
**Somerset County Planning Board
Draft Highlands Regional Master Plan
Review Comments**

Somerset Highlands Municipal Forum
April 26, 2007

County Role in Draft RMP Review Process

- Provide share updated information with and provide feedback to the Highlands Council
- Facilitate a better understanding among Somerset County municipalities and stakeholders
- Provide County/Regional Perspective
- Participate in peer review process

Structure of County Review Comments

- Modifications to the LUCM
- Data and Information Releases That Should Occur Prior to Final Plan Adoption
- Pre-Conformance Requirements That Should be Completed Prior to Final Plan Adoption
- Proposed New Pre-Conformance Requirements
- General Changes to the Draft RMP
- Plan Conformance Issues
- Plan Consistency and Coordination Recommendations

Top 5 County Concerns

- Is the Draft RMP fair and equitable? What will it cost, and who will bear the burden?
- Does the Draft Plan meet the requirements of the Highlands Act?
- Does it integrate other critical local, regional and state priorities?
- Is it based on sound science, data, analyses and assumptions?
- Is the Plan Conformance Process Reasonable and Do-able?

General Modifications to the Land Use Capability Map

- Resolve “over-simplification” issues resulting from the current “3-Zone” system
- Work with both “opt in” and “non-opt-in” municipalities to refine zone boundaries based on site specific and local information
- Show the location of publicly owned parks, opens space, preserves and public water supply areas
- Delineate “Specially Planned Areas (these should include SPC-designated centers)
- Areas that are pursuing Plan Endorsement and following the SDRP should be distinguished from “Opt-in” areas
- Refinement of population densities used to define LUCM zones

Modifications to the Land Use Capability Map: Planned Community Zone

- Distinguish PCZ areas based on growth potential
- Incorporate proximity to highway interchanges as a factor in defining the PCZ
- Include non-residential development/employment data as a factor in defining the PCZ Zone
- Identify undeveloped areas unconstrained by environmental limitations comprising “potential” infill and development areas
- Identify redevelopment areas (emphasize brownfields) using an analysis of improvement value as compared to land value
- Show potential TDR Receiving Zones

Modifications to the Land Use Capability Map Conservation Zone

- Distinguish agricultural production areas from rural/estate landscape management areas
- Identify existing preserved farms and adopted PIG Areas
- Identify historic hamlets, landscape heritage areas, and scenic resources

Modifications to the Land Use Capability Map

Protection Zone

- Identify high resource value areas targeted for public acquisition where no human/development related impacts should occur
- Re-consider the inclusion of developed sites, brownfields and active public recreation areas within PZ

General Changes to the Draft RMP

- Policies and strategies related to Well Head Protection Areas should be expanded
- Brownfield clean-up & redevelopment policies and strategies specific to each LUCM Zone should be provided, and priority Brownfield clean-up and re-use areas should be identified
- The Transportation section of the RMP must be enhanced and expanded
- The expansion of municipal housing elements and fair share plans as proposed in the RMP should be optional.
- The RMP should define and provide specific examples of “Major Highlands development” and the other specific exemptions from the Act
- The Highlands Council should prepare an annual report that establishes indicators and tracks progress in attaining the plan’s goals for public review

Data and Information Releases That Should Occur Prior to Final Plan Adoption

- Water Supply and Sewer Utility Capacity specific to each municipality by LUCM Zone and HUC
- Septic suitability analysis including septic density standards by LUCM Zone and HUC; and policies regarding alternative system design technology
- Build-out datasets, methods, assumptions and municipal specific results by LUCM Zone

Pre-Conformance Requirements That Should be Completed Prior to Final Plan Adoption

- Estimate of amount and type of potential development activity by municipality according for LUCM Zone
- Growth thresholds by municipality and HUC based on Net Water Availability
- Comprehensive performance-based development standards by LUCM Zone
- Preparation of model ordinances and plan elements

Pre-Conformance Requirements That Should be Completed Prior to Final Plan Adoption

(continued)

- Review procedures and criteria for proposed adjustment and revisions to open water/riparian area requirements
- Steep slope protection standards

Proposed New Pre-Conformance Requirements

- Establishment of the Highlands TDR Program
- Development of technical guidelines for preparing Regional Stormwater/Wetland Mitigation Plans
- Guidelines and process for municipal refinement of “Specially Planned Areas”; and municipal criteria for evaluating development and redevelopment feasibility of “potential” sites identified on the LUCM for inclusion in municipal-specific “smart growth” plans and policies
- Specific water conservation policies and strategies for both new and existing development served by inter-connected regional public water-supply sources both within and outside of the Highlands

Proposed New Pre-Conformance Requirements (continued)

- Creation of a comprehensive regional open space plan that establishes public acquisition and land management priorities, strategies and resources.
- Detailed guidance on municipal and site-specific water conservation plans and strategies
- Specific guidance for coordinating WMPs with the RMP, including criteria for defining “future SSAs” and expanding sewer capacity to accommodate projected growth.

Plan Conformance Issues

- Requirements must be refined to coincide with jurisdictional level –avoid duplication of efforts
- The linkage between each requirement and the Highlands Act requirements and RMP must be demonstrated
- The HC should prepare an estimate of the time and resources needed to accomplish each jurisdictional conformance requirement so that jurisdictions can address them in their budgetary processes
- Opportunities for shared resources, data and technical support among entities must be identified
- A fully defined process for submitting corrections to the RMP, LUCM and associated data for “Non-opt-in” municipalities is needed

Plan Conformance Issues

(continued)

- Jurisdictional actions/submission that meet conformance requirements must be clarified (identification of documents that must be changed versus submission of revised documents)
- Regulatory impacts of the Highlands Act in Non-opt-in” municipalities must be defined
- Opportunities for municipal and county “consistency by reference” to the RMP should be defined
- Overall clarification of the “Opt-in” Process, particularly for bifurcated jurisdictions
- Process through which adjustments and revisions to the RMP can be made after plan conformance has been achieved

Plan Consistency and Coordination Recommendations

- The relationship between the RMP and the SDRP should be clearly defined
- MOUs defining the planning, permitting and regulatory authority among various state agencies must be formalized to add clarity and certainty for municipalities and other stakeholders in both the “Planning” and “Preservation” Areas
- The RMP should address only those requirements defined by the Act, and should defer to appropriate agencies and jurisdictions regarding other planning requirements and policies

Public Involvement is Critical if the RMP is to Succeed

- The deadline for public comment on the Draft RMP is May 11, 2007
- Adequate opportunities for public comment on the “revised” Draft RMP must be provided
- The Pre-conformance requirements to be completed after RMP is adopted must be subject to public review and comment
- Opportunities for public involvement in the Plan Conformance Process must be clearly defined
- The process for updating the RMP must be open and inclusionary

Please submit comments on the Draft RMP to:

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More information about the Highlands Regional Master Plan, associated Land Use Capability Map and technical studies can be obtained through the Highlands Council Website:

www.highlands.state.nj.us

Please share your thoughts and
recommendations on the Draft RMP
with us

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