

RESOLUTION 2026-11

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL APPROVAL OF THE AMENDED PETITION FOR PLAN CONFORMANCE FOR A CENTER DESIGNATION FOR THE BOROUGH OF BERNARDSVILLE, SOMERSET COUNTY

WHEREAS, the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act (Highlands Act) has created a public body corporate and politic with corporate succession known as the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (Highlands Council); and

WHEREAS, Section 15 of the Highlands Act provides for voluntary Plan Conformance whereby any municipality or county located wholly or partially in the Planning Area may voluntarily revise and conform its local master plans and development regulations, as they relate to the development and use of land in the Planning Area, with the goals, requirements and provisions of the RMP at any time; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Act provides that approval of a Petition for Plan Conformance entitles the conforming municipality or county to specific benefits including: planning grants, technical assistance, state aid, priority for projects, tax stabilization funds, a strong presumption of validity and extraordinary deference in the event of legal challenge, and legal representation; and

WHEREAS, Section 18 of the Highlands Act obligates the Highlands Council to establish a grant funding program to reimburse municipalities and counties for reasonable expenses associated with Plan Conformance; and

WHEREAS, on December 18, 2008, the Highlands Council approved Resolution 2008-73 to provide grant funding for Highlands municipalities to cover the reasonable expenses associated with revisions to master plans, development regulations or other regulations to conform them to the RMP; and

WHEREAS, the Borough of Bernardsville is located in Somerset County and the full extent of its 8,265 acres lies in the Highlands Planning Area; and

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council previously approved the Borough of Bernardsville's Petition for Plan Conformance by adoption of Resolution #2024-34 on December 12, 2024.

WHEREAS, 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; and

WHEREAS, in approving the Borough's Petition for Plan Conformance, the Highlands Council identified preparation of a Highlands Center Feasibility Study as a task in the Implementation Plan and Schedule (IPS); and

WHEREAS, in August 2025, the Highlands Council approved the Borough's scope of work for the Highlands Center Feasibility Study, and the Borough completed the study in November 2025, requesting that the Highlands Council amend the previously approved Petition for Plan Conformance to include the Highlands Center; and

WHEREAS, 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; and

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WHEREAS, on December 22, 2025, the Highlands Council staff posted a Public Notice, the Draft Consistency Review and Recommendations Report, and the complete amended petition documents on the Highlands Council website for a public review and comment period with written comments due on or before January 22, 2026, and three comments were received; and

WHEREAS, the Petition includes the following reimbursement-based grant funding in order to address the Highlands Act requirements for Plan Conformance.

Purpose	Amount
Highlands Interactive Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI)	\$3,000.00
Municipal Stormwater Management Plan	\$25,000.00
Highlands Center Planning	\$30,000.00
Total	\$58,000.00

WHEREAS, the Highlands Council accepts the staff recommendation as stated in the Final Consistency Review and Recommendations Report; and

WHEREAS, according to the Highlands Act and the Plan Conformance Guidelines, the Borough of Bernardsville’s compliance with an approved Final Consistency Review and Recommendations Report, the Highlands Plan Conformance Procedures, and the Highlands Act shall maintain the Borough of Bernardsville’s status as conforming to the Regional Master Plan and all statutory benefits associated with Plan Conformance; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 13:20-5.j, no action authorized by the Highlands Council shall have force or effect until ten (10) days, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays excepted, after a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council has been delivered to the Governor for review, unless prior to expiration of the review period the Governor shall approve same, in which case the action shall become effective upon such approval.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Highlands Council hereby approves the Borough of Bernardsville’s Amended Petition for Plan Conformance for a Center Designation with conditions, as set forth in the Final Consistency Review and Recommendations Report; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Highlands Council staff recommends that the Highlands Council authorizes the execution of a Plan Conformance Grant Agreement with the Borough of Bernardsville for the funding allotted to the above-referenced tasks in the amounts designated, not to exceed in the aggregate \$58,000; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Executive Director or designee is authorized to make any amendments and publicly release the Final Consistency Review and Recommendations Report, Highlands Implementation Plan and Schedule, and amend the Plan Conformance Grant Agreement consistent with direction from the Highlands Council and the Department of the Treasury, to properly effectuate the intent of the Council and thereafter execute the Report and Schedule on behalf of the Council; and

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Borough of Bernardsville is hereby entitled to the statutory benefits associated with Plan Conformance as detailed in the Highlands Act, the Regional Master Plan, and the Plan Conformance Procedures in Addendum 2019-2, so long as the Borough of Bernardsville remains in conformance with the Regional Master Plan and to the extent such funds are made available by the State; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Executive Director or designee is authorized, consistent with direction from the Council, to oversee and monitor the Borough of Bernardsville’s compliance with this Resolution and to take any and all action necessary in coordination with the Highlands Council.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Highlands Council at its regular meeting held on the 16th day of April 2026.



Carl J. Richko, Chairman

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