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Washington Borough to Address Downtown Revitalization and Other Priorities through Highlands Plan Conformance

CHESTER, N.J. — At its most recent meeting the Highlands Council approved a petition for Plan Conformance and Highlands Center Designation for Washington Borough, Warren County. The approved petition includes an Implementation Plan and Schedule (ISP) that allocates up to \$101,000 in grant funding to address a number of local efforts including Highlands Center planning and downtown redevelopment planning.

“For Washington Borough, conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) helps advance a number of efforts the town already has underway,” explained Highlands Council Executive Director Lisa Plevin. “The Borough is very committed to maximizing the potential of its downtown and the designation as a Highlands Center will build on previous planning efforts aimed at revitalization and redevelopment. The town is also eager to address some wastewater challenges and we are glad to support them in that work.”

Strategically situated at the intersection of State Highways 31 and 57, Washington Borough offers easy access to a small retail and commercial center amid the largely rural character of southern Warren County. The Borough had previously developed revitalization and redevelopment plans that, while more than ten years old, guide much of the future development goals of the Borough. These plans will be updated as part of the Plan Conformance process to reflect revised goals and strategies and current conditions.

The Borough is located entirely within the Planning Area of the Highlands Region where conformance with the RMP is voluntary. Washington Borough’s Highlands Center designation includes the entire municipality. A Highlands Center is an area within a municipality that the town and the Highlands Council staff have jointly determined is appropriate for development. Designation as a Highlands

Center launches a very specific approach to conformance with the RMP designed to identify the goals, best uses and densities for a specific area within a municipality.

“The benefit of designating a Highlands Center is that it provides the town with a planning process that supports development and redevelopment, while remaining consistent with the Highlands RMP,” said Carl Richko, Highlands Council Chairman. “Washington Borough is an ideal location for a Highlands Center and we look forward to working in partnership with the Borough on projects that will benefit both the municipality and the overall Highlands region.”

The majority of the proposed Highlands Center in Washington Borough is currently developed. Undeveloped portions that contain Highlands resources will be protected within the parameters of a “Highlands Environmental Resource Zone” (HERZ). The delineation of the HERZ recognizes that a designated Center, while generally suitable for future development and redevelopment, may contain areas of sensitive resources that may require additional protections.

Today’s approval by the Council brings the total number of approved municipal petitions for Plan Conformance to 51. Additional details about the Borough’s Petition, including Highlands Council recommendations and specific funding allocations related to Plan Conformance implementation, are available in the “Final Draft Consistency Review & Recommendations Report,” which can be found along with all other Petition materials on the Washington Borough page of the Highlands Council website: www.nj.gov/njhighlands/planconformance/wash_boro.html.

Actions taken by the Council at this meeting will take effect following the Governor’s review and consideration of the meeting minutes, up to 10 business days from receipt of the minutes. Materials related to this meeting including resolutions, presentations, audio and minutes will be posted at: www.nj.gov/njhighlands/about/calend/index.html (click on February 18 meeting).

The Highlands Council is a regional planning agency, established in 2004 with the passage of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act and charged with implementation of the Act. More information is available at www.nj.gov/njhighlands.

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