

This letter to multiple newspapers was facilitated by the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.

The Star-Ledger

January 7, 2011

Towns praise Highlands Council

Dear Editor:

We represent some of the first towns who have received or will soon receive approval from the Highlands Council for conformance to the Highlands Regional Master Plan. We believe it would be helpful to other Highlands communities and the public at large to consider our experiences.

Conformance to the Highlands plan is a process of planning for sustainable growth while protecting Highlands' resources. For example, Byram Township in Sussex County worked with the Council to reinvigorate its Route 206 corridor including a concept for a town center with a mix of residential and commercial development-an amenity that Byram lacked-while simultaneously preserving Byram's extensive natural resources.

Working with the Highlands Council and its staff has given our municipalities access to expert planning and technical guidance not otherwise easily available to us. No other State agency has been as responsive to our concerns and as committed to maintaining the individual character of our communities as the Highlands Council.

Initially, many of us approached conformance with suspicion. We wanted to hear what the Council had to offer, but we weren't quite ready to buy. In the end, however, we are all pleased with how plans for our individual communities moved forward.

We encourage our neighboring Highlands communities to keep an open mind and consider the many benefits and opportunities that conformance provides. We also invite township officials to contact any of us with their questions.

Sincerely,

Bettina Bieri, Mayor, Township of West Milford
Charles Daniel, Mayor, Borough of Califon
John Graefe, Deputy Mayor, Township of Bethlehem
James Oscovitch, Mayor, Byram Township
Mark E. Paradis, Mayor, Borough of Lebanon
Kristine Peterson, Borough of Hampton