

**Plan Conformance Success Story:**

## **Waking a Sleeping Giant in Hunterdon County**

A few years ago, Hunterdon County began thinking about how best to position itself for economic growth. With a perfect combination of picturesque farmland, vibrant downtowns, lush open spaces, abundant recreational opportunities, and easy access to transportation, it seemed that all the right elements were in place for a thriving economic future. As they embarked on planning efforts to maximize this potential, the County discovered that being in the Highlands Region only added to these opportunities.

“Our economic development director began talking with Highlands Council staff and we discovered that many of the things we wanted to do, and were already planning to do, were in complete alignment with the goals of the Highlands Act and Regional Master Plan (RMP),” explains Hunterdon County Freeholder Matt Holt.

In November, the Board of Chosen Freeholders in Hunterdon County passed a resolution indicating the County’s intent to participate in the Highlands Council Plan Conformance process. The decision to move the resolution was based on what the county deemed “positive outcomes” that have already been realized. In 2018, Hunterdon County completed two phases of a three-phase tourism study funded by the Highlands Council. The County also received approval in December 2018 for an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Analysis and Incubator Feasibility Study.

“I firmly believe that tourism is the sleeping giant of economic development in Hunterdon County,” says Holt. “We’re very fortunate that the Highlands Council shares that vision and is able to support this work.”

There are 26 municipalities in Hunterdon County. Fifteen (15) are located in the Highlands Region and of those, 14 are already participating in the Plan Conformance process. High Bridge Borough and Lebanon Borough, two of only three municipalities in the County that are located entirely in the Planning Area, have made significant progress toward RMP implementation. Any county planning activities funded by the Highlands Council will benefit the entire County, not only the Highlands portion.

