



Township of West Orange

66 Main Street, West Orange, NJ 07052

Environmental Commission

Phone: 973-325-4101

August 13, 2025

Planning Board
Township of West Orange
66 Main Street
West Orange, NJ 07052

Subject: PB-24-01, West Essex Highlands, Inc.
Proposal to Destroy Forested Acreage and Build 496 Unit Multifamily Property

Dear Members of the West Orange Planning Board,

On behalf of the West Orange Environmental Commission (WOEC), I write to formally express our strong opposition to the development proposed in the above-captioned matter. After careful review and consideration, the WOEC finds that this proposed development is inconsistent with our community's environmental goals and would adversely impact ecological integrity, regional open space, and quality of life for residents. As described further below, we ask that the Planning Board (1) reject the above-captioned application and (2) require a full environmental impact statement for any future proposed development of the site.

We wish to emphasize that our stance is in full alignment with the resolutions recently adopted by the environmental commissions and governing bodies of neighboring municipalities. Specifically, the WOEC endorses and stands with the towns of Verona, Caldwell, and Essex Fells, and with Essex County Environmental Commission, all of whom have issued Resolutions stating opposition to the proposed project because of the reasonably foreseeable severe environmental impact that would occur should it be realized.

These resolutions collectively articulate serious environmental, hydrological, and community-scale concerns regarding the proposed West Essex Highlands development. We believe their conclusions are well-founded in scientific and planning principles.

In support of our position, the WOEC is attaching our own formal resolution, which outlines our rationale in detail. Key points include:

1. Protection of Natural Resources

The Highlands area includes sensitive ecosystems, watersheds, critical wildlife habitats, and mature woodlands. The proposed development would fragment these areas, degrade biodiversity, and reduce natural water infiltration, impacting downstream systems.

2. Stormwater and Watershed Concerns

The project site lies within a significant watershed. Any large-scale clearing, grading, or impermeable paving will result in increased erosion, sedimentation, and stormwater runoff, which will adversely affect water quality and local stream systems.

3. Preservation of Open Space & Scenic Character

The Highlands contribute to the scenic beauty and rural character that define our region. Their loss would diminish open space and community identity that West Orange and its neighbors value highly.

4. Cumulative Regional Impact

We share the concerns voiced by Verona, Caldwell, Essex Fells, and Essex County: the West Essex Highlands development may set precedent for further sprawl in the region, undermining coordinated planning and environmental stewardship.

Request of the Planning Board

Based on these considerations, the West Orange Environmental Commission respectfully urges the Planning Board to:

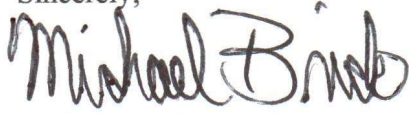
1. Deny the application for the proposed development, and
2. Require a full environmental impact statement (EIS) that comprehensively addresses the issues outlined above, including hydrological modeling, ecosystem assessments, and evaluation of alternative, lower-impact design options for this or any future proposed development of the site.

We also request that the Planning Board hold a joint public hearing with representatives from the environmental commissions of Verona, Caldwell, Essex Fells, and Essex County, fostering regional dialogue and coordinated decision-making on this matter.

Again, the WOEC affirms its alignment with the corresponding resolutions from neighboring municipalities and Essex County, and strongly opposes any approval of the current development plan for the West Essex Highlands. We trust that the Planning Board will consider these environmental concerns with the seriousness they deserve and act in protection of West Orange's ecological and community welfare.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We stand ready to work collaboratively in pursuit of a sustainable, well-planned future for our township and region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Brick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Brick
Chair, West Orange Environmental Commission

Attachment:

- Resolution of the West Orange Environmental Commission Opposing the West Essex Highlands Development.