

WANAQUE

Borough Council moves on adopting Highlands ordinance

BY HOLLY STEWART

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In spite of the fact that the Highlands Council has not yet approved the document, members of the Borough Council voted all in favor of passing the borough's Highlands Ordinance (No. 21-0-12) at their Dec. 10 meeting.

After stating that the council had been waiting several months for the Highlands Council to discuss the borough's ordinance, Mayor Daniel Mahler explained that he and Borough Administrator Tom Carroll "had spoken with the Highlands Council director about getting it on their agenda before tonight," but that had failed to occur. As noted on the Highlands Council website, three meetings of the Highlands Council – on Aug. 16, Nov. 1 and Dec. 6 – were cancelled since Mahler and the council sent them a copy of the local ordinance in mid-summer.

The borough's 116-page Highlands Ordinance details proposed changes made to Chapter 114 of Wanaque's Revised General Ordinances with the inclusion of a new chapter to that document called Article XVI, "Highlands Area Land Use Guidelines."

Much of the new ordinance revolves around the redevelopment and usage of the area designated as the Town Center, consid-

ered to be the borough's central business district located primarily along Ringwood Avenue. A primary theme running throughout the Highlands Ordinance is the borough's commitment to development and redevelopment within the Town Center area. The ordinance states: "Continued planning and redevelopment efforts in the designated (Highlands) Planning Area have the potential for bringing new ratable to Wanaque while . . . protecting environmentally sensitive areas throughout the borough."

At the Sept. 10 Borough Council meeting, Mahler said that the Highlands Council had requested an opportunity to review the ordinance before it became law.

Mahler said during the Dec. 10 meeting that the council had decided to go ahead and vote on the measure before the Highlands Council had given its final approval because pending ventures are dependent upon passage of the ordinance.

"We have to move it along to do the Hagstrom Boulevard project," Mahler said, referring to plans for a group home for the developmentally disabled to be built at 10 Warren Hagstrom Boulevard. As previously reported in *Suburban Trends*, Bergen County United Way (BCUW) and its partner –

the Madeline Group – will construct and operate a special needs housing development project on the site. BCUW President Tom Toronto expects to break ground on the project in summer 2013.

Mahler expressed confidence that the borough's Highlands Ordinance will pass muster with the higher governing body once it has a chance to look at it.

"There may be some amendments," he said, "but we're pretty confident it will be accepted as presented."

The Highlands Water and Protection Act was signed into law by former Gov. James McGreevey in 2004. It was designed to preserve the natural resources of the Highlands region of northwest New Jersey by regulating development under the supervision of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Although lauded by many environmentalists, it has also been the target of criticism from members of the business community, who say it places an undue burden on towns within the region by restricting their ability to expand their tax base.

The next meeting of the Highlands Council is planned for Jan. 17.

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