

January 17th Special Township Meeting on the Highlands

The Township will hold a special meeting on Thursday, January 17th at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall concerning the recently issued draft of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (“RMP”). The RMP draft is open for public comment until the end of February after which time it will be finalized. Eileen Swan, the Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Council, the State agency responsible for the RMP and implementing the Highlands legislation, will attend the meeting and answer questions from the Township. Jack Schrier, Vice Chairman of the Highlands Council and Morris County Freeholder, has also been invited but has not yet agreed to attend.

The Highlands legislation designates boundaries within the Highlands into two categories: Preservation Area and Planning Area. Counties and municipalities must comply with RMP rules for land in the Preservation Area, but have the option of whether or not to follow RMP rules for land located in Planning Areas. Harding lies within the Planning Area and therefore will likely have to make a choice in the future of whether or not to adopt RMP rules. Adoption means Harding’s master plan and zoning must conform with and would be subordinate to RMP rules as supervised by the NJ DEP. The RMP draft includes a zoning map for the Highlands region including Harding Township. Harding land has been assigned to one of three zones: Preservation, Conservation, or Community. Land within a zone may be further assigned to a sub-zone. Information on the Highlands or a copy of the RMP draft maybe obtained from the Highlands website www.highlands.state.nj.us. For an informative interactive zoning map provided on the Highlands website, see <http://maps.njhighlands.us/>, follow the instructions and then select Harding Township.

The Township Committee is studying the RMP draft in order to understand its potential impact to Harding as well as to ultimately identify the pros and cons of whether or not to modify its master plan and ordinances to be in compliance with the RMP. A preliminary analysis of the RMP by the Township’s planner is shown in Attachment A. The Township’s first priority, however, is to submit its comments on the RMP draft before the expiration of the comment period. According to Dr. Lanzerotti, the Township Committee has many questions about the RMP draft, specifically including the zoning map for Harding, it would like answered prior to submitting its comments. A list of the Township’s questions it plans to discuss during the meeting is listed in Attachment B.

The Township Committee has identified the Highlands RMP as one of the most important topics for the Township in 2008 and urged members of the public interested in Highlands to attend the meeting.