

# The Borough of Highlands Community Energy Plan



June 2023

Prepared by:

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CED project 22002028A



This report was made possible through a grant from New Jersey's Clean Energy Program™. New Jersey's Clean Energy Program is brought to you by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities.

#### **ABOUT THE NEW JERSEY BOARD OF PUBLIC UTILITIES (NJBPU)**

The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities ("NJBPU" or "Board") is the state agency with authority to oversee the regulated utilities, which provide critical services such as natural gas, electricity, water, telecommunications, and cable television. The law requires the Board to ensure safe, adequate, and proper utility services at reasonable rates for customers in New Jersey.

#### **ABOUT THE NEW JERSEY CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAM (NJCEP)**

NJCEP, established on January 22, 2003, in accordance with the Electric Discount and Energy Competition Act (EDECA), provides financial and other incentives to the State's residential customers, businesses and schools that install high-efficiency or renewable energy technologies, thereby reducing energy usage, lowering customers' energy bills and reducing environmental impacts. The program is authorized and overseen by the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU).

#### **ABOUT SUSTAINABLE JERSEY**

Sustainable Jersey is a certification program for municipalities in New Jersey. Launched in 2009, Sustainable Jersey is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that supports community efforts to reduce waste, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and improve environmental equity. It provides tools, training and financial incentives to support and reward communities as they pursue sustainability programs. Sustainable Jersey is one hundred percent voluntary and each town can choose whether it wants to get certified and the actions it wants to do in order to achieve enough points to get certified.

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# I. Introduction

Borough of Highlands is committed to addressing climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This Community Energy Plan details the specific strategies Highlands will pursue in the coming years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the local energy system. The Plan covers public policies and programs designed to support the community in reducing emissions.

In November 2022, a Community Energy Plan kickoff was held with municipal staff to set a timeline and big-picture goals for the project. In January 2023, a Planning Team was assembled and met to review the Sustainable Jersey [Guide for Sustainable Energy Communities](#) and [Community Energy Plan Workplan Template](#) to determine how to prioritize and implement the initiatives. Relevant community data was gathered from the [Sustainable Jersey Data Center](#).

A public hearing was held on February 16, 2022, at which time the desire to broaden clean energy opportunities borough-wide was discussed. As a result of that discussion, the Borough Council decided to pursue the Community Energy Planning Grant, discussed and approved at a March 2, 2022, public hearing. A third public hearing was held on September 7, 2022, when the authorization to execute the grant was approved, specifically addressing the need for community-level action to achieve New Jersey state goals.

The final community Energy Plan was adopted by municipal resolution at a public hearing with an additional opportunity for public comment on June 21, 2023.

Highlands' Community Energy Plan establishes how the municipality will promote the transition to sustainable energy over the next several years. Initiatives were selected based on demonstrated effectiveness, unique local opportunities, community co-benefits, and streamlining the permitting processes through zoning amendments.

As a shore community, climate change is one of the greatest threats to our future prosperity in Highlands, and globally. New Jersey is both a significant source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a state particularly vulnerable to climate change. Increasing heat waves, intense storms, and sea-level rise caused by climate change will dramatically alter our coastal state for many years to come (NJDEP, *Scientific Report on Climate*

## Co-benefits of Sustainable Energy

The sustainable energy transition offers an opportunity to realize various co-benefits in our community and beyond. Besides reducing GHG emissions, implementing this plan will improve:

- Public health
  - Lower concentrations of ground-level outdoor air pollutants
  - Removal of indoor air pollution sources
- Social equity
  - Better affordable transportation
  - More affordable renewable energy
- Resiliency
  - More dependable electric grid
  - Decreased reliance on imported energy

Change). According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s [NJ Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory Report](#), New Jersey adds almost 100 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e to the atmosphere annually. New Jersey can mitigate the local and global impacts of climate change with a rapid transition from the current GHG-intensive energy system to one that optimizes energy use and produces energy with minimal GHG emissions.

Recognizing New Jersey’s role in climate change mitigation, the State of New Jersey has established a goal of 100% clean energy in the state by 2050. [The New Jersey Energy Master Plan: Pathway to 2050](#) outlines the state’s strategies for achieving that goal while also addressing issues of social and economic inequity. To promote action at the local level in support of the state’s goals, the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) launched the Community Energy Plan Grant Program, offering support and funding for municipalities to develop a Community Energy Plan. Borough of Highlands received the Community Energy Plan Grant and completed this Plan as a participant of the grant program.



*Photo 1: Aerial view of Highlands.  
Source: Highlands Borough, Code\_zero\_drone*

## II. Community Overview

Highlands Borough is a 0.9-square mile suburban community of 2,671 households located in Monmouth County. According to the 2020 US Census American Community Survey, the racial composition of Highlands' 4,746 residents is 91% White, 1% Black, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 4% "other"; 3% of the population is Hispanic/Latinx.

Highlands' median household income is \$76,263, with 5.3% of households below the U.S. poverty threshold. Highlands' Municipal Revitalization Index (MRI) score, a measure of a municipality's economic conditions, is 34 out of a possible 100, which ranks 156th of New Jersey's 564 municipalities (Sustainable Jersey Community Profile Data by Municipality). In other words, Highlands' overall economic conditions are in the top third relative to other New Jersey municipalities.

**Population Characteristics for Highlands, NJ**

| Population | Households | Median Household Income | Percent of Population in Poverty | NJ DCA MRI Score* | NJ DCA MRI Rank* |
|------------|------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 4,746      | 2,671      | \$76,263                | 5.3%                             | 34                | 156              |

Table 1. 2020 Population Characteristics

Source: Sustainable Jersey. Community Profile Data by Municipality

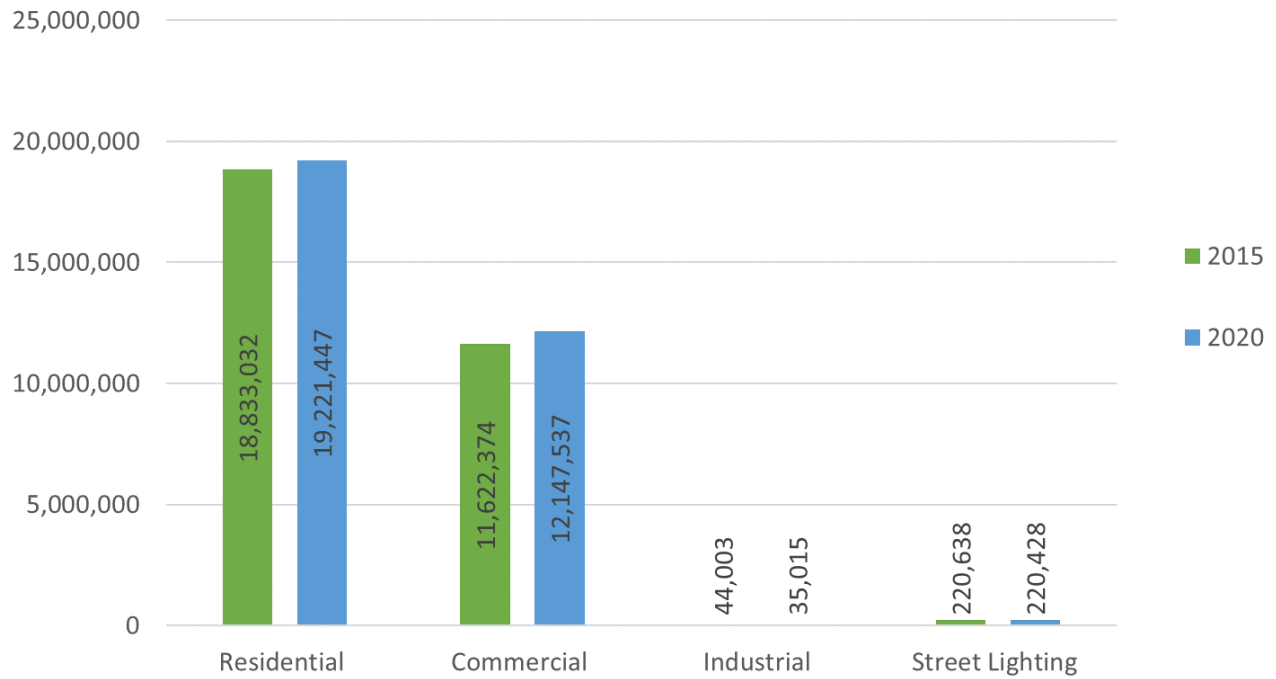
\*MRI = Municipal Revitalization Index (MRI)

### Electricity and Natural Gas Usage Data

Most electricity and natural gas use is currently associated with buildings. Utility companies generally organize electricity and natural gas use into four sectors – residential, commercial, industrial, and street lighting. The commercial sector includes nonprofits and government entities such as schools and municipal buildings, as well as businesses.

As illustrated in the charts on the next page, the residential sector accounts for the majority of electricity and natural gas use in Highlands. In other words, residential buildings present the greatest opportunity for energy use reductions.

### Amount of Electricity Purchased by Sector (kWh)

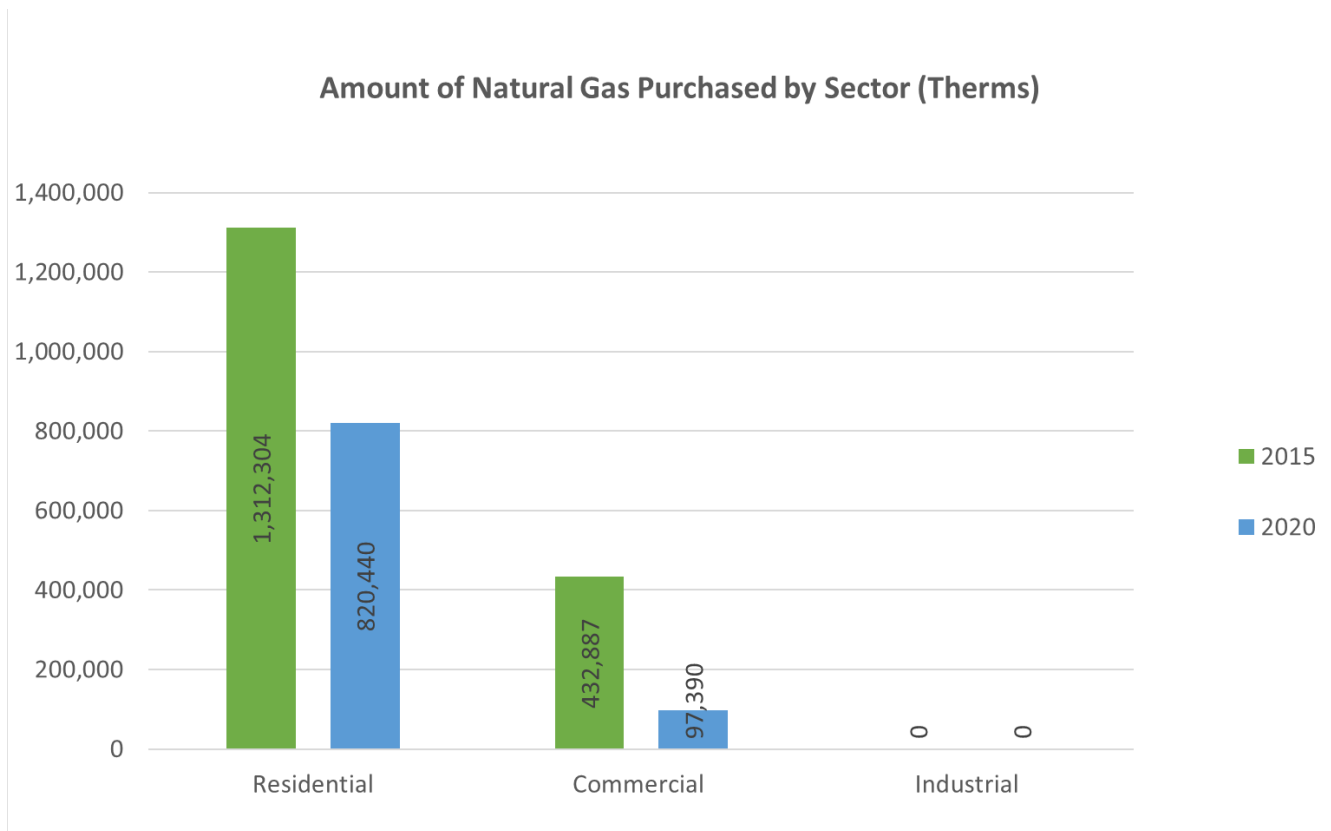


**Chart 1. Amount of Electricity Purchased by Sector (kWh)**

Source: Sustainable Jersey. Aggregated Community-Scale Utility Energy Data

Note: electricity values represent purchased electricity and do not include customer-generated electricity, such as from rooftop solar.





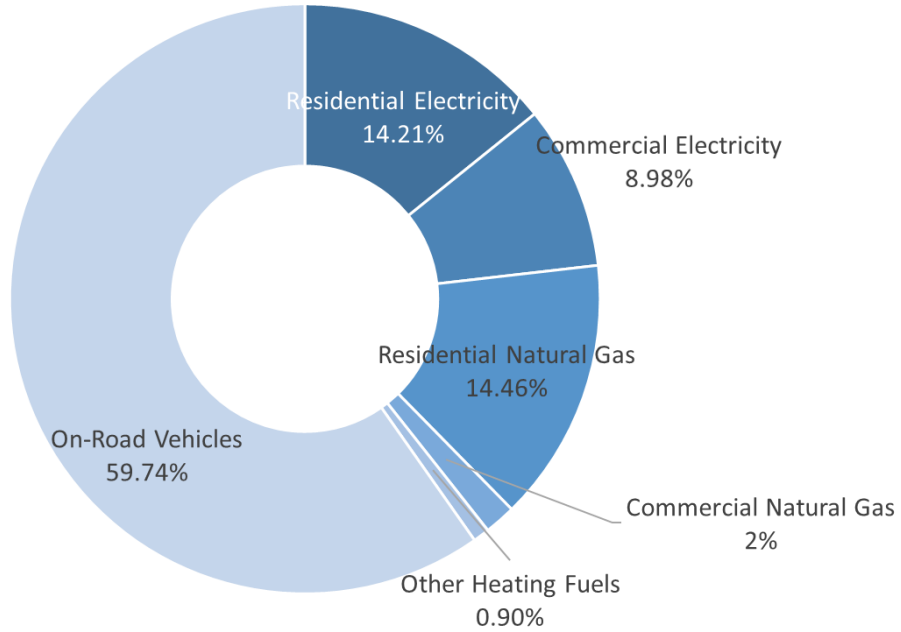
**Chart 2. Amount of Natural Gas Purchased by Sector (Therms)**

Source: Sustainable Jersey. Aggregated Community-Scale Utility Energy Data

### Community GHG Emissions from Energy Use

In 2020, the total community-wide greenhouse gas emissions from electricity, natural gas/heating fuel, and transportation energy use in Highlands was **30,270 metric tons CO<sub>2</sub>e**. The largest share of community emissions came from On-Road Vehicles, followed by Residential Natural Gas use.

**2020 Community-Scale Energy-Related GHG Emissions  
by Sector and Energy Type (MT CO2e)**



**Chart 3. Overall GHG Emissions of Highlands by Subsector**

Source: Sustainable Jersey. Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Data

### III. Work Plan

The Highlands Community Energy Plan is primarily an implementation and action plan. This section details all of the initiatives selected as borough priorities for the next four years (2023-2027). These initiatives will make energy-efficient development within Highlands more streamlined, safe, and straightforward, providing numerous local co-benefits, such as improved air quality and creation of local jobs.

The initiatives are organized by the Strategies of the [New Jersey Energy Master Plan: Pathway to 2050](#). Each Strategy section includes one or more initiatives. Implementation details are provided for each initiative, including the initiative lead person/entity, the time frame for implementation, and any significant obstacles to successful implementation.

#### **Strategy 1: Reduce Energy Consumption and Emissions from the Transportation Sector**

- 1.1 Adopt Supportive Zoning and Regulations for EV Infrastructure
- 1.2 Train First Responders on EVs and EVSE
- 1.6 Install Public EV Charging Infrastructure

#### **Strategy 2: Accelerate Deployment of Renewable Energy and Distributed Energy Resources**

- 2.1 Adopt Supportive Zoning and Permitting for Solar
- 2.4 Train First Responders on Solar

#### **Strategy 3: Maximize Energy Efficiency and Conservation and Reduce Peak Demand**

- 3.1 Upgrade Energy Efficiency for Municipal Facilities

#### **Strategy 4: Reduce Energy Consumption and Emissions from the Building Sector**

- 4.1 Construct New Municipal Buildings as Model Green Buildings

## Strategy 1: Reduce Energy Consumption and Emissions from the Transportation Sector

Transportation accounts for over 40% of New Jersey’s greenhouse gas emissions, primarily due to on-road gasoline consumption (NJDEP, “Transportation & Emissions”). Fossil fuel-powered transportation also produces local air pollution that significantly harms the health and quality of life of residents. Highlands can promote transportation electrification in the community to lessen the negative impact of our transportation system on our community and the world.



*Photo 2: Existing EV infrastructure*

## Initiative 1.1: Adopt Supportive Zoning and Regulations for EV Infrastructure

Description: Pass NJDCA’s Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance specifying electric vehicle charging stations as a permitted accessory use, establishing the permitting process for charging stations, and requiring Make-Ready and EVSE (Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment) parking in new multifamily developments and parking lots. Modify the model ordinance standards for safety, signage, etc. as needed.

| Lead              | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|-------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Municipal Planner | immediate  | High     | 6 Months           | N/A             |

### Departments involved:

- Code Enforcement
- Planning
- Legal Department

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- No significant barriers were identified

### Community notes:

The Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance went into effect in September 2021 as specified by state law, but the policies in the ordinance are not integrated into Highlands’s municipal code. Code Enforcement currently requires applications for new developments to comply with the Model Ordinance.

| Vehicles and Electric Vehicles in Highlands |                                    |          |            |
|---|------------------------------------|----------|------------|
| Year Updated                                | Estimated Total Passenger Vehicles | # of EVs | % Electric |
| 2015  | 3,394                              | 17       | .5%        |
| 2019  | 3,519                              | 35       | 1%         |

**Table 2. Vehicles and Electric Vehicles in Highlands**  
Source: Sustainable Jersey. Community Profile Data by Municipality

As of 2019, 1% of passenger vehicles in Highlands were electric. As EV adoption accelerates, demand for charging infrastructure will also accelerate.

### Measures of Success:

The goals for this initiative are new regulations regarding EVSE site design, such as accessibility and signage, and integration of the Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance into Highlands’s land-use code and permitting documents.

### Next steps:

1. Highlands-specific information to be added to the Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance, and “Reasonable Standards” section made to fit municipal needs.
2. Governing body to review and approve.

## Initiative 1.2: Train First Responders on EVs and EVSE

**Description:** Require training for local first responders on electric vehicles and associated infrastructure, furthering public confidence and maintaining emergency preparedness.

| Lead                | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|---------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Deputy Fire Marshal | May 2023   | Medium   | Ongoing, annually  | N/A             |

### Departments involved:

- First Aid Squad
- Fire Department
- Police Department

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- NJ State Fire Code (NJAC 5:70), NJ PEOSH (NJAC 12:100-8), and Federal Regulations (CFR 29) do not mandate required repetitive training for firefighters on EVs.
- Municipal staff may perceive additional training as an unnecessary burden.
  - The Police Chief will build support for EV safety training by creating awareness that EVs have unique first-response protocols.

### Community notes:

To be done collectively with Initiative 2.4. Free online training resources are available.

As of 2020, there were 17 passenger electric vehicles in Highlands; the number of EVs in town has likely increased since then (Sustainable Jersey, Electric Vehicle Ownership Data). There are also two public EV charging stations in the township (NJDEP, Charging Map).

### Measures of Success:

The goal of this initiative is that all first responders will be regularly trained in how to deal with emergencies involving electric vehicles and EV infrastructure.

### Next steps:

1. Lead will compile list of available training courses
2. Lead will coordinate with departments involved, distribute training resources or options
3. A list of all participating (trained) members will be compiled
4. At the 6-month mark, lead will evaluate participation of members and make recommendations going forward.

## Initiative 1.6: Install Public EV Charging Infrastructure

**Description:** Install electric vehicle charging infrastructure, including chargers, signage, and safety and accessibility features, for public use.

| Lead | Start Date   | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources                          |
|------|--------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| DPW  | October 2022 | Medium   | Q2 2023            | Municipal budget, NJBPU EV Tourism grant |

### Departments involved:

- Department of Public Works
- Finance Department
- Borough Administrator
- Governing Body
- Mayor’s Office

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- Choice of parking space was limited in order to connect to electricity (where are existing poles and lines, access with angled spaces, etc.)
- Attention must be paid to risk of flooding

### Community notes:

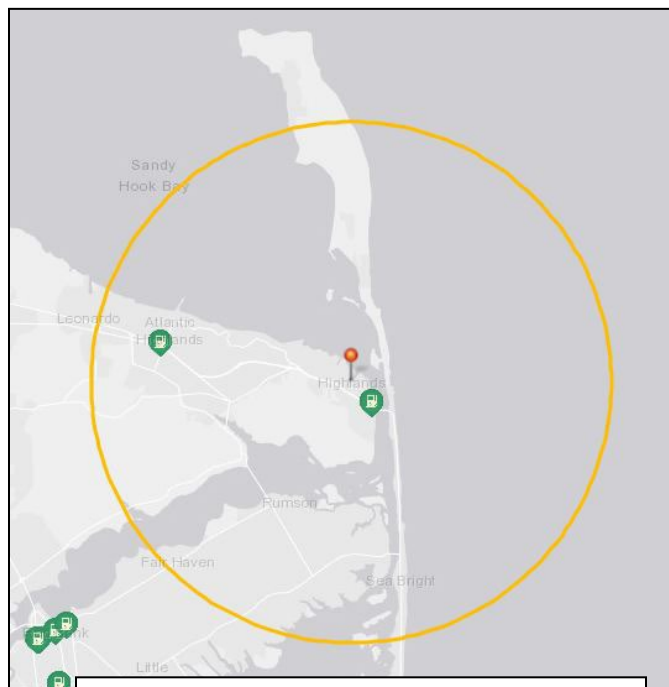
There are two Level 4 public EV charging stations within Highlands and two within a five-mile radius. There are no Level 3/DCFC public charging stations within five miles of Highlands.

### Public EV Charging Station Locations:

1. Bahrs Landing Station 01. 12 Bay Avenue, Highlands, NJ. (2)
2. Bahrs Landing Station 01. 12 Bay Avenue, Highlands, NJ. (2)
3. Starbucks. 999 NJ-36, Atlantic Highlands, NJ. (2)

#### Map Legend.

Light green tags (not shown) – Level 1  
 Medium green – Level 2  
 Dark green (not shown) – Level 3/DCFC



**Map 1. Public EV Charging Stations in Highlands Area**

Source: NJDEP. Public EV Charging Locator Map

### Measures of Success:

The goal of this initiative is to install an additional public charging station in Highlands. Use of EV stalls will demonstrate success.

### Next steps:

1. Installation at parking lot opposite 171 Bay Avenue.



## Strategy 2: Accelerate Deployment of Renewable Energy and Distributed Energy Resources

Expanding renewable energy generation is necessary to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from our energy system. New Jersey’s most readily available renewable resource is sunlight, which more and more utility customers can now access thanks to declining prices and new systems like community solar. Highlands can continue to refine local policies regarding solar and other renewable resources to promote local growth of renewable generation capacity.



*Photo 3: examples of solar installations in Highlands.  
Source: Google Aerial*

## Initiative 2.1 Adopt Supportive Zoning and Permitting for Solar

**Description:** Provide clear guidance/standards for solar developers and limit barriers to solar adoption such as lengthy permitting and multiple reviews.

| Lead              | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|-------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Municipal planner | Q3 2023    | High     | Q1 2024            | N/A             |

### Departments involved:

- Code Enforcement
- Planning
- Legal Department

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- None at present.

### Community notes:

The borough does not currently regulate solar energy systems. A new solar ordinance will allow for building-integrated, roof mounted, canopy, and ground-mounted solar. Solar in all zones may be considered as accessory uses.

### Measures of Success:

The goals for this initiative are new regulations regarding solar regulations, such as accessibility and signage, and integration of the Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance into Highlands's land-use code and permitting documents.

### Next steps:

1. Solar ordinance to be drafted by law office and/or municipal planner.
2. Governing body to review and approve.

## Initiative 2.4 Train First Responders on Solar

**Description:** To further public confidence and maintain emergency preparedness, require training on solar infrastructure for first responders.

| Lead                | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|---------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Deputy Fire Marshal | May 2023   | Medium   | Ongoing, annually  | N/A             |

### Departments involved:

- First Aid Squad
- Fire Department
- Police Department

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- NJ State Fire Code (NJAC 5:70), NJ PEOSH (NJAC 12:100-8), and Federal Regulations (CFR 29) do not mandate required repetitive training for firefighters on EVs.
- Municipal staff may perceive additional training as an unnecessary burden.
  - The Police Chief will build support for EV safety training by creating awareness that EVs have unique first-response protocols.

### Community notes:

To be done collectively with Initiative 1.2. Free online training resources are available. As of 2020, there were 46 solar installations in Highlands.

### Measures of Success:

The goal of this initiative is that all first responders will be regularly trained in how to deal with emergencies involving solar infrastructure.

### Next steps:

1. Lead will compile list of available training courses
2. Lead will coordinate with departments involved, distribute training resources or options
3. A list of all participating (trained) members will be compiled
4. At the 6-month mark, lead will evaluate participation of members and make recommendations going forward.

### Strategy 3: Maximize Energy Efficiency and Conservation and Reduce Peak Demand

Energy efficiency and conservation are the most cost-effective methods of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the energy system. Improving energy efficiency also generates local jobs, reduces local pollution, improves health and comfort, and adds resiliency to the energy system. Highlands can utilize energy efficiency to lower costs in municipal operations and encourage the community to follow suit to realize these many benefits.



Figure 1 Highlands

Source: EQ Roy, Shutterstock 1788844139

### Initiative 3.1 Upgrade Energy Efficiency for Municipal Facilities

**Description:** Upgrade municipal facilities to be more energy efficient. New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program and electric and natural gas utilities offer incentive programs that guide municipalities through the upgrade process, starting with free audits to establish the most effective measures to reduce energy use. Following implementation, showcase upgrades in energy efficiency outreach to local businesses.

| Lead | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| DPW  | Q3 2023    | Medium   | 3-5 years          | NJ Natural Gas  |

#### Departments involved:

- DPW

#### Obstacles/Barriers:

- Navigating programs and funding.

#### Community notes:

The Green Team is happy to consider all programs to help the Borough become more "green." Improving energy efficiency is already a priority of the Green Team so seeing those goals become a reality is their mission.

The Green Team will look into technical assistance through Sustainable Jersey to determine next steps for improving energy efficiency in municipal facilities.

#### Measures of Success:

The goal of this initiative is for the Borough to familiarize itself more thoroughly on programs offered, with the assistance of Sustainable Jersey. This may lead to assessments for all municipal buildings.

#### Next steps:

1. Coordinate with Sustainable Jersey to receive Technical Assistance, identifying meter discrepancies, billing inconsistencies, etc.
2. Consider NJ Natural Gas' SaveGreen Project initiatives (<https://savegreenproject.com/businesses>)

## Strategy 4: Reduce Energy Consumption and Emissions from the Building Sector

According to New Jersey's Energy Master Plan, 62% of the state's total end-use energy consumption is associated with buildings, with space heating, water heating, appliances, and industrial uses accounting for 28% of New Jersey's greenhouse gas emissions. Decisions made during new construction and building retrofits have significant and long-lasting impacts on this energy use. Highlands can reduce energy use and emissions from buildings by prioritizing green design in new construction and utilizing municipal buildings as models for the community.



Figure 2: Welcome to the Highlands

## Initiative 4.1 Construct New Municipal Buildings as Model Green Buildings

**Description:** Implement a policy encouraging or requiring consideration of green building practices for any new municipal construction project. Highlight incentives from NJCEP’s New Construction Energy Efficiency program. Following construction, showcase green building features with on-site kiosks and digital webpages to encourage others to follow suit.

| Lead | Start Date | Priority | Anticipated Length | Funding Sources |
|------|------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| DPW  | Q3 2023    | Medium   | ongoing            | N/A             |

### Departments involved:

- Department of Public Works

### Obstacles/Barriers:

- Cost

### Community notes:

Highlands is looking to repurpose the Police Department trailers into a permanent raised structure. In addition to the resiliency benefits of doing so, a variety of green initiatives including Energy Star will be considered. This is a mid- to long-term project.

Highlands is also looking to start using green products in cleaning and janitorial services, switch to LED lights in all municipal buildings, etc. This can be done in the short- to mid-term.

### Measures of Success:

The goal of this initiative is to upgrade existing municipal facilities and build new municipal facilities that have improved efficiency over aging buildings.

### Next steps:

1. Coordination with Sustainable Jersey where appropriate.
2. Inventory buildings to target for improvements (recreation building, etc.).

## IV. References

- EIA (U.S. Energy Information Administration). 2021. *New Jersey State Profile and Energy Estimates*. <https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=NJ>.
- NJDEP (New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection). 2020. *New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change At-A-Glance*. <https://www.nj.gov/dep/climatechange/pdf/scientific-report-on-climate-change-at-a-glance.pdf>.
- NJDEP. 2020. "Transportation and Emissions." <https://www.nj.gov/dep/ages/opea-trans-emissions.html>.
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## Appendix. Data Sources

Almost all data used in this plan is sourced from the [Sustainable Jersey Data Center](#).

| <b>Community Overview Data</b>            |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Section, Map, or Table</b>             | <b>Original Source(s)</b>                                    | <b>Link to data</b>  |
| General Information Section               | U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS)                  | <a href="#">SJ Community Profile Data by Municipality</a>      |
| Current Housing Units by Year Built Chart | U.S. Census ACS  | <a href="#">SJ Community Profile Data by Municipality</a>      |
| Number of Units by Structure Type Chart   | U.S. Census ACS<br>SJ Community Profile Data by Municipality | <a href="#">SJ Community Profile Data by Municipality</a>      |
| Commercial & Industrial Properties Map    | NJ MOD IV Tax Data   | <a href="#">SJ Commercial &amp; Industrial Properties Map</a>  |
| Commercial & Industrial Properties Data   | NJ MOD IV Tax Data   | <a href="#">SJ Commercial &amp; Industrial Properties Data</a> |

| <b>Energy Use Data</b>                                   |                                  |  |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Section, Map, or Table</b>                            | <b>Original Source(s)</b>        | <b>Link to data</b>  |
| Amount of Electricity Used by Sector (kWh) Chart         | NJ Investor-Owned Utilities      | <a href="#">SJ Aggregated Community-Scale Utility Energy Data</a>      |
| Amount of Natural Gas Used by Sector (Therms) Chart      | NJ Investor-Owned Utilities      | <a href="#">SJ Aggregated Community-Scale Utility Energy Data</a>      |
| Number of Occupied Housing Units by Primary Heating Fuel | U.S. Census ACS                  | <a href="#">SJ Community Profile Data by Municipality</a>              |
| Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Charts                    | SJ GHG Emissions by Municipality | <a href="#">SJ Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Data</a> |

| <b>Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Data</b>        |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Section, Map, or Table</b>                             | <b>Original Source(s)</b>                    | <b>Link to data</b>   |
| Solar Installations Chart                                 | NJCEP Solar Installation Data                | <a href="#">SJ Solar Installation Data</a>  |
| Commercial Energy Efficiency Program Participation Data   | New Jersey Clean Energy Program (NJCEP) Data | <a href="#">SJ Energy Efficiency Program Participation (2008-2021) Data - Lifetime Commercial Participation</a> |
| Residential Program Participation Data                    | NJCEP Data                                   | <a href="#">SJ Energy Efficiency Program Participation (2008-2021) - Lifetime Commercial Participation</a>      |
| Energy Efficiency Projects Completed by Municipality Data | NJCEP Data                                   | <a href="#">SJ NJCEP Local Government Projects 2008-2021</a>  |