

Ratable chase not the answer in Highlands

August 2, 2010 Kate Millsaps

In a July 30 column, R. Gregory Jones attempts to perpetuate the misconception that the ratable chase is the answer to a municipality's need to provide services to its residents and that the Highlands Act will devastate the tax base in the region's communities. His predicted "reverse doughnut consequence of the Highlands Act" is the exact opposite of what has been proven in the Pinelands in southern New Jersey.

Under a regional Comprehensive Management Plan for more than 30 years, communities in the Pinelands enjoy higher property values and a lower tax rate compared to neighboring municipalities outside the region, as documented in the Pinelands Commission's 2009 Economic Report.

The ratable chase championed by Jones does not work. The municipalities with the highest ratables have the highest property taxes. More building means more municipal services.

Then Gov. Christie Whitman explained it well in her 1998 inaugural speech: "Too many towns bend over backwards to pursue development, hoping it will help balance their budgets. In the process, they strain not only their backs but also the services needed to support this development. The result is a double whammy: less open space and higher property taxes."

The Highlands Act works to combat this ratable chase myth by encouraging redevelopment in appropriate areas instead of in green space. As the rest of the state is consumed in sprawl growth Highlands homeowners will see property values rise as the area becomes an uncongested Eden of open space.

Kate Millsaps
BOONTON

The writer is campaign and grassroots coordinator for the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.