



State of New Jersey

Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council
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BENJAMIN L. SPINELLI, ESQ.
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

To: Budget & Finance Committee
From: Benjamin L. Spinelli, Esq., Executive Director
Subject: Committee Meeting Minutes – October 3, 2024
Date: October 10, 2024

A Budget and Finance (B&F) Committee meeting was held on Thursday, October 3, 2024 at 12:00pm via Zoom. The following participants were present:

Committee: Council Chair Richko, Committee Chair Visioli and Committee Member James.

Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU): Alexis Franklin, Associate Counsel

Highlands Staff: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Kelley Curran, Jocelyn van den Akker, Neda Hartman, Roberta Burkhart and Annette Tagliareni.

Committee Chair Visioli opened the meeting at 12:01pm.

A roll call was taken. Committee Member Bush was absent. All other committee members were present.

Committee Chair Visioli reported that the committee will discuss three (3) agenda items.

Highlands Council FY2025 General Operating Budget

Ranji Persaud, Manager of HR, Fiscal & Office Services, reported that the FY2025 General Operating Budget projected at \$3,304,340 is straightforward with some minor projections/adjustments. It was noted that the State Appropriation was the same from previous years with an increase of state aid to cover salaries per collective bargaining agreements. It was also noted that \$170,000 of unexpended funds was returned to the Council from FY24. The budget only covers basic expenses and payroll. It did not include any additional staff members.

Committee Chair Visioli asked for a motion to move the FY2025 General Operating Budget to the full Council for consideration. Chair Richko made the motion and Member James seconded it. All were in favor.

Highlands Council FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Budget

James Humphries, Director of Planning, Science & GIS reported on behalf of Grant Manager, Herb August and stated that the FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Budget will address:

- Municipal Plan Conformance Petition Planning & Implementation
- Highlands Housing Element and Fair Share Plans
- Highlands MS4 Permit Compliance and Stormwater Planning
- County Plan Conformance

Ben Spinelli, Executive Director, reported that due to the MS4 Permit Compliance and Affordable Housing initiatives which will consume a majority of this budget, he reached out to the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to make a request to fund the Affordable Housing initiative to free up some of our grant funding.

Committee Chair Visioli asked for a motion to move the FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget to the full Council for consideration. Chair Richko made the motion and Member James seconded it. All were in favor.

Highlands Council FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Grant Requests

Stormwater Management Planning (\$709,000)

Kelley Curran, Science Manager, reported that since the committee's last meeting, Council staff did more investigation on the 33 requests we received for MS4 Permit Compliance & Stormwater Planning since the total funding requested exceeded the Council's annual grant budget. Council staff recommended to place a cap of \$50,000 on requests over this amount for conforming municipalities and denying request for non-conforming municipalities. In addition, two (2) municipalities received prior MS4 grant funding and need to close out their initial grants prior to approving new funding. Four (4) municipalities' requests are being held for consideration at a future meeting as they need to complete important required plan conformance tasks.

Mr. Spinelli also added that municipalities are eligible to receive NJDEP funding of \$25,000 (Tier A towns) and \$75,000 (Tier B to A). Municipalities need to demonstrate in their requests that they have expended or plan to expend those funds before they receive supplemental funding from the Council.

Affordable Housing Municipal Build Out Analysis, Housing Element and Fair Share Plans - \$25,000 per municipality for 24 municipalities (\$600,000)

Mr. Humphries reported that 25 municipalities have met the definition of conformance as of March 20, 2024. To allow these fully conforming municipalities to update their Municipal Build Out Report and begin preparing a 4th round Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, \$25,000 is recommended to be awarded to 24 of these municipalities (one municipality has already received funding). Any funds that remain unawarded as of January 1, 2025 will be returned to the grants budget for reallocation. Additional grants will be awarded in spring 2025 if Council receives DCA funding.

Town of Boonton – Highlands Center Designation Petition (Morris County) - \$23,500

Mr. Humphries reported that the Town of Boonton is requesting funding to pursue plan conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan through the designation of a Highlands Center.

Bloomsbury Borough Sewer Feasibility Technical Assistance (Hunterdon County) - \$10,000

Mr. Humphries reported that Bloomsbury Borough wishes to investigate the potential to sewer the developed portions of the town. An initial technical assistance grant is proposed to allow the Borough's professionals to begin the lengthy process of preparing for a sewer feasibility study. Council staff met with NJDEP and EPA to discuss a centralized wastewater treatment system for the Borough. This grant will get the process going and provide the technical assistance they need.

Committee Chair Visioli asked for a motion to move the FY2025 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget for Plan Conformance Funding Grants to the full Council for consideration. Chair Richko made the motion and Member James seconded it. All were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:18pm.