

PUBLIC COMMENTS SUBMITTED AT HIGHLANDS
COUNCIL MEETING ON OCTOBER 20, 2016

Comments of Wilma Frey, New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Re:

NJ Highlands Council proposed Resolution
“NJ Highlands Council Support for a Water User Fee as a
Dedicated Source of Funding for Land Conservation”

~~1. We are disappointed that the Resolution was adopted by the Council. We believe that the Council should have been more thorough in its review of the Resolution and its implications for the region. We believe that the Council should have been more thorough in its review of the Resolution and its implications for the region.~~

2. NJ Conservation supports what is implied by the title of the resolution – a water user fee that would support the Council’s Open Space and HDC Purchase Program. We are in favor of more land preservation in the critical Highlands region, and believe it is essential to protect the water and forest resources of the region.

However, reading of the body of the resolution reveals:

1. Errors in the Whereas’s referencing the Highlands Act itself, and other statements that are partially or entirely inaccurate.

2. Action points in the “Be It Resolved” section do not indicate that the goal is to purchase lands in fee or dedicated conservation easements through the Highlands Open Space and HDCPP programs. Rather, the stated goal is to “assist in compensating landowners whose future land use expectations have been impacted.”

3. “Be It Resolved” point 2 also does not appear to support the stated goal of utilizing the water tax as a dedicated source of funding for land conservation, but instead recommends the development of a “means of distribution of funds to harmed landowners.” It does not indicate that the purchase of their lands in fee or easement will be the means of distributing the funds.

The funds must be applied to permanent preservation of the land resources.

We urge that this resolution be tabled at this time.

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I'm Hank Klumpp-I own 150+ acres in the Highlands Preservation Area.

I have had no equity for twelve years - the council has been telling me they are working hard to try to help me and others - then - I get the word, that for months now, that there will be no Highlands meetings due to the lack of agenda items. THANKS!

The taking of our property values with no compensation is an item for your agenda, and even if it were the only item on your agenda, there would have been lots to discuss.

In a 2012 U.S. Department of Agriculture Census, in Hunterdon County

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the average farm is 66 acres with a yearly earning of ¹⁵16.21 per acre. You do the math. There are taxes, insurance, maintenance and so on - Farmers need equity!

I have gone to the Tewksbury Tax office and asked the following —

My 150 acres have been forced into the preservation area because of the Highlands Act. My land has no equity. I farm the land so I pay farmland taxes. I'm not getting any younger.

What will happen when I no longer can farm my land? I cannot be expected

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to then pay real estate taxes on land that is unbuildable. What will the taxes be on my land??

The answer the Tewksbury Tax office gave me was, "We don't know how your Highlands preserved property will be taxed when you no longer can farm it. Go ask the Highlands Council - they did this - Guess they will have to fix it - So go ask them!"

Maybe this is an item that could have been addressed during the months that you had no items for an agenda!

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Hank Klumpp

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