



MIKIE SHERRILL
Governor

DR. DALE G. CALDWELL
Lieutenant Governor

State of New Jersey

HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL

100 North Road (Route 513)
Chester, New Jersey 07930-2322
(908) 879-6737
(908) 879-4205 (fax)
www.nj.gov/njhighlands



CARL J. RICHKO
Chairman

BENJAMIN L. SPINELLI, ESQ.
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Budget & Finance Committee

FROM: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director

DATE: July 9, 2026

SUBJECT: Committee Meeting Minutes – June 30, 2026

A Budget and Finance (B&F) Committee meeting was held on Tuesday, June 30, 2026, at 12:00 pm via Zoom. The following participants were present:

Committee: Council Chair Richko, Committee Chair Visioli, Committee Members Kibler, Koop, and Le Frois. Committee Member Bush was absent.

Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU): Azeem Chaudry, Associate Counsel

Highlands Staff: Ben Spinelli, Neda Hartman, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Kelley Curran, Jocelyn van den Akker, Corey Piasecki, Allison Bittner, Carole Ann Dicton, Kyli Engle, Annette Tagliareni, and Diana Swiderski.

Committee Chair Visioli opened the meeting at 12:00 pm.

Committee Chair Visioli reported that the committee will discuss the following agenda items:

1. FY2027 Plan Conformance Grant Program Overview
2. FY2027 Plan Conformance Grant Request
3. Additional items

At this time, Highlands staff gave an overview on the first agenda items:

FY2027 Plan Conformance Grant Program Overview

James Humphries, Director of Planning, Science & GIS, stated that Highlands Council staff recommend that grants be reviewed and awarded on a quarterly basis in order to prioritize conforming municipalities and budget

New Jersey Is an Equal Opportunity Employer



Follow the New Jersey Highlands Council @njhighlandscouncil

drawdown. Beginning in July of each fiscal year and as funding permits, \$400,000 will be allocated from the plan conformance grant budget per quarter. Any funding not allocated during that quarter will be divided amongst the remaining quarters, and any remaining grant funding will be transferred into the RMP Implementation Account at the end of the fiscal year. Awards will be made at the July, October, January, and April Council meetings.

Priority based on plan conformance status:

1. Fully conforming municipalities and/or counties
2. Partially conforming municipalities and/or counties
3. Municipalities or counties with an approved Petition, underway with active implementation
4. Non-conforming planning area municipalities
5. Non-conforming preservation area municipalities or counties are ineligible, except for plan conformance petition funding.

Grant Priorities

The following priorities for the award of grants shall be considered, in no particular order.

- Time sensitivity of project
- Projects that leverage outside funding
- Plans required by the Highlands Council through plan conformance, the RMP or project review conditions
- Water quality improvement projects
- Water quantity projects (including Water Use and Conservation Management Plans)
- Plans necessary for outside funding (such as Open Space Plans for Green Acres or Farmland Retention Plans for SADC funding)
- Climate Change Related Hazard Vulnerability Assessments
- Environmental resource management plans (critical habitat management, wellhead protection, etc.)
- Projects nexus to RMP GPOs and Programs

Highlands staff recommended that Executive Director, Ben Spinelli, award the following grants under Executive Director's authority provided by the Highlands Council. *(It was noted that amounts are estimates and will be reported to the Budget & Finance Committee at their quarterly meetings.)*

- Plan Conformance Assessment Grants for \$15,000
- Interactive ERI Implementation for \$5,000
- Conformance Ordinance Adoption for \$5,000, and
- Highlands Master Plan Element Adoption (conformance ordinance version) for \$5,000.

Council Chair Richko agreed with the idea of prioritizing conforming municipalities.

Mr. Humphries noted that if grant requests amount to more than \$400,000 per quarter, we will prioritize conforming municipalities.

Council Chair Richko also stated that we should not award any grants until the fourth quarter to non-conforming towns. Mr. Humphries added that there may be exceptions to that rule, for example, a non-conforming grant is positive for the region or there is a mandate from the state, we should consider funding the grant.

Committee Member Kibler expressed that prioritizing conforming towns was an effective way but asked if there is a way we can get a message to non-conforming towns.

At this time there was further discussion regarding funding non-conforming towns and how best to handle. Corey Piasecki, Principal Planner added that Highlands planners can relay this information to their non-conforming municipalities via phone or email and provide grant funding if there is value to our RMP mission.

In conclusion, Mr. Humphries added that it is essential to prioritize who receives our assistance so we can stay within our available funding. We will report to the Committee each quarter and adjust as needed.

Plan Conformance Planning Grants

Mr. Humphries noted that contingent on the approval of the FY2027 budget of \$2,182,352, Highlands Council staff recommends the approval of grants totaling \$268,458 for approval by the Highlands Council. The balance of \$131,542 allocated for this quarter will be distributed among the remaining three grant award periods.

At this time, Highlands staff gave an overview of the grant requests for FY2027 budget.

Borough of Wharton, Morris County – Master Plan Update (\$25,000)

Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager, reported that the Borough of Wharton is located entirely within the Planning Area, with conformance underway. The borough's Petition for Plan Conformance with a Center Designation in the Planning Area was approved in 2014. The borough has since adopted several additional components of its Master Plan since then, including a Housing Element & Fair Share Plan and Stormwater Management Plan. An update has recently begun to the Land Use Plan Element of the Master Plan with the required Climate Change Hazard Vulnerability Assessment. The borough expects to complete these elements by the end of 2026.

Borough of Glen Gardner, Hunterdon County – Master Plan Reexamination Report (\$17,600)

Ms. Haddock-Weiler reported that the Borough of Glen Gardner is a fully conforming municipality located entirely within the Preservation Area. The borough is seeking to prepare its sixth Master Plan Reexamination Report, which will be guided by Municipal Land Use Law. Completion is anticipated by the end of 2026.

Borough of Netcong, Morris County – Hydrogeological Study Phase II (\$22,000)

Ms. Haddock-Weiler reported that the Borough of Netcong is located entirely within the Planning Area, with conformance underway. Funding is requested for the second phase of a design study for the replacement of municipal Well 1A that has diminished in yield. The replacement well will be located on the same site as the existing well so that it can fall under an NJDEP Minor Modification Application. Phase II will include design boring, groundwater sampling, and preliminary well design. Due to \$11,000 in funding remaining from Phase I, the Borough is requesting \$22,000 to complete Phase II.

Mendham Township, Morris County – Master Planning (\$153,558)

Mr. Piasecki, Principal Planner, reported that Mendham Township is located entirely within the Planning Area, with conformance underway and Plan Conformance approval conditions actively being met including the adoption of the Plan Conformance Ordinance and the Agriculture Retention and Farmland Preservation Plan under active development. The township is requesting funding to update the Master Plan Goals and Objectives, Land Use Plan Element, Circulation Plan Element, Conservation, Environmental and Sustainability Plan Element, Historic Preservation Plan Element, Community Facilities Plan Element, Stormwater Management Plan Element, Recycling Plan Element, and Open Space and Recreation Plan Element. Since the township's last adoption of the Master Plan Land Use Plan in 2000, there have been significant changes in the region, including the Highlands Act. Completion of the process will take place over the next 8-12 months.

Chester Township, Morris County – Redevelopment Study/Plan (\$15,000)

Mr. Piasecki, Principal Planner, stated that Chester Township is a fully conforming municipality that contains both Preservation and Planning Areas. The township is requesting funding for a Redevelopment Study and Plan for the Simmonds Precision Property, commonly known as the Hercules Site. The study and plan will include a site assessment to determine environmental contamination and whether the property can be redeveloped.

Borough of Mountain Lakes, Morris County – Stormwater Management Planning (\$20,300)

Kelley Curran, Science Manager, reported that the Borough of Mountain Lakes is a fully conforming municipality that is located entirely within the Planning Area. The borough is requesting funding for the preparation of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan Update, Stormwater Control Ordinance Update, MS4 Infrastructure Map, and Phases I and II of a Watershed Improvement Plan. Completion is projected to be by January 2027.

Township of Holland, Hunterdon County – Stormwater Management Planning (\$15,000)

Ms. Curran reported that the Township of Holland is a fully conforming municipality that contains both Preservation and Planning Areas. The township is requesting funding for the preparation of Phase I of a Watershed Improvement Plan.

At this time, in response to a question from Council Chair Richko, Neda Hartman, Senior Counsel, noted that Member Bush would need to recuse himself from the Holland Township grant so that will be a separate resolution for Council's consideration.

Executive Director Authority

The following grants have been approved by the Executive Director under his authority *(based on the grant program priorities noted above)*.

Township of Mt. Olive, Morris County – Plan Conformance Grant (\$16,500)

Mr. Humphries reported that the Township of Mount Olive is located within Preservation and Planning Areas, with conformance in the Preservation Area. The township is requesting funding to conduct an analysis on conforming for the Planning Area.

Township of Chester, Morris County – Plan Conformance Ordinance (\$5,000)

Mr. Humphries reported that the township is requesting funding to update the Highlands Referral Ordinance by adopting the Plan Conformance Ordinance in order to maintain compliance with the Regional Master Plan.

Plan Conformance Petitions – *the following grant was approved by the Council at its June meeting.*

Town of Boonton – Planning Area Conformance & Center Designation (\$117,000)

Mr. Humphries reported that the Town of Boonton requested funding for plan conformance and center approval.

Committee Chair Visioli asked for a motion to approve grants for the following municipalities: Boroughs of Wharton, Glen Gardner, Netcong, and Mountain Lakes; and the Townships of Mendham, Chester, and Holland. Council Chair Richko made the motion and Committee Member Kibler seconded it. All were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 12:29 pm.