

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

PRESENT

CARL J. RICHKO)	CHAIR
KURT ALSTEDE)	VICE CHAIR
TIMOTHY DOUGHERTY)	COUNCIL MEMBERS
MICHAEL FRANCIS)	
BRUCE JAMES)	
DANIEL J. VAN ABS, PhD)	
MICHAEL SEBETICH, PhD)	
JAMES VISIOLI)	
RICHARD VOHDEN)	

VIA TELECONFERENCE:

MICHAEL DRESSLER)
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ABSENT:

ROBERT HOLTAWAY)
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CALL TO ORDER 196TH meeting of the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council was called to order at 4:01pm at the Highlands Council Offices in Chester, NJ.

ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken. Member Holtaway was absent. All other Council Members were present. Member Dressler was present via teleconference. *The following staff members were present: Ben Spinelli, Gabrielle Gallagher, James Humphries, Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Neda Hartman, Herb August, Annette Tagliareni, Carole Ann Dicton, Alex Hascha and Tom Tagliareni. Others present via teleconference: Thomas F. Holl, Associate Counsel, Governor's Authorities Unit (GAU).*

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT was recited.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE was recited.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Chair Richko reported on West Milford's forest fire and thanked the New Jersey Forest Service, as well as the volunteer West Milford Fire Company and fire companies from surrounding municipalities.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Mr. Spinelli provided a number of updates:

- Policy Standards for Warehouses in the Highlands Region – supplements the State's Office of Planning Advocacy's guidelines. Council will consider releasing this document. Mr. Spinelli acknowledged the hard work of staff in putting this document together.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

- Affordable Housing Request for Qualifications (RFQ) – Received four (4) responses and it is anticipated that a recommendation will be made to the Council for consideration at its next meeting.
- Agriculture policy – working on putting in place a critical policy.
- Watershed Restoration and Protection Plans Request for Proposal (RFP) – Received 4 responses and it is anticipated that a recommendation will be made to the Council for consideration at its next meeting.
- Highlands Operating Budget FY2024 – requested an additional \$300K for additional staff positions (agriculture specialist, climate scientist, restoration professional, and an engineer for stormwater requirements).
- Science staff has attended conference/training regarding:
 - a. Travelling Harmful Algae Blooms (HABs) Lab
 - b. Sparta Mountain site visit – comments submitted to NJDEP
 - c. Presentation on Native plants in the home landscape at Pequest Hatchery
 - d. Karst field work
- Forest Management Guidelines with a Highlands-specific approach
- Corporation Business Tax (CBT) funding – continue to advocate for funding for Highlands land preservation program – map provided to members showing undeveloped lands at risk
- Plan Conformance outreach
 - a. Harding Township – submitted Scope of Work (SOW) to conform with Regional Master Plan (RMP)
 - b. Netcong Borough – received approved resolution to pursue Plan Conformance
 - c. Peapack-Gladstone Borough – indicated that they want to pursue Plan Conformance
 - d. Union Township – pursuing Plan Conformance in the Planning Area (already conform in Preservation Area)
- Council Appointments – thanked all Council members for their efforts
- Alpha Borough Amended Petition for Center Designation – Council considering at today’s meeting. Complimented Mr. Humphries and Ms. Haddock-Weiler for their innovative approach to this petition
- Climate change
- Economic Sustainability

Mr. Spinelli complimented staff on their hard work.

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

Council Comments

Member Sebetich complimented staff on their site visit to Sparta Mountain and comments to NJDEP.

At this time there was a question regarding what Council can say about the “confidential” documents provided to Council.

Member Alstede added that as a Council we have not taken a position on this topic.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

Member Francis complimented staff's ability to collaborate as it is critically important and will make a difference in our efforts.

Member Dougherty complimented Mr. Spinelli's enthusiasm for the Highlands and is very supportive of his efforts.

Chair Richko added that good things are happening, and he compliments Mr. Spinelli and his staff.

APPROVAL OF HIGHLANDS COUNCIL MINUTES OF MARCH 16, 2023

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the Council Minutes of March 16, 2023.

Member Sebetich made a motion to approve the Highlands Council Minutes of March 16, 2023. Member Dougherty seconded it.

A roll call vote was taken. The Highlands Council Minutes of March 16, 2023 were APPROVED 9-0, with one abstention by Member Dressler.

PLAN CONFORMANCE COMMITTEE

Committee Chair Dressler turned it over to staff to give a review of the meeting.

Mr. Spinelli added that this is a great example of collaboration by our staff. Judy Thornton, Principal Planner, took the initiative on preparation of the warehouse document.

James Humphries, Director of Planning, Science and GIS provided a presentation on the Policy Standards for Warehousing in the New Jersey Highlands Region. The presentation may be found on the Highlands Council website at the link below:

www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2023/apr20/pres_CouncilMtg_april_20.pdf

Council Comment

Member Van Abs commented that the policy document before us now is a very well-done policy.

Vice Chair Alstede commented that the current appraisals are not keeping up with the trends and recognizes it is a challenge to use our authority to strengthen the appraisals.

Chair Richko asked the Council if there were any objections to releasing the document. There were no objections.

Resolution – Approval of Amended Petition for Plan Conformance for Highlands Center Designation, Alpha Borough, Warren County

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager, provided a presentation on Alpha Borough's Amended Petition for Highlands Center Designation. The presentation may be found on the Highlands Council website at the link below beginning on page 5:

www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/2023/apr20/pres_CouncilMtg_april_20.pdf

At this time, Chair Richko introduced Mayor Dunwell for his comments on Alpha Borough's amended petition.

Mayor Craig Dunwell, Alpha Borough – Mayor Dunwell commented that Ms. Haddock-Weiler encapsulated some of the essential elements of Alpha Borough. He proceeded to give an in-depth history of Alpha Borough dating back to 1911. Mayor Dunwell added that part of this is about the industrial park, but the other is about community. We have done good planning and haven't jumped at the latest fad, which is the right choice for Alpha. Mayor Dunwell concluded that if this petition is approved, we will achieve a goal established in 1958.

Chair Richko announced that Alpha Borough posted a notice for this Council meeting.

Councilman Louis Cartabona, Alpha Borough – Mr. Cartabona commented that the number one concern is seeing the Alpha community thrive.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member James moved the resolution. Member Alstede seconded it.

Council Comment

There was no Council discussion.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.

BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Resolution –Approval of Fiscal Year 2023 Highlands Protection Fund Capital Budget for Plan Conformance Funding Grants

On behalf of Committee Chair Holtaway, Committee Member Visioli introduced the following grant requests:

1. Roxbury Township, Morris County is requesting \$113,650 for a Lake Management Plan to complete a dredging project in the Landing Channel section of Lake Hopatcong.
2. Montville Township, Morris County is requesting \$73,000 for the design and planning of a recreational walking and biking trail.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

3. Hunterdon County is requesting \$70,000 for a GIS Parcel Update Project to update their existing parcel data for their constituent municipalities.

Chair Richko asked if anyone from Roxbury Township would like to comment on their proposed grant.

John Shepard, Township Manager – Mr. Shepard gave a brief overview, technical specifications and ecological components of the dredging project and beneficial reuse of the Landing Channel section of Lake Hopatcong. Mr. Shepard noted that the last time Landing Channel was dredged was in 1990. He noted that this is one of the 3rd highest priorities in addressing HABs.

Fred S. Lubnow, PhD, Princeton Hydro – Dr. Lubnow commented that this unique project, in addition to dredging, is beneficial reuse to create habitat by using existing sediments in a freshwater system. Dr. Lubnow noted that implementation of this project is currently being discussed.

Chair Richko asked if anyone from Montville Township would like to comment on their proposed grant.

Nick Marucci, Township Engineer & Director of Public Works – Mr. Marucci thanked the Council for entertaining our request for funding for a trail in Montville Township. It is a project that our governing body is very excited about.

Chairman Richko asked for a motion on the resolution.

Member Francis moved the resolution. Member Visioli seconded it.

Council Comment

Member Vohden asked for clarification on the floating island. Dr. Lubnow responded that at one time, the island was called “floating island.” It was an existing island that contained cranberries. Using some of the sediment with this project, it would recreate habitat.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

A roll call vote was taken. The resolution was APPROVED 10-0.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

Vice Chair Alstede asked about the best way to have a Council-wide discussion on forest management at Sparta Mountain.

Gabrielle Gallagher, Chief Counsel, responded that Council may discuss by closed session, add as an agenda item at Council’s next meeting, or set up a separate meeting, etc. The question is about noticing the meeting and addressing the requirements.

Chair Richko responded that the best way to discuss this would be in closed session.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

Member Dougherty also asked if we go into closed session, is there a timeline to OPRA the document once we hold it in closed session.

At this time, there was discussion regarding the “Advisory, Consultative & Deliberative” labeling of Council’s site visit report and correspondence to NJDEP and how to proceed with Council discussion regarding the two (2) documents.

Mr. Humphries also suggested that we schedule a couple of informational sessions to get a basic understanding before the next meeting for discussion.

It was then decided to have an Executive Session at Council’s next meeting for discussion with the appropriate staff members.

Chair Richko opened the meeting for any public comment.

Public Comment

Mayor Craig Dunwell, Alpha Borough – Mayor Dunwell thanked the Council for approving Alpha Borough’s Amended Petition and also noted that Alpha Borough approved a resolution to update their open space plan with Highlands Council funding.

Julia Somers, New Jersey Highlands Coalition – Ms. Somers commented on the following topics: 1) Keep It Green for small parcels; 2) Sparta Mountain document interest; 3) Ms. Somers’ appointment to the State Planning Commission; 4) debt limit problems; and 5) whether the process of Alpha Borough’s center designation will serve as a model moving forward. Ms. Haddock-Weiler responded that “yes” it will serve as a model. Ms. Somers expressed concern about meaningful public input and how Lopatcong is noticing their meetings.

Nicholas Homyak, Parsippany-Troy Hills Township – Mr. Homyak provided three (3) reports on pro-forestation and urged every member of the Council to read these reports before the next meeting. Mr. Homyak submitted these reports for the record.

John Kecherson, Lopatcong Township – Mr. Kecherson is interested in what is going on in Lopatcong and the potential for more warehouses. Mr. Kecherson added that he has been attending Lopatcong Council meetings and he is happy that Alpha Borough’s petition will serve as a model for other municipalities.

Councilman Louis Cartabona, Alpha Borough - Mr. Cartabona commends the Council on their efforts to help the environment, communities, and resources. Mr. Cartabona commented on micro plastics and emphasized his concerns.

Tom Dallessio, Musconetcong Watershed Association – Mr. Dallessio commented that a clean-up was held at Musconetcong River and there was less garbage; the message is getting across. Mr. Dallessio thanked the Council for an opportunity to apply for the RFP on Watershed Restoration and Protection Plans. Mr. Dallessio also spoke about their vision and action plan for Musconetcong watershed and announced that a new park will be opened at 152 West Portal Road in Asbury, NJ.

NEW JERSEY HIGHLANDS WATER PROTECTION AND PLANNING COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 20, 2023

Before adjourning the meeting, Chair Richko suggested that the Council schedule the Executive Session earlier (3:00pm) before 4:00pm public meeting. Council agreed.

Chair Richko asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Member James made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Francis seconded it. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:29pm.

CERTIFICATION

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

Date: 5/18/2023

Name: Annette Tagliareni
Annette Tagliareni, Executive Assistant

Vote on the Approval of Minutes	Motion	Second	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
Councilmember Alstede	✓		✓			
Councilmember Dougherty						✓
Councilmember Dressler						✓
Councilmember Francis			✓			
Councilmember Holtaway					✓	
Councilmember James		✓	✓			
Councilmember Sebetich			✓			
Councilmember Van Abs			✓			
Councilmember Visioli			✓			
Councilmember Vohden			✓			
Chairman Richko			✓			