and environmental constraints. By focusing growth within these more suitable areas, the proposed boundary aligns with Highlands Council objectives to protect water quality, biological diversity, and natural resources, while supporting sustainable economic and community development.

This approach balances conservation priorities with the Borough’s goals for smart growth, affordable housing, infrastructure efficiency, and community vitality. It leverages the Highlands Center designation as a tool to encourage redevelopment and revitalization in appropriate locations while ensuring the long-term protection of Bernardsville’s unique natural environment and resilience to climate hazards.

Figure 2. Steep Slope Protection Areas

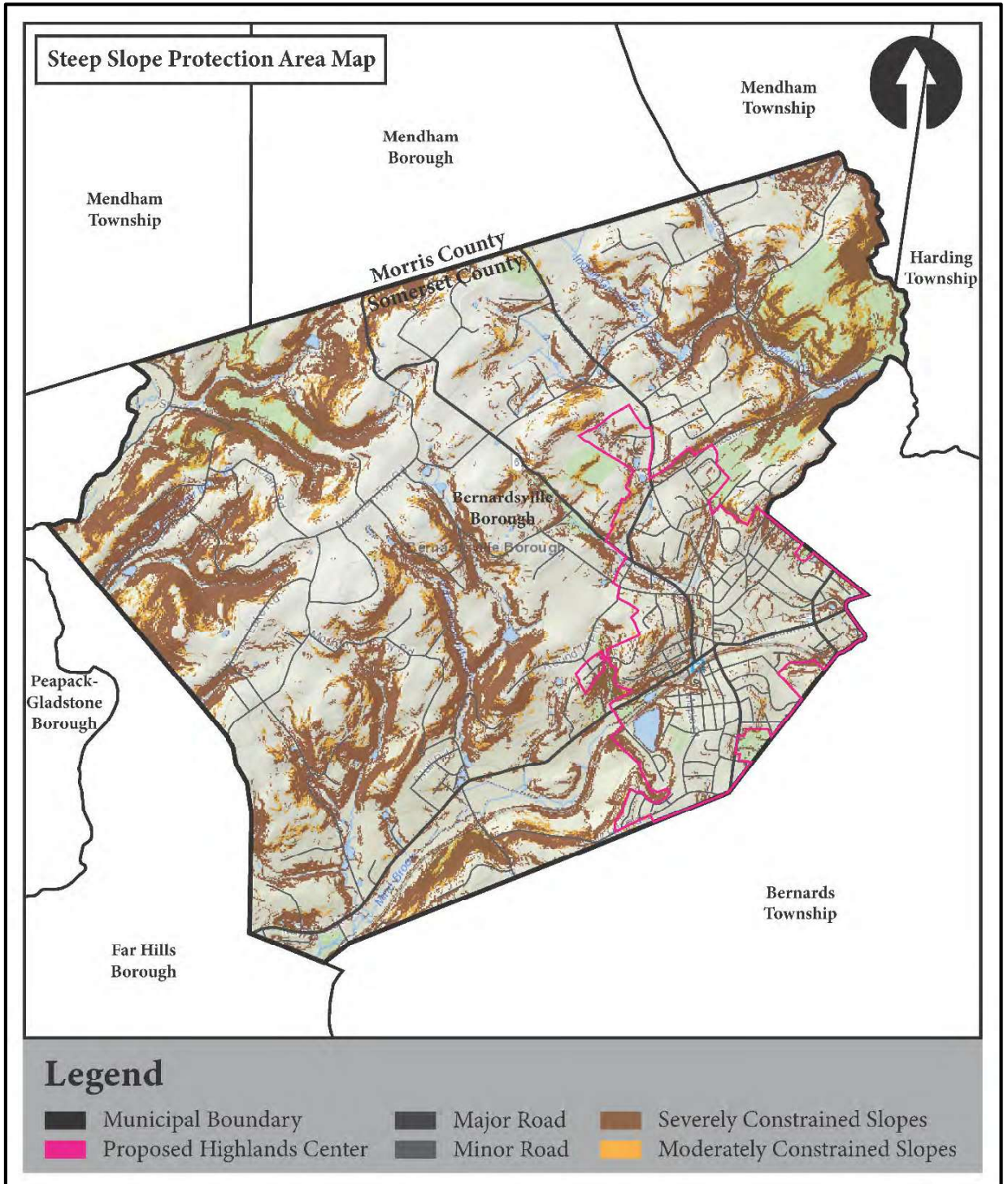


Figure 3. Critical Wildlife Habitat

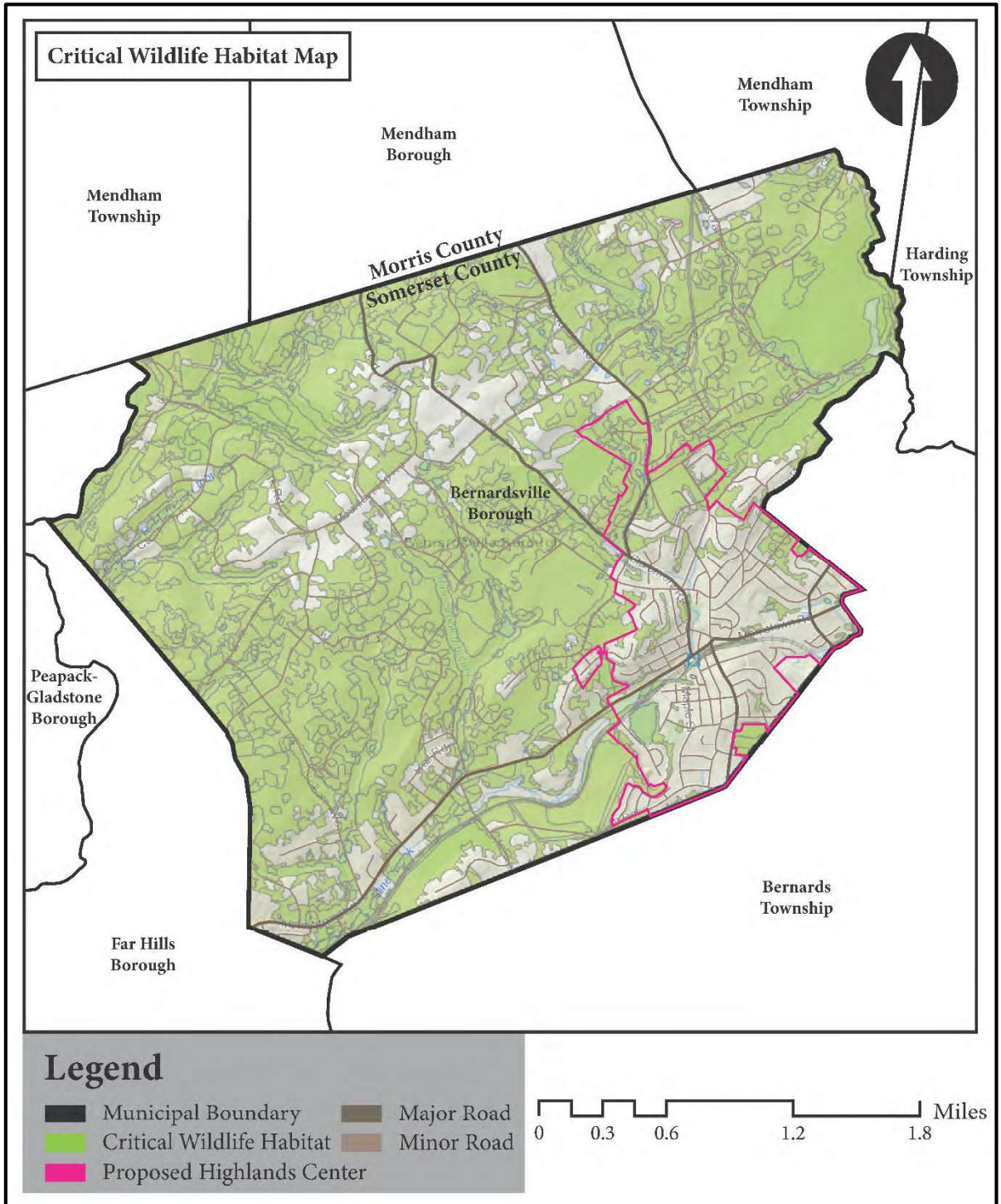


Figure 4. Category 1 Waterways

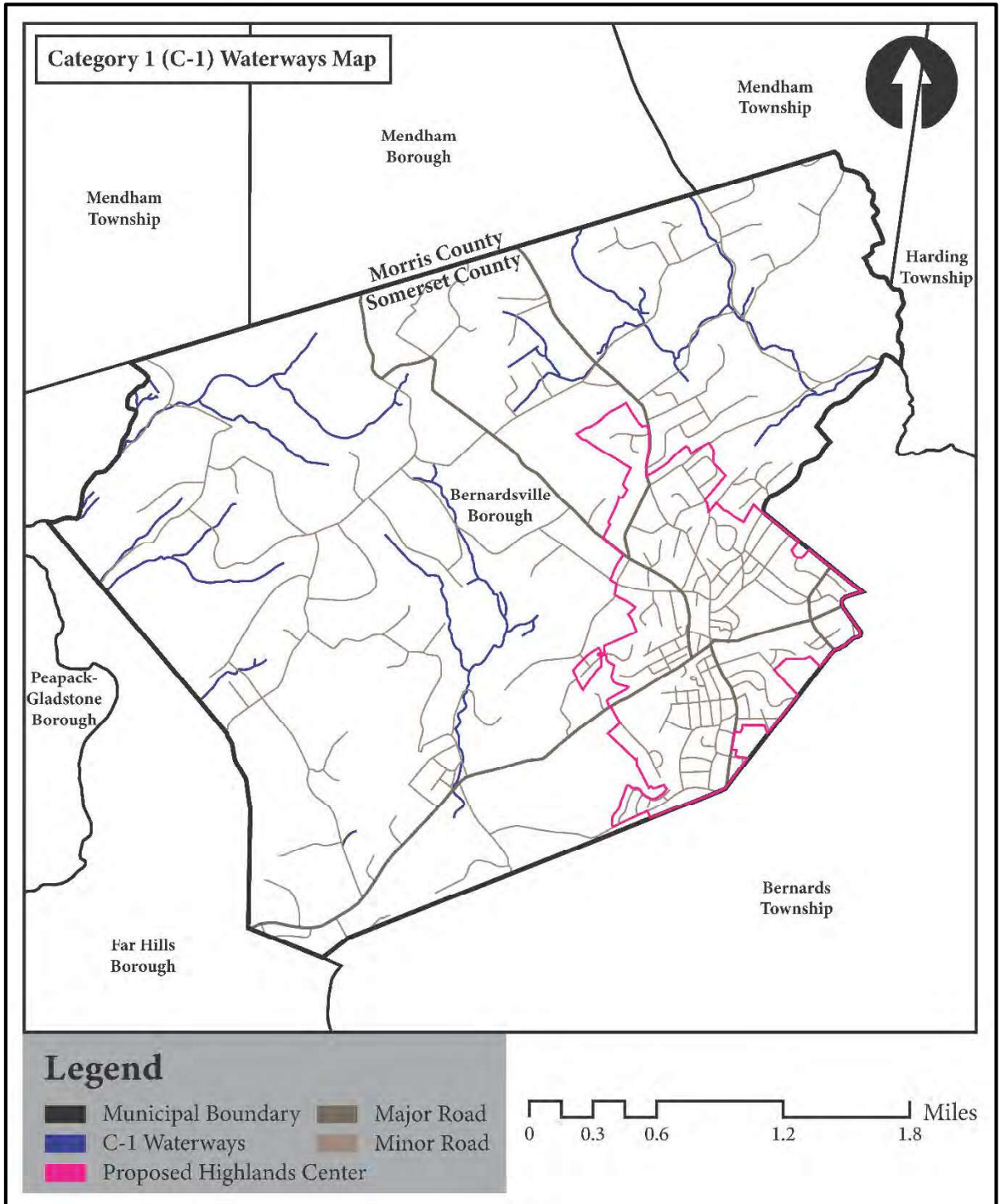
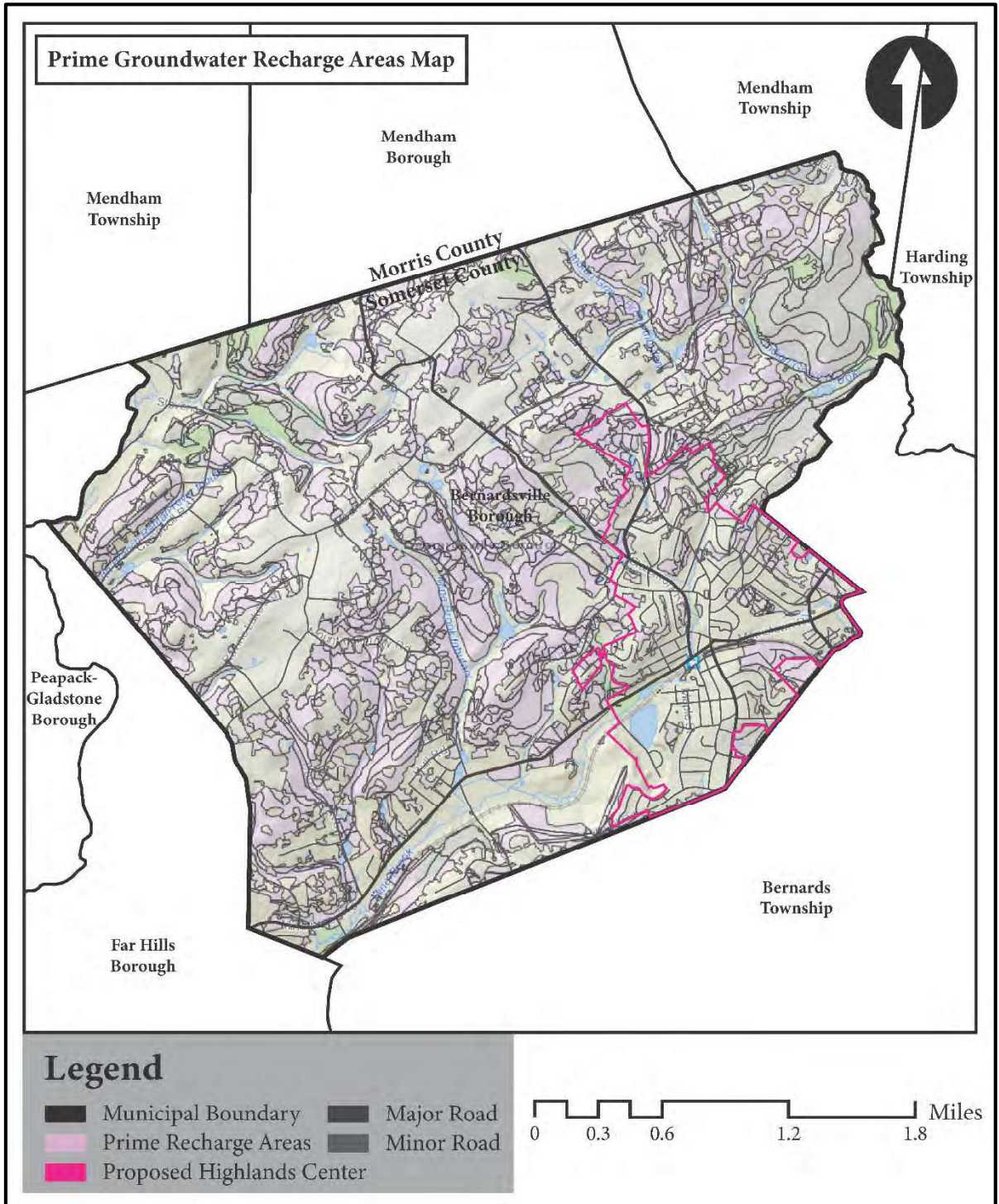


Figure 5. Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas



Historic and Cultural Resources

Bernardsville Borough is rich in historic and cultural resources, which are essential components of the community's identity and heritage. These resources include designated historic districts as well as numerous individual historic properties that contribute to the Borough's unique character. **Figures 6 and 7** illustrate the locations of historic districts and historic properties, respectively, within the Borough and in relation to the proposed Highlands Center boundary.

Historic Districts

A total of 502.2 acres, or 6.1% of Bernardsville Borough, is located within five recognized historic districts. These include the Gladstone Branch of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western (DL&W) Railroad Historic District, the Olcott Avenue Historic District, Morristown National Historical Park (New Jersey Brigade Encampment), Hardscrabble Road, and Pleasant Valley (O-Wan-O-Massie) Historic District. Historic districts are defined by a significant concentration or continuity of buildings, sites, or structures that hold historic or aesthetic value, as designated by the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office (NJ SHPO).

The proposed Highlands Center boundary (see **Figure 6**) strategically incorporates the entirety of the Olcott Avenue Historic District, which is closely tied to the downtown core, reflecting the importance of preserving historic fabric in areas of active community and commercial use. It also includes the portion of the Gladstone Branch of the DL&W Railroad Historic District nearest to the downtown area, where its historical influence remains relevant to ongoing development and planning considerations.

Conversely, the proposed boundary purposefully excludes the other historic districts, including the Morristown National Historical Park, Hardscrabble Road, and Pleasant Valley Historic Districts, as these are located on the northeastern and northwestern edges of the Borough, well beyond the feasible scale of the Highlands Center. This delineation allows for focused preservation and management efforts within the more centralized, walkable, and developable parts of Bernardsville, avoiding overextension into peripheral areas that have distinct preservation priorities.

Historic Properties

Bernardsville contains 78 individually recognized historic properties, ranging from residences and municipal buildings to bridges and estates. These properties collectively represent a rich architectural and cultural heritage, contributing to the Borough's distinct sense of place.

As shown in **Figure 7**, many of these historic properties are concentrated in dense clusters near the downtown core. The proposed Highlands Center boundary effectively encompasses these dense pockets of adjacent historic properties, reinforcing the strategy of focusing development

and preservation efforts where historic resources are most abundant and integral to community identity.

While there are some historic properties outside the proposed boundary, these tend to be more isolated or peripheral; thus, they are less likely to be impacted by new development within the center. The boundary's configuration allows for preservation goals to be balanced with growth, ensuring that new projects respect and complement the historic fabric concentrated around downtown Bernardsville.

Integration with Highlands Center Planning

Incorporating historic districts and properties within the proposed Highlands Center boundary supports a planning approach that emphasizes sustainable growth, heritage conservation, and community character. By including key historic districts and clusters of historic properties, the proposed boundary ensures that new development or redevelopment will consider the preservation of historic resources, enhancing the cultural and economic vitality of the Borough's core.

Excluding peripheral historic districts and isolated historic properties from the Highlands Center reflects a realistic planning strategy. It acknowledges the challenges and impracticalities of extending the center to encompass areas with less development pressure or connectivity to downtown, while still maintaining respect for their historical significance through other preservation mechanisms.

Overall, the proposed Highlands Center boundary aligns well with the distribution of Bernardsville's historic and cultural resources, integrating preservation priorities into the broader vision for sustainable and context-sensitive community growth.

Figure 6. Historic Districts

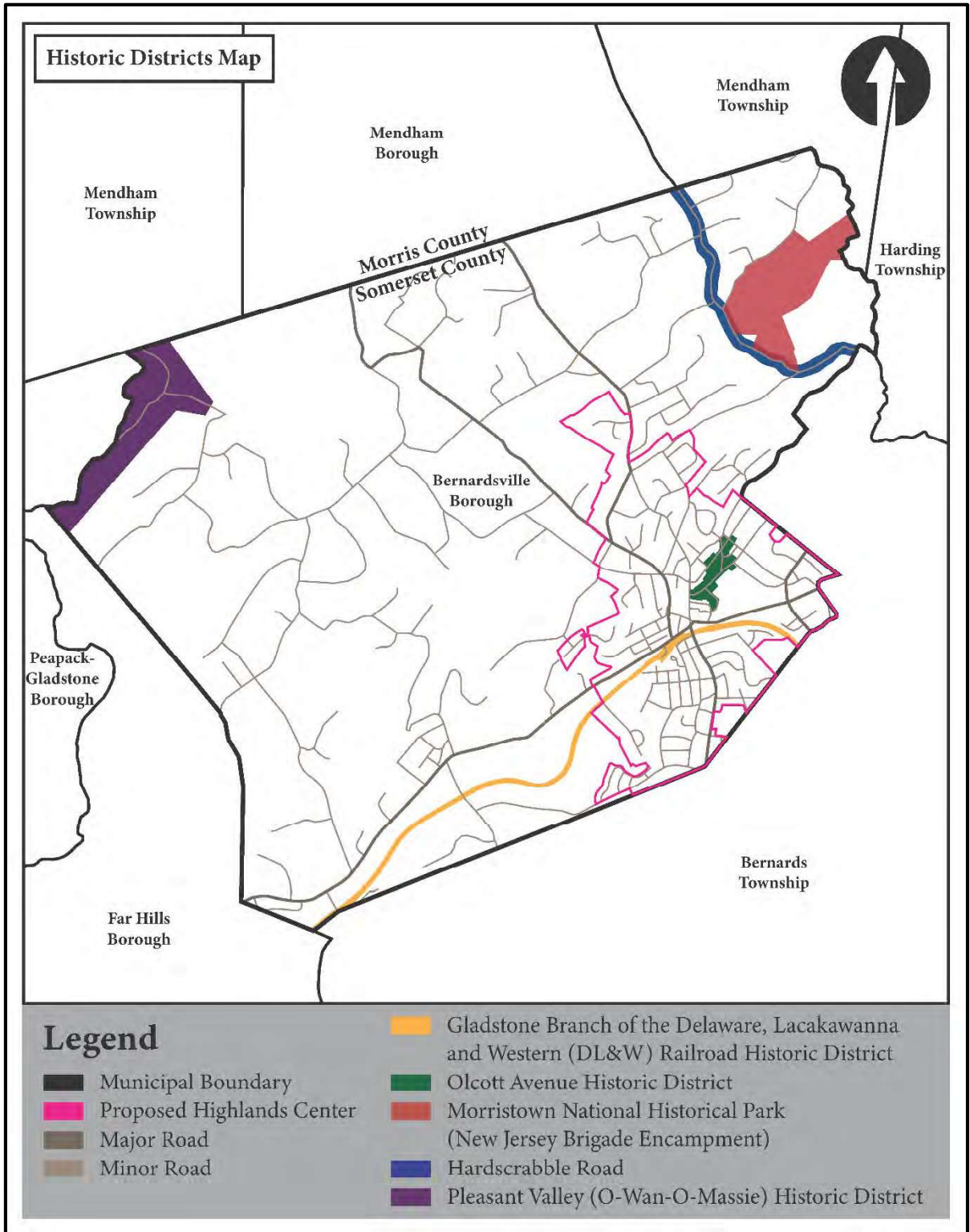
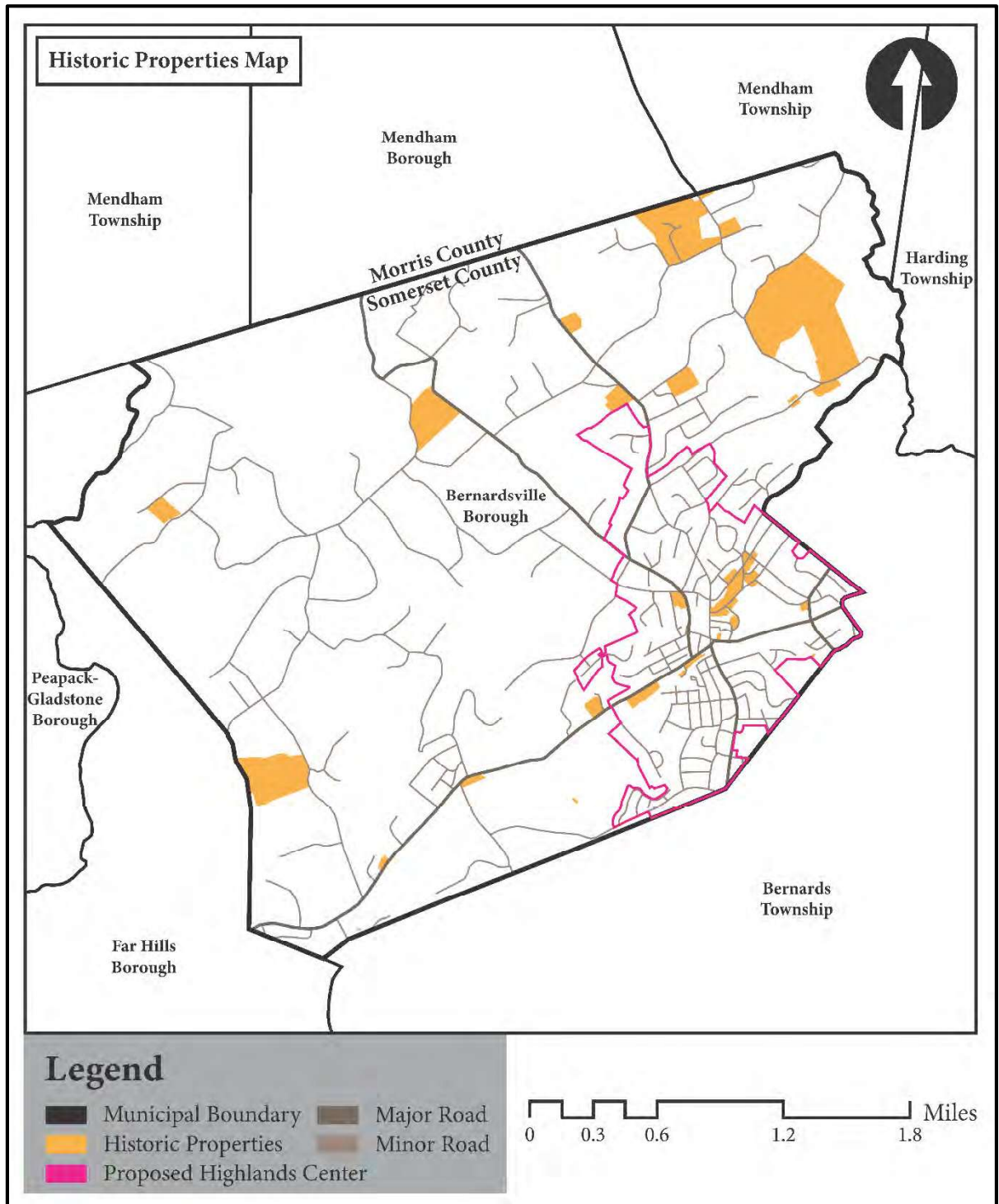


Figure 7. Historic Properties



4. Highlands Center Area Boundary & Goals

This section outlines the proposed boundary for the Highlands Center in Bernardsville, a carefully defined area intended to concentrate future growth and development in a sustainable, resource-efficient manner. The boundary has been strategically drawn to include areas with robust infrastructure, specifically the sewer and water service areas, which are essential for supporting compact, walkable development. By focusing growth within these well-served zones, the Borough aims to foster smart growth, protect natural resources, and promote economic revitalization, especially throughout Downtown. Likewise, the proposed Center is also focused on the Bernardsville Train Station and the surrounding area, which was designated a Transit Village by NJ Transit in August 2025. This walkable and well-served Transit Village is an ideal location for center-based development and redevelopment in the Highlands Region.

The zoning districts included within the proposed Highlands Center support a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and redevelopment-oriented land uses, including key sites designated for affordable housing. Excluded from the boundary are low-density residential and environmentally sensitive areas, ensuring that development is directed away from locations where it would be inefficient or harmful to the environment.

This section also outlines the goals for Bernardsville's Highlands Center, which emphasize the creation of vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods, the protection of natural and cultural assets, and the expansion of affordable housing. Implementation action steps are proposed to guide the Borough in achieving these goals, focusing on economic development, infrastructure upgrades, zoning updates, and environmental stewardship.

This comprehensive approach positions Bernardsville to leverage its Highlands Center designation for funding, technical support, and regional collaboration, all while staying true to the Borough's local values and long-term vision.

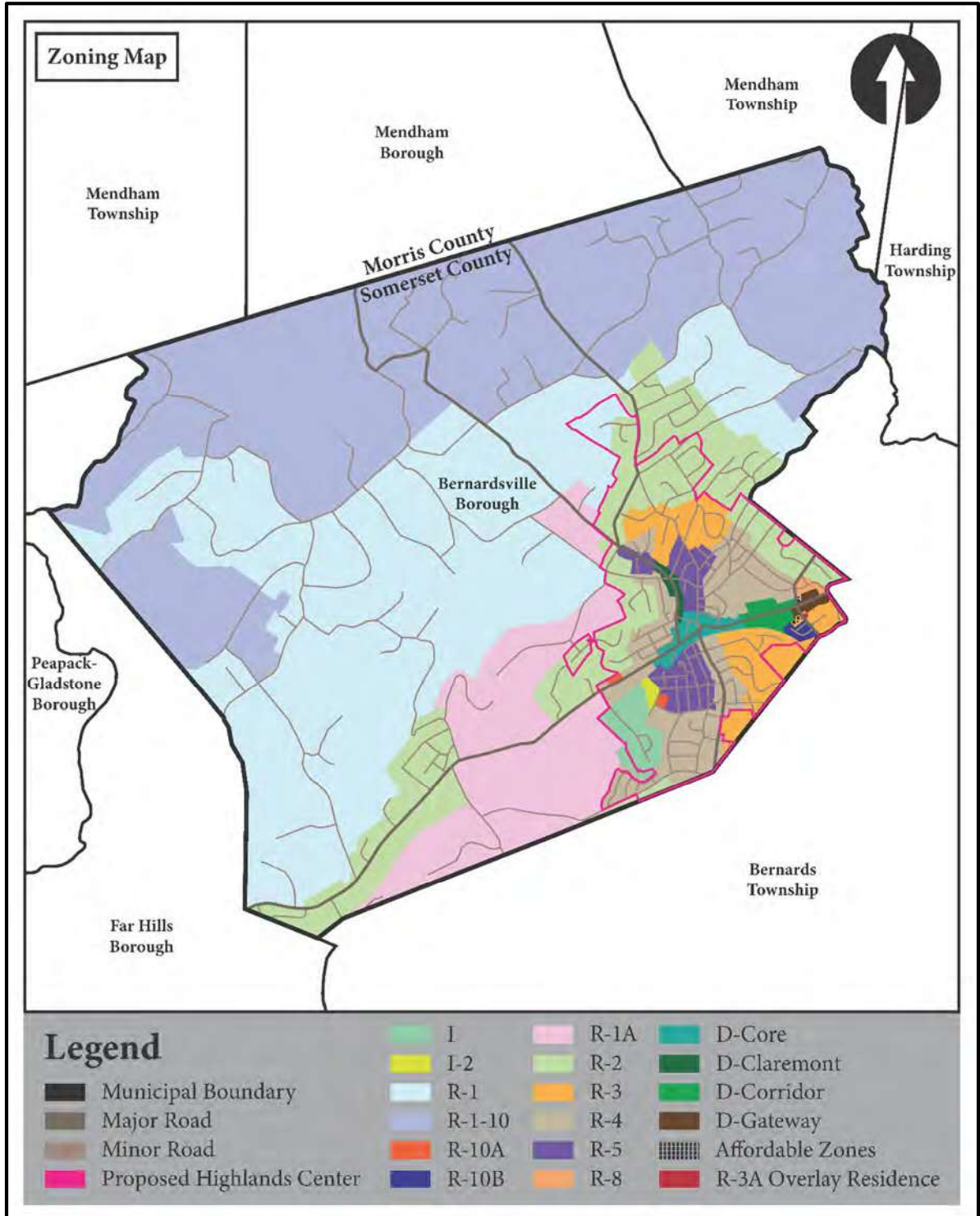
Bernardsville Zoning Districts

Bernardsville contains a diverse array of zoning districts that accommodate residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development. These zones are illustrated in **Figure 8**, and a detailed view of zoning districts within the Highlands Center is provided in **Figure 12**, along with municipal parcel boundaries.

The proposed Highlands Center boundary encompasses zoning districts with existing infrastructure capacity, access to public sewer and water, redevelopment momentum, and higher-density or mixed-use zoning patterns. This includes downtown districts, affordable housing zones, industrial areas, designated redevelopment sites, and select residential districts.

Low-density residential zones and environmentally sensitive areas, primarily located on larger lots without utility access, were intentionally excluded from the Center to ensure future growth occurs where it is most efficient and sustainable.

Figure 8. Zoning Districts



Zoning Districts Within the Proposed Highlands Center

The following zoning districts are fully or substantially included in the proposed Highlands Center boundary:

Downtown Districts

The Downtown District is the civic and commercial heart of Bernardsville and is subdivided into four distinct subdistricts that support a walkable, mixed-use, historically rich downtown environment. The Downtown District is designed to implement the goals of Bernardsville's master planning efforts, including creating a cohesive and attractive commercial area, enhancing pedestrian access and streetscapes, preserving historical architecture, and supporting adequate parking and civic uses. Maximum residential density is 35 units per acre; however, building heights vary based on the subzone. The entirety of all four subdistricts is included in the proposed Highlands Center boundary.

- **Downtown Core (D-Core):** Mixed commercial/residential with a maximum 3 stories and 45 feet height.
- **Downtown Corridor (D-Co):** Mixed commercial/residential along key roadways with a maximum 2.5 stories and 35 feet height;
- **Downtown Gateway (D-G):** Transitional zone at downtown entrances; mixed-use with a maximum 3 stories and 45 feet height.
- **Downtown Claremont Road (D-Cl):** Supports residential over retail north of the Downtown Core with a maximum of 2.5 stories and 35 feet height.

Residential Districts (R-3, R-4, R-5, R-8, R-10A, R-10B, R-3A Overlay)

These districts represent a range of low- to medium-density residential neighborhoods, some of which include zoning provisions that allow for affordable housing or attached housing forms.

- **R-3, R-4, and R-5 Residence Districts (2–6 du/acre)**
 - Primarily single-family detached homes.
 - Conditional uses: professional offices, institutional uses, and public utilities.
 - The R-5 district uniquely allows for single-family attached units.
- **R-8 Residence District (approx. 8 du/acre)**
 - Allows single-family attached residential units (e.g., townhouses up to six (6) units per structure).
- **R-10A and R-10B Residence Districts**
 - Similar to R-3 to R-5 in use, but larger lot sizes and dimensional standards.

- **R-3A Residence Overlay District**

- Applies to areas within the R-3 District and permits two-family affordable housing units, which must be deed-restricted.

These districts are fully included within the proposed Highlands Center boundary due to their proximity to infrastructure, development potential, and, in some cases, affordable housing capacity.

Industrial Districts (I and I-2)

The Borough contains two industrial zones with distinct characteristics:

- **I District (Industrial)**

- Permits quarry operations, stone and rock processing, bulk storage, warehousing, recycling facilities, and materials recovery.
- This area includes the former quarry site, which has been included in Bernardsville's Affordable Housing Plan and is mostly included in the proposed Highlands Center.

- **I-2 District (Light Industrial)**

- Supports small-scale industrial uses, such as light assembly, workshops, and self-storage.
- Entirely included within the Highlands Center boundary, due to its adjacency to the sewer service area and redevelopment potential.

Affordable Housing Districts (AH-1 through AH-7, and AHO-3, AHO-4; AHO-8)

To meet its affordable housing obligations under state law, Bernardsville has established several specialized Affordable Housing Districts, which are mostly located within the Highlands Center boundary.

- **AH-1 to AH-7 Districts**

- Permit a range of multi-family rental units (townhouses and apartments), with supportive parking and accessory uses.
- Designed exclusively for affordable housing, with units subject to income-based restrictions.
- 100% affordable family or senior housing; typically, 8–16 du/acre.

- **AHO-3, AHO-4 and AHO-8 (Affordable Housing Overlay Districts)**

- Allow inclusionary mixed-use developments, which combine residential units with ground-floor commercial space.

- AHO-3 requires at least 500 square feet of commercial space, or 1,000 square feet at street corners, supporting the Borough's economic development goals.
- AHO-3 and AHO-4 allow mixed-use with required commercial space (min. 500–1,000 sq. ft.).
- AHO-8 covers the Quarry site and permits multi-family residential development up to 51 affordable units total; 23 units + 8 bonus credits were applied to the 4th Round Fair Share Plan, and the density is approx. 6–8 du/acre over 69.2 acres.

These districts reflect Bernardsville's strategic effort to integrate affordable housing with smart growth principles, while maximizing the utility of existing infrastructure.

Designated Redevelopment Plans within the Proposed Highlands Center

Figure 9 illustrates the locations of the below Redevelopment Plans.

- **Quimby Lane Redevelopment Plan (Block 70, Parts of Lots 1 and 2, 3-5; Block 71, Lots 4, 5, 5.01, and 7-13) 4.3 Acres**
 - Permits mixed-use commercial, retail, and residential uses with an affordable housing set-aside. The current vision is for up to 68 residential units with approximately 13 affordable units and 27,000 square feet of retail and restaurant uses. A redeveloper has been designated, and plan discussions are ongoing.
- **Palmer Square Redevelopment Plan (Block 125, Lots 1, 2, and 3) 0.98 Acres**
 - The Plan permits mixed-use commercial and residential development. In August 2025, the Borough Planning Board approved a 67-unit mixed-use development with 10,000 square feet of ground-floor retail.
- **65 Morristown Road Redevelopment Plan (Block 125, Lot 13) 0.43 Acres**
 - The Plan permits mixed-use residential development along with commercial development. The current proposal is to redevelop the site into a classic and collector car dealership.

Proposed Affordable Housing Zones within the Proposed Highlands Center

Figure 9 illustrates the locations of the below Affordable Housing Zones.

- **65 Claremont Road (Block 69, Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4) 0.88 Acres**
 - Proposes multi-family development with an affordable housing set-aside for up to approximately 28 apartments with six (6) affordable units; approx. 32 du/acre.

- **Clarus Proposed Redevelopment Area (Block 66, Lots 10, 11, 12, 14, and part of Lot 22) 2.0 Acres**
 - Proposes multi-family development with an affordable housing set-aside for up to 94 units with 18 age-restricted affordable units; approx. 35-40 du/acre.
- **I-2 Affordable Housing Zone (Block 102, Lots 2, 2.01, and 13) 6.14 Acres**
 - Proposes 125 multi-family units with an affordable housing set-aside for up to 25 units; 20 du/acre.

Proposed 100% Affordable Housing within the Proposed Highlands Center

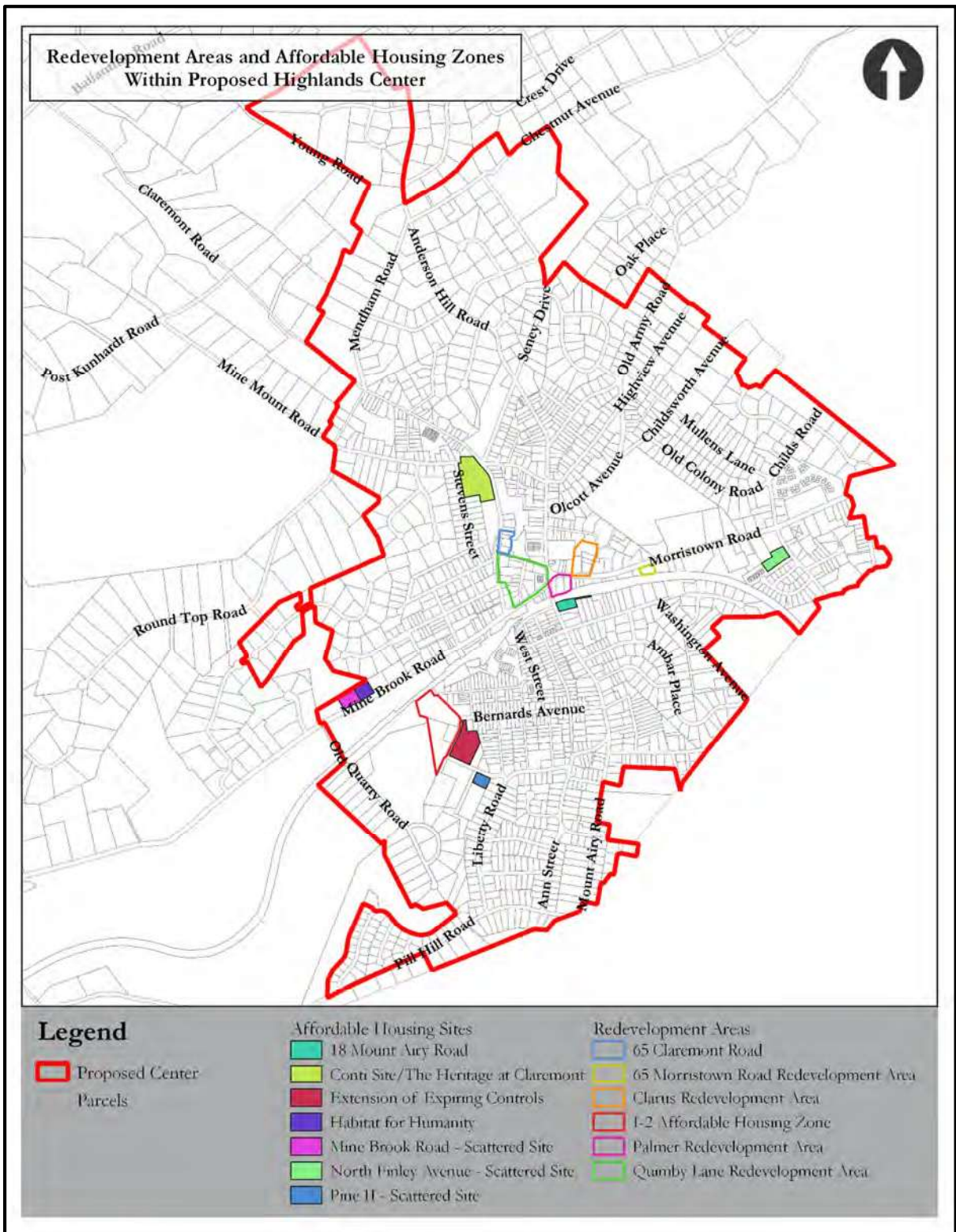
- **Scattered Sites 100% Affordable Housing – 59 units family affordable**
 - Proposes multi-family development on three sites: Block 80, Lot 15.38 (Mine Brook Road) with 25 units; Block 124, Lot 1 (18 Mt. Airy Road) with 12 units; and Block 102, Lot 12 (63 Bernards Road) with 22 units.
- **Age-Restricted 100% Affordable Housing – 46 Units**
 - Proposes age-restricted multi-family development on Block 125, Lot 25 (210 N. Finley).

Portions of Residential Districts Included in the Proposed Highlands Center

Some large-lot residential zones are only partially included within the Highlands Center boundary. These portions are limited to areas that are within the sewer service area and proximate to the downtown:

- **R-2 Residence District (50,000 SF Min. Lot Area)**
 - Single-family residential with some institutional and professional conditional uses.
 - Only portions closest to the downtown and within the sewer service area are included.
- **R-1 Residence District (218,750 SF Min. Lot Area)**
 - Large-lot single-family homes, limited institutional/professional conditional uses, and farming.
 - Only a very small portion is included in the Highlands Center, again based on infrastructure availability.

Figure 9. Redevelopment Areas and Affordable Housing Zones Within Proposed Highlands Center



Zoning Districts Not Included in the Highlands Center

To protect rural character and avoid incentivizing sprawling development, the following low-density residential zones are excluded from the Highlands Center boundary:

- **R-1A Residence District**
- **R-1-10 Residence District**
- **Most of the R-1 Residence District** (aside from the small area described above)

These zones are generally not served by sewer or public water, are located farther from the downtown core, and include large lots that are not suitable for center-based growth or redevelopment.

Summary and Planning Rationale

The zoning districts, redevelopment areas, and affordable housing projects included within the proposed Highlands Center reflect a conscious effort to concentrate future development in areas that already contain higher-density or mixed-use zoning, public sewer and water infrastructure, access to transit, redevelopment opportunities, affordable housing obligations, and/or proximity to Downtown.

This zoning pattern supports the Highlands Council's principles for smart growth, infrastructure efficiency, and resource protection, while enabling the Borough to plan for vibrant economic development, inclusionary housing, and community investment.

As shown in **Figure 8**, the proposed Highlands Center boundary encompasses the Borough's most urbanized and accessible zones, while excluding rural, low-density, or environmentally sensitive areas that are not suited for center-based development.

Land Use / Land Cover

The land use and land cover profile of Bernardsville Borough reveals a landscape that is both environmentally rich and spatially diverse, shaped by natural topography, historical development patterns, and zoning regulations. **Figure 10** illustrates the spatial distribution of land cover types throughout the Borough, based on the most recent NJDEP Land Use/Land Cover (LULC) dataset. This data provides an essential foundation for understanding the physical development context of the proposed Highlands Center.

Overall, Bernardsville is defined by an even balance between natural and developed landscapes, with the following land cover distribution:

- **Forest – 45.5%**
- **Urban – 45.1%**

- **Agriculture – 6.5%**
- **Wetlands – 1.9%**
- **Water – 0.9%**
- **Barren Land – 0.2%**

Geographic Patterns and Key Land Use Types

Urban land uses dominate the southeastern quadrant of the Borough, where the Downtown Core and surrounding neighborhoods represent the heart of Bernardsville’s commercial, civic, and residential life. Additional urbanized areas are located throughout the Borough in the form of compact residential neighborhoods connected by a local roadway network and served by infrastructure.

Interspersed between these developed areas are extensive forested zones, small agricultural pockets, and natural resource areas that define the Borough’s rural character and contribute to its scenic and ecological value. A large contiguous forested area in the northeastern portion of the Borough is home to public open space and conservation areas such as the Cross Estate Gardens, New Jersey Brigade Area, and Scherman Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary, which are all vital components of the region’s ecological and recreational network.

Land Use Patterns Within the Proposed Highlands Center

The Proposed Highlands Center boundary encompasses the most urbanized, densely developed, and infrastructure-served areas of Bernardsville. While Urban land cover is the dominant classification within the Center, **Figure 10** reveals that there are still some small but notable pockets of Forest and Water areas contained within the boundary:

- **Forest:** These smaller forested areas are typically located in between or behind residential parcels, particularly in lower-density neighborhoods where vegetation buffers and wooded backyards remain intact. They are also present along stream corridors or within undeveloped parcels interwoven with urban fabric.
- **Water:** The quarry site, which is partially included in the Highlands Center boundary and also designated for affordable housing development, accounts for a significant portion of the Borough’s Water classification. It is both a land use and redevelopment opportunity, while also representing an environmental feature of note.

Despite these inclusions, the overall land use character within the proposed Highlands Center remains predominantly urban, especially when viewed in contrast to the rural and environmentally constrained areas that lie beyond the boundary. The areas selected for inclusion in the Center reflect the most spatially cohesive and contiguous urban development patterns in the Borough and represent the zones best suited for future growth, reinvestment, and infrastructure efficiency.

Included land uses within the Highlands Center boundary primarily consist of:

- **Urban – Residential:** Covering a broad spectrum from detached single-family homes to townhouses and multi-family units, particularly in districts such as R-3, R-4, R-5, R-8, and the R-3A overlay.
- **Urban – Commercial and Mixed Use:** Found in the Downtown District and its four subdistricts (D-Core, D-Gateway, D-Corridor, and D-Claremont), supporting the Borough’s business community and civic institutions.
- **Urban – Light Industrial and Redevelopment-Oriented Uses:** Within zones such as I and I-2, including the quarry site, which has been identified in the Borough’s affordable housing strategy and presents redevelopment potential.
- **Institutional and Public Facilities:** Including public buildings, the train station, and community-oriented uses that support walkability and mixed-use development.

These urbanized areas benefit from access to public water and sewer infrastructure, making them suitable and sustainable candidates for future growth under the Highlands Center designation.

Land Use Patterns Outside the Highlands Center

In contrast, areas excluded from the Proposed Highlands Center boundary tend to be:

- Dominated by Forest (45.5%) and Agricultural lands (6.5%), which serve as natural buffers and scenic open spaces;
- Less accessible to infrastructure, particularly sewer service;
- Comprised of low-density residential zoning (such as R-1, R-1A, and R-1-10) with large-lot development patterns and limited redevelopment potential; and
- Home to environmentally sensitive features, including wetlands, streams, and steep slopes, which require protection and are not conducive to intensive development.

These characteristics reinforce the decision to focus the Highlands Center boundary around areas that are most consistent with smart growth principles, and avoid those where development would be costly, inefficient, or environmentally disruptive.

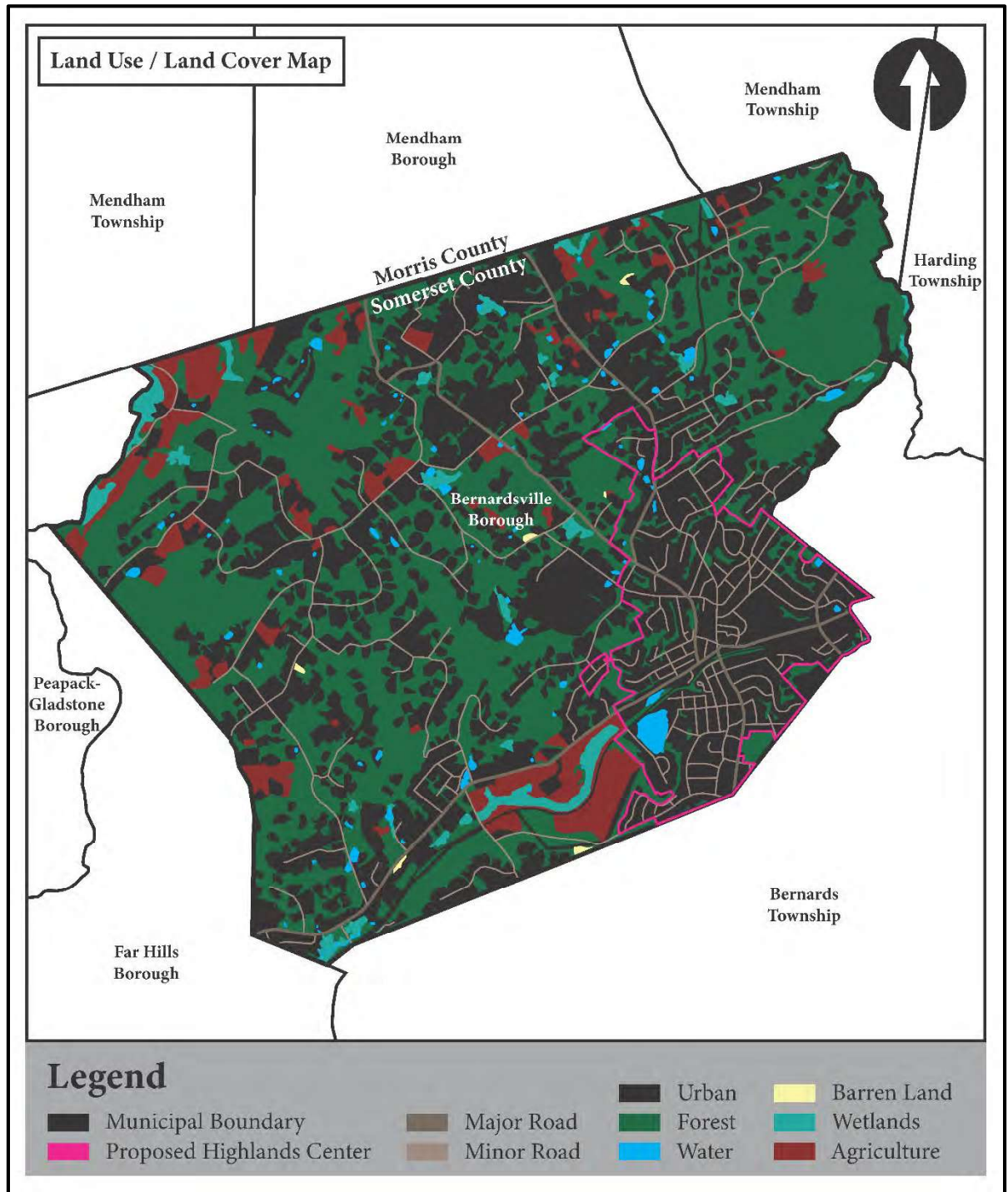
Planning Implications and Alignment with Highlands Goals

The analysis of land use and land cover validates the Borough’s proposed Highlands Center boundary and supports the following planning objectives:

- Directing growth to the most appropriate areas: Areas with urban land use classifications and existing public infrastructure are targeted for development and redevelopment.

- Preserving rural and natural landscapes: Forest, water, wetlands, and agricultural lands are generally excluded to ensure their protection and continuity.
- Reinforcing zoning and redevelopment strategies: The land use patterns within the proposed Center align with Bernardsville’s zoning framework, Redevelopment Plans, and Affordable Housing Plan.
- Balancing environmental protection with economic development: The proposed Highlands Center boundary reflects an intentional effort to promote compact, walkable, infrastructure-supported growth while safeguarding sensitive environmental resources outside the boundary.

Figure 10. Land Use / Land Cover



Critical Infrastructure

A critical factor influencing the delineation of the Proposed Highlands Center boundary is the availability and capacity of municipal infrastructure. In particular, wastewater and potable water service areas formed the foundation of the boundary-setting process, ensuring that growth is directed toward areas best equipped to handle it sustainably. Reliable access to water and sewer infrastructure is essential to support compact development, protect environmental resources, and maintain public health standards.

Sewer Service Area

The sewer service area served as the primary organizing framework for defining the Highlands Center boundary. The proposed boundary includes nearly the entirety of Bernardsville's designated sewer service area, as shown in **Figure 11**. This boundary was one of the critical starting points in the delineation process. All additional land use, zoning, infrastructure, and environmental considerations were evaluated in tandem with the sewer service boundary.

The Bernardsville Sewer Department provides service for almost 1,600 residences (approximately 55%) in the Borough. The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) has a permitted flow of 0.8 million gallons per day (MGD). The average flow is 550,000 gallons per day, leaving an available capacity of 250,000 gallons per day.

Concentrating new growth and redevelopment within the sewer service area ensures that adequate wastewater treatment capacity exists, which is vital for reducing reliance on septic systems that can pose environmental and public health risks, especially in more densely developed settings. Moreover, sewer service supports more compact, walkable, and transit-oriented development patterns, which align with the Borough's smart growth and sustainability goals.

By anchoring the Highlands Center boundary to the sewer service area, Bernardsville ensures that future development occurs within areas already equipped to accommodate it, thereby promoting fiscally responsible growth and protecting natural resources in outlying areas.

Public Water Service Area

The proposed Highlands Center boundary also encompasses most of the Borough's public water service area, as illustrated in **Figure 12**, further reinforcing the suitability of this area for future development and redevelopment. Access to public water ensures safe and reliable drinking water and supports both residential and nonresidential development.

The area shown on **Figure 12** is located within the New Jersey American Water – Short Hills System. This is a public community water system consisting of 25 well(s), 4 surface water intake(s),

12 purchased ground water source(s), and 3 purchased surface water source(s).² This system serves 30 municipalities.

While the public water service area extends slightly further north and west than the sewer service area, it was determined based on a comprehensive review of land use, zoning, environmental data, and infrastructure constraints that the sewer service area provides a more appropriate and consistent basis for defining the Highlands Center boundary. Nearly all properties within the sewer service area are also served by public water.

Infrastructure-Aligned Growth Strategy

Aligning the Proposed Highlands Center with existing infrastructure allows the Borough to:

- Focus investment and redevelopment within areas best equipped to accommodate it;
- Minimize the environmental impact of new development;
- Encourage smart growth, walkability, and transit-supportive land uses; and
- Preserve natural resources and rural character outside the service areas.

By grounding the Highlands Center boundary in existing sewer and water infrastructure, Bernardsville advances a targeted, resource-efficient growth strategy that prioritizes sustainability, resiliency, and long-term serviceability.

² NJ American Water Company – Short Hills Division. 2024 Water Quality Report. Retrieved from <https://www.amwater.com/ccr/shorthills.pdf>

Figure 11. Sewer Service Area

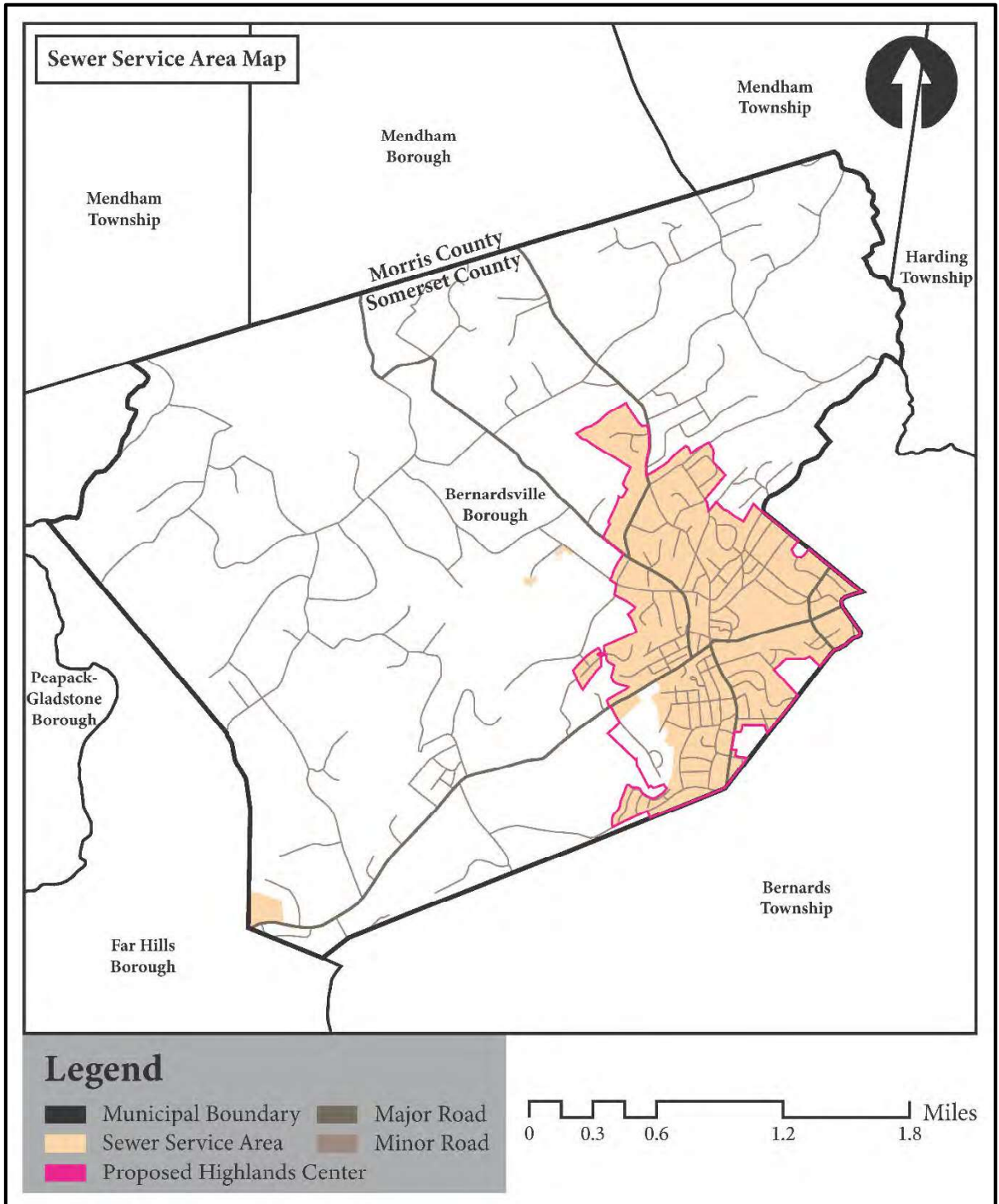
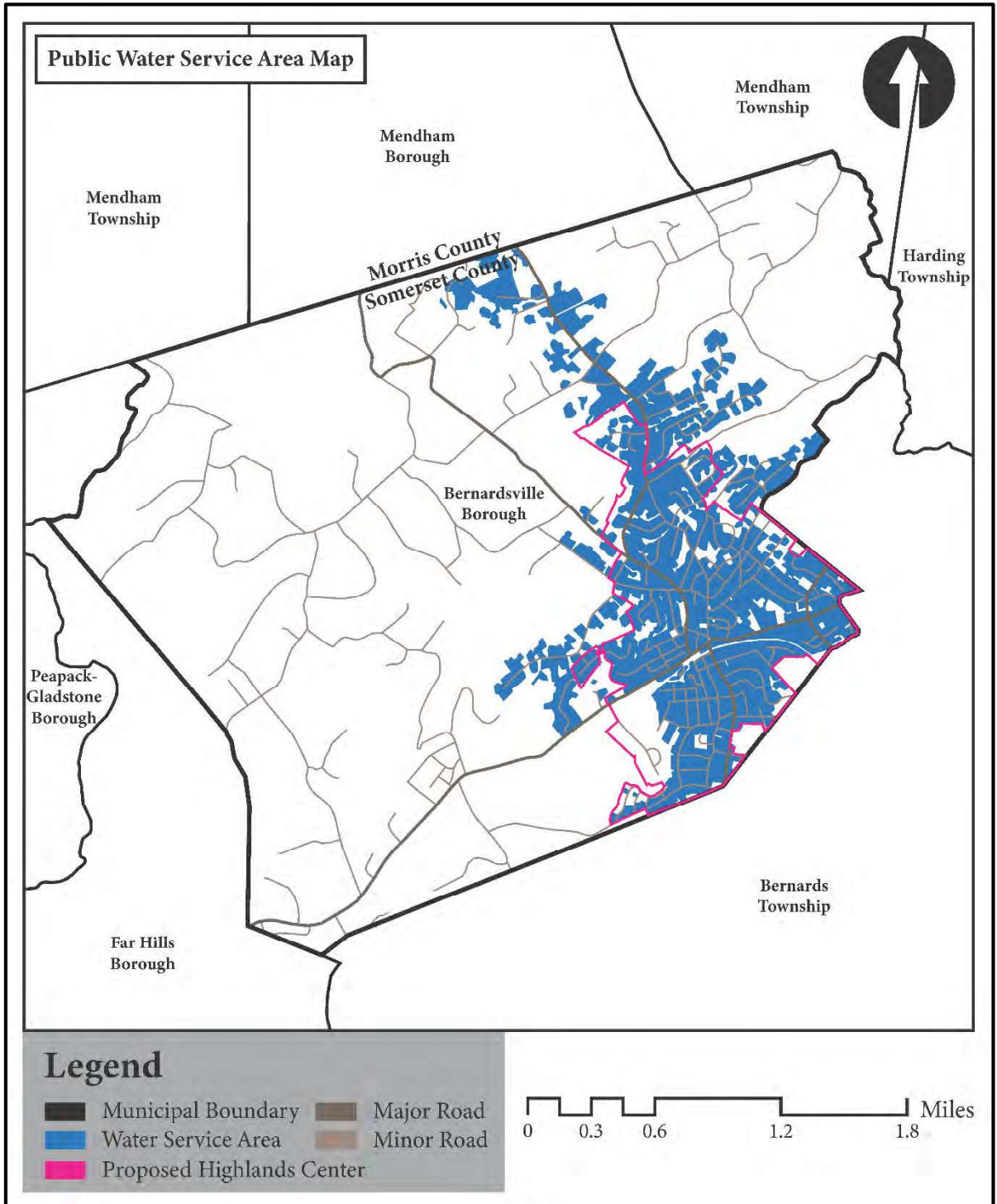


Figure 12. Public Water Service Area



Map of Proposed Highlands Center

The Proposed Highlands Center boundary represents the culmination of a comprehensive, data-driven planning process that aligns the Borough of Bernardsville's future growth potential with the infrastructure, zoning, and environmental conditions best suited to support it. This boundary is depicted in **Figure 13**, which illustrates the zoning districts, parcel boundaries, and land area included within the designated Center.

At the heart of the Highlands Center is Bernardsville's Downtown, which includes the entirety of the Downtown Core (D-Core), Downtown Corridor (D-Co), Downtown Claremont (D-Cl), and Downtown Gateway (D-G) subdistricts. These areas represent the Borough's civic, commercial, and cultural center, and they offer the most intensive mix of land uses, pedestrian activity, and redevelopment potential. Surrounding this core, the boundary incorporates the Borough's most concentrated residential neighborhoods, including zones such as R-3, R-4, R-5, R-8, R-10A, R-10B, and the R-3A Overlay District, all of which are located within the sewer service area and exhibit compact development patterns conducive to smart growth principles.

The boundary also captures all or most of Bernardsville's key redevelopment sites, including the Palmer Redevelopment Plan Area, the Quimby Village Redevelopment Area, the Clarus Redevelopment Area, and the Audi Redevelopment Area. These areas are central to the Borough's revitalization efforts and present opportunities for mixed-use, inclusionary housing, and economic development that align with both municipal planning goals and the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

In addition, the Proposed Highlands Center incorporates the I and I-2 Industrial Districts, which include both existing light industrial uses and key sites designated for affordable housing as part of the Borough's Fair Share Housing Plan. The inclusion of these zones ensures that future development will be balanced across residential, commercial, and employment land uses, while also fulfilling critical housing obligations.

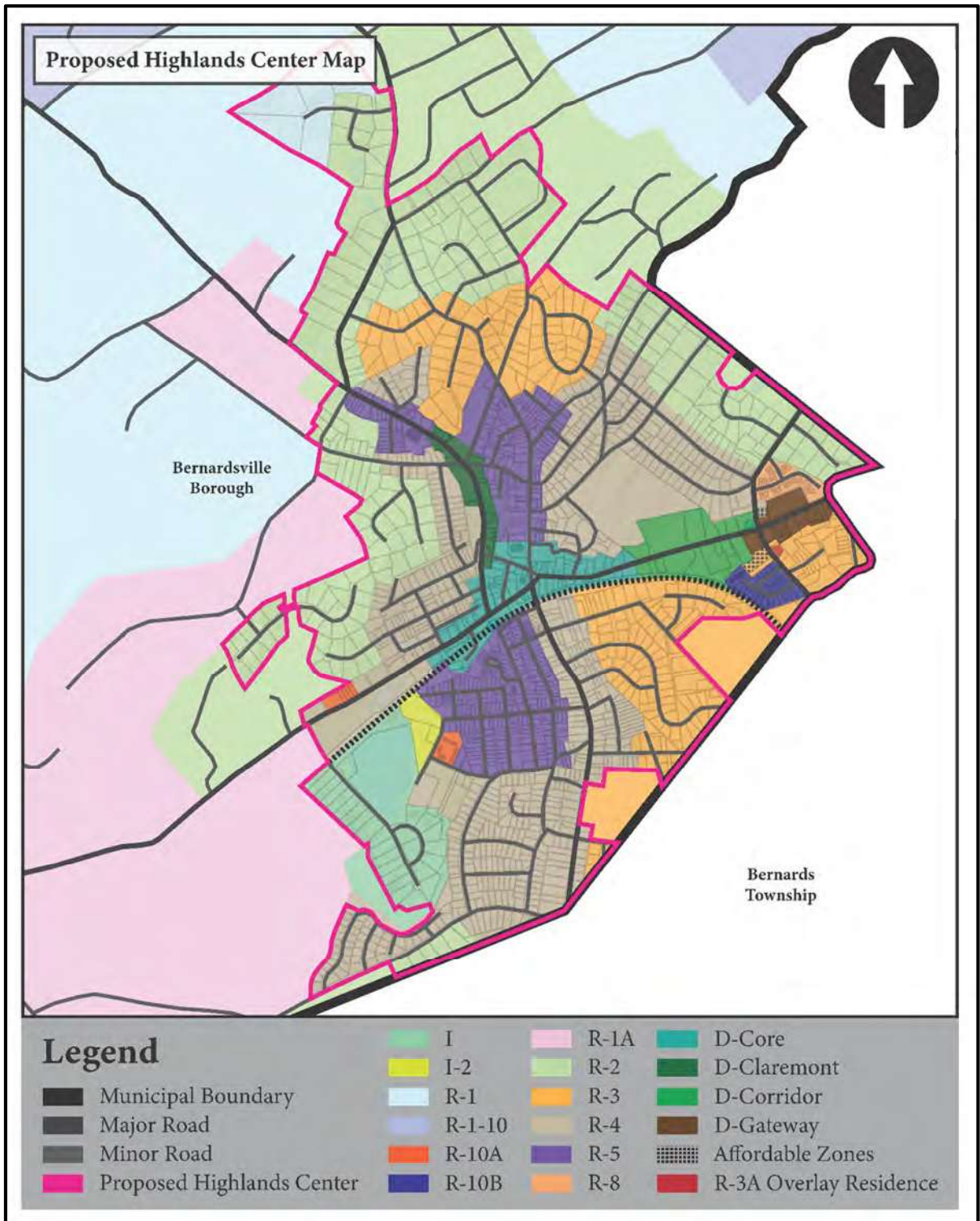
Importantly, the boundary was intentionally aligned with the Borough's sewer service area, which served as the foundation for delineation. This ensures that development within the Highlands Center will occur where wastewater infrastructure already exists or is planned, avoiding environmental risks associated with septic systems. Nearly all of the proposed Center area is also served by public water, reinforcing the infrastructure readiness of the selected geography.

Although the boundary encompasses the Borough's most urbanized and infrastructure-supported areas, it was also designed to exclude low-density and rural residential zones (such as R-1, R-1-10, and R-1A), which lie outside the sewer service area and serve important environmental, scenic,

and open space functions. By doing so, the Borough maintains its commitment to resource protection and avoids extending growth into areas not suited for intensive development.

Overall, the Proposed Highlands Center boundary defines a clear, compact, and strategic growth area that captures the most appropriate locations for development and redevelopment while protecting the Borough's rural character and natural resources. As shown in **Figure 13**, the boundary offers a manageable footprint for focused planning, infrastructure investment, and implementation of Highlands Act goals. It positions Bernardsville to leverage the Highlands Center designation for funding, technical assistance, and coordinated regional planning while remaining consistent with local values and community vision.

Figure 13. Proposed Highlands Center



Goals and Objectives for Proposed Highlands Center

The following goals and objectives are designed to guide growth and investment within the Proposed Highlands Center in Bernardsville Borough. They are rooted in the principles of the Highlands Act, municipal land use priorities, and long-term sustainability. Together, they reflect a strategic vision to strengthen the Borough's downtown, advance equitable housing, and protect valuable resources while capitalizing on existing infrastructure and redevelopment opportunities.

1. Catalyze Economic Activity in the Downtown through Strategic Partnerships and Redevelopment

Strengthen the Borough's economic foundation by leveraging public-private partnerships and the existing Redevelopment Plans (Palmer, Quimby, Clarus, and Audi) to foster high-quality commercial, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development within the Downtown Core and surrounding subdistricts of the Highlands Center.

2. Promote Bernardsville's Cultural, Natural, and Civic Assets to Attract Visitors and Investment

Implement branding, wayfinding, and marketing initiatives that highlight the Borough's unique assets, such as its historic downtown, preserved open spaces, and community events, to support tourism, strengthen the local economy, and build community identity.

3. Use Zoning and Redevelopment Tools to Attract Context-Sensitive Investment

Advance strategic zoning updates, overlay districts, and redevelopment mechanisms that enable infill, mixed-use, and inclusionary housing development while respecting neighborhood character and environmental constraints within the Highlands Center boundary.

4. Encourage Mixed-Use, Walkable, and Compact Development Patterns

Promote smart growth by incentivizing pedestrian-friendly design, integrating residential and commercial uses, and concentrating development near existing infrastructure, transit access, and redevelopment sites.

5. Expand the Supply of Inclusionary and Affordable Housing to Meet Regional Needs

Facilitate the construction of affordable and workforce housing through implementation of the Borough's Fair Share Housing Plan, prioritizing inclusionary development within designated zones such as the Affordable Housing (AH) Districts and R-3A Overlay District located within the Center.

6. Align Infrastructure Investment with Targeted Growth Areas

Prioritize infrastructure upgrades, especially water, sewer, and stormwater systems, within the Highlands Center to accommodate projected growth, improve system reliability, and support compact, efficient development patterns.

7. Improve and Expand Access to Recreational and Open Space Resources

Upgrade existing parks, greenways, and trail connections, including those near the Borough's water features and forested pockets within the Center, to enhance recreational access, community health, and ecological connectivity.

8. Enhance Multimodal Transportation Networks and Safety

Improve circulation systems for all users by investing in sidewalk expansions, crosswalk improvements, bike infrastructure, traffic calming, and enhanced access to NJ Transit and downtown destinations. Prioritize connectivity within and between the Downtown and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

9. Protect Critical Environmental Features Within the Center and at its Edges

Preserve remaining natural features such as forest patches and steep slopes through strong enforcement of municipal and Highlands' regulations, while guiding future development away from environmentally sensitive areas outside the Center.

Implementation Action Steps

The following implementation steps are designed to help Bernardsville Borough achieve its above-listed Highlands Center goals by guiding growth, infrastructure investment, affordable housing, and environmental protection. These actions align with the Highlands Regional Master Plan and local planning priorities.

1. **Economic Development and Redevelopment Activation** [Goals Addressed: 1, 2, 3]
 - **Adopt and Implement Redevelopment Plans** for the Palmer, Quimby, Clarus, and Audi sites.
 - **Pursue funding** through NJEDA and other grant programs for façade, streetscape, and infrastructure improvements; and the Highlands Council for planning and design of projects.
 - **Promote transit-oriented, mixed-use development** near the NJ Transit station to strengthen downtown.
2. **Zoning and Policy Alignment** [Goals Addressed: 3, 4, 5]
 - **Conduct a zoning audit** to ensure alignment with smart growth and redevelopment goals.
 - **Adopt overlay zones or form-based codes** for appropriate districts.
 - **Update the Land Use Element** to reflect Highlands Center designation.
 - **Advance Highlands Plan Conformance** to align local policies with regional planning goals.
3. **Affordable Housing Development** [Goal Addressed: 5]
 - **Prioritize construction of affordable units** on designated sites, especially within AHO zones.
 - **Expand infrastructure** to support housing development within the Center.
 - **Collaborate with developers** on inclusionary housing projects.
 - **Promote use of the R-3A Overlay** to enable affordable two-family homes.
4. **Infrastructure and Utilities** [Goal Addressed: 6]
 - **Coordinate with water and sewer providers** to plan for capacity and upgrades.
 - **Pursue infrastructure funding** via NJ Water Bank and NJ Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).
 - **Adopt a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)** prioritizing projects within the Center boundary.

5. Parks, Recreation, and Public Space [Goal Addressed: 7]

- **Update the Open Space and Recreation Plan** to focus on gaps within the Highlands Center.
- **Improve trail connectivity and park access** from surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Seek Green Acres funds** for park upgrades and new recreational amenities, and **apply to the Highlands Council Open Space Partnership Funding Program** for acquisition of properties.

6. Transportation and Mobility [Goal Addressed: 8]

- **Conduct a Complete Streets assessment** to improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure.
- **Apply for transportation grants** (Safe Routes to School, TAP, Local Aid).
- **Enhance transit access** and walkability near the train station and major corridors.

7. Environmental Stewardship [Goal Addressed: 9]

- **Enforce environmental regulations** on wetlands, steep slopes, and sensitive lands.
- **Incorporate green infrastructure** in development and public works projects.
- **Partner with conservation groups** to support greenway preservation and connectivity.

8. Center Designation and Management [Applies to All Goals]

- **Adopt a formal resolution** to designate the Highlands Center and complete Plan Conformance.
- **Assign a staff liaison or consultant** to coordinate implementation.
- **Report annually** on progress and update the community through workshops and surveys.

5. Relationship to Planning Documents

Alignment with Bernardsville Borough's Master Plan

The Proposed Highlands Center boundary in Bernardsville is consistent with the Borough's Master Plan goals, particularly those from the 2020 Land Use Element Amendment.

1. Promote the Downtown as the Commercial and Civic Center of Bernardsville

- The Highlands Center encompasses Bernardsville's Downtown Core and surrounding subdistricts (D-Core, D-Co, D-Cl, D-G), aligning to strengthen the downtown as the Borough's commercial and civic hub.

2. Enhance the Physical Characteristics of the Downtown

- The boundary includes areas designated for redevelopment (Palmer, Quimby, Clarus, Audi), supporting initiatives for façade, streetscape, and infrastructure improvements.

3. Encourage Architectural Design Consistent with Historical Character

- The inclusion of the Downtown Core and Gateway subdistricts facilitates the promotion of architectural design that respects Bernardsville's historical character.

4. Create a Pedestrian-Friendly Atmosphere in the Downtown

- The boundary's focus on compact, walkable development patterns supports the creation of a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.

5. Provide Sufficient Parking in the Downtown

- The redevelopment areas within the boundary offer opportunities to address parking needs through strategic planning.

6. Provide Affordable Housing Opportunities

- The inclusion of Affordable Housing (AH) Districts and the R-3A Overlay District within the boundary facilitates the construction of affordable and workforce housing, aligning with the Borough's Fair Share Housing Plan.

Alignment with Highlands Regional Master Plan

While Bernardsville is located entirely within the Planning Area of the Highlands region, the Proposed Highlands Center boundary aligns with several key goals of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP).

1. Encourage Appropriate Development and Redevelopment

- The RMP encourages development and redevelopment that is consistent with smart growth strategies. The Proposed Highlands Center focuses growth within areas already equipped with infrastructure, promoting efficient land use and reducing environmental impact.

2. Promote Brownfield Remediation and Redevelopment

- The inclusion of key redevelopment sites within the boundary supports the RMP's goal of promoting brownfield remediation and redevelopment.

3. Protect and Enhance Water Quality and Quantity

- By aligning the boundary with existing sewer and water infrastructure, the plan ensures that development occurs in areas where water quality and quantity can be effectively managed.

4. Preserve Environmentally Sensitive Lands

- The boundary intentionally excludes low-density and rural residential zones outside the sewer service area, preserving environmentally sensitive lands and maintaining the rural character of the Borough.

5. Promote Sustainable Economic Development

- The focus on compact, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development within the Highlands Center supports the RMP's goal of promoting sustainable economic development.

Consistency with Surrounding Municipalities' Master Plans

The Proposed Highlands Center boundary and associated goals in Bernardsville exhibit strong consistency with the master plans of all surrounding municipalities. This is especially true for Bernards Township, the only municipality sharing a direct boundary with the Highlands Center, where coordinated infrastructure-driven growth, housing, and environmental objectives create a solid regional planning foundation.

For other neighboring municipalities without direct adjacency, the shared commitment to preserving rural character and natural resources, combined with Bernardsville's compact, infrastructure-focused Highlands Center designation, results in no significant inconsistencies or conflicts. This alignment supports regional sustainability, smart growth, and community values across the Greater Somerset Hills area, particularly in the following ways:

- **Growth Concentration and Infrastructure Alignment:** All plans support directing growth to areas with existing infrastructure, avoiding scattered or low-density development in rural and environmentally sensitive zones.
- **Environmental Protection:** There is a shared commitment to preserving forests, wetlands, steep slopes, and open space to maintain regional ecological health.
- **Rural Preservation Adjacent to Urban Centers:** Bernardsville's compact Highlands Center approach complements neighboring plans that emphasize rural preservation and low-density development.
- **Support for Mixed-Use and Affordable Housing:** While intensity varies, Bernardsville's focus on transit-oriented, mixed-use, and inclusionary housing aligns well with regional smart growth and housing strategies, especially with Bernards Township.

Bernards Township

Bernards Township is located to the southeast of Bernardsville. Bernards Township's 2023 Master Plan aligns closely with Bernardsville's Proposed Highlands Center in several respects:

- **Infrastructure-Aligned Growth:** Both municipalities prioritize concentrating development in areas served by existing sewer and water infrastructure, promoting compact, fiscally responsible growth. This shared focus supports coordinated regional management of growth and infrastructure capacity, especially near their shared border.
- **Smart Growth and Mixed-Use Development:** Bernards Township encourages mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods and balanced residential and commercial development. These goals complement Bernardsville's emphasis on mixed-use redevelopment, transit-oriented development, and inclusionary housing within the Highlands Center boundary.

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Both plans strongly commit to protecting natural resources and rural character outside of designated growth areas, safeguarding steep slopes, wetlands, and open spaces that characterize the region.
- **Affordable Housing:** Bernards Township’s fair share housing goals align with Bernardsville’s inclusionary housing initiatives, facilitating coordinated regional solutions to affordable and workforce housing needs.

The Proposed Highlands Center boundary and its guiding goals are highly consistent with Bernards Township’s Master Plan, reinforcing shared priorities in infrastructure-driven growth, environmental protection, and housing diversity along their mutual border.

Mendham Borough and Mendham Township

Located to the north of Bernardsville but not directly adjacent to the Proposed Highlands Center, Mendham Borough and Mendham Township’s master plans emphasize rural preservation, environmental protection, and low-density residential character. These goals complement Bernardsville’s strategy of focusing growth within the sewer, compact Highlands Center and preserving rural areas outside it. No direct land use conflicts are anticipated, given the lack of a shared boundary.

Far Hills Borough and Peapack-Gladstone Borough

Situated west of Bernardsville, neither municipality borders the Proposed Highlands Center boundary. Their master plans similarly promote preservation of open space and rural character, which aligns with Bernardsville’s approach to exclude low-density zones from the Highlands Center. Bernardsville’s targeted growth within existing infrastructure supports regional goals for conservation and smart development, fostering overall consistency.

Harding Township

Located northeast of Bernardsville and bordering Bernards Township, Harding Township’s master plan reexamination continues to emphasize environmental conservation and rural character maintenance. Since Harding does not share a boundary with Bernardsville’s Highlands Center, no direct land use or growth conflicts are expected. The Highlands Center’s focus on directing growth inward complements Harding’s rural preservation goals.

Consistency with Somerset County’s Master Plan

The Somerset County Master Plan, adopted as part of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, emphasizes coordinated regional planning, environmental stewardship, and sustainable development. Bernardsville’s Proposed Highlands Center aligns with these goals by focusing growth within existing infrastructure areas, promoting mixed-use development, and preserving open spaces. This approach supports the county’s objectives of enhancing economic vitality while protecting natural resources.

Consistency with New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP)

The SDRP provides a framework for land use, housing, economic development, and environmental protection across New Jersey. The plan’s goals include promoting economic growth, providing adequate housing, revitalizing underutilized areas, addressing climate change, and protecting natural resources. Bernardsville’s Proposed Highlands Center aligns with these goals by concentrating development in areas with existing infrastructure, promoting affordable housing, and preserving environmentally sensitive areas. This alignment demonstrates Bernardsville’s commitment to the state’s planning objectives and sustainable development principles.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
Borough of Bernardsville Amended Petition for Highlands Center Designation
Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

APPENDIX D

PUBLIC COMMENT/HIGHLANDS RESPONSE
Amended Petition for Plan Conformance for a Center Designation
Bernardsville Borough, Somerset County

PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED

A public comment period was held on the Bernardsville Borough's Amended Petition for Plan Conformance for a Center Designation from December 22, 2025, through January 22, 2026. Three public comments were received.

Comment: A commenter complimented the Borough on pursuing a Center designation. They emphasized the importance of educating the public on the Highlands Region in terms of both water quality and supply as well as biodiversity. The commenter suggested providing educational materials within the municipal building and displaying the "Ecology Flag." The commenter also recommended including materials on the benefits of protecting intact forests and woodlands, especially for climate mitigation.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The Highlands Council agrees that building awareness of the benefits and significance of the Highlands Region is an important component of implementing the Regional Master Plan (RMP) and will work with the Borough on education and outreach.

Comment: The Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA) expressed their support for approval of the proposed Highlands Center designation for the Borough of Bernardsville with the conditions noted in the Consistency Review and Recommendations Report. RHA notes that directing growth to the Borough's downtown while protecting areas of the municipality designated as Protection Zone and Conservation Zone is good planning and consistent with the RMP as well as the goals of RHA. RHA notes that approval of the Highlands Center designation aligns with the Borough's New Jersey Transit Village designation and demonstrates New Jersey's commitment to smart growth, protecting natural resources, and supporting vibrant communities.

Response: Thank you for your comment.

Comment: Members of the Bernardsville Environmental Commission submitted comments on the Borough's Amended Petition for Plan Conformance for a Center Designation. They propose that the Center includes provisions to ensure that the Mine Brook River remains clean, shaded, and unencumbered through the urban center. They also questioned the inclusion of residential areas and the quarry within the Center boundary and do not consider the quarry suitable for residential use. In addition, they want to make sure the Center promotes green spaces where possible.

Response: Thank you for your comment. The Highlands Council is committed to working with the Borough to ensure the implementation of the Highlands Center is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP). A high priority identified in the RMP is for municipalities to develop and implement a Stream Protection/Restoration Plan to be used as a basis for both development review and restoration activities. Completion of a Stream Protection/Restoration Plan for the Mine Brook has been

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
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Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report

added as a plan conformance task in the Borough's Implementation Plan and Schedule as part of the Consistency Review and Recommendations Report.

Center planning is intended to be a community driven process with a significant public outreach component. If the Highlands Council approves the amended petition for Center Designation, the next step will be for the Borough to undertake the full process of center planning for the designated Center with input from the public and stakeholders. Master plan updates and zoning updates will be adopted upon completion of the Center planning.