

Dear Representatives Sheldon and Stevens,

Re Affordable Housing in Vermont

I sit on the Planning Commission in Moretown. We have now zoning regulations that are much more open to duplexes, triplexes, "ADU's" and allow for some flexibility in ag/res districts. We would love to see more families be able to live here. However, unless significant changes are made to allow developers to more opportunities to build and make a profit Moretown and Vermont will fall far short of our housing goals.

Vermont thinks of itself as a champion in the natural resources arena and has much to be proud of. However, stating a commitment to "smart growth" and "balanced and thoughtful growth" in "growth centers" that will solve the housing crisis is delusional. This seems so obvious.

If you have some real examples of how smart growth can work please inform me.

It pains me to say this, I consider myself a strong environmentalist, but Vermont will have to "give up" some areas to development. There is no way other than this. I'd love to be proved wrong..

My concern and source of consternation is with numbers. I have seen no maps, data, or examples of where housing would be placed, how affordable housing is where its been built nor drawings of what infill housing would look like. Valuing growth where growth has been historically is laudable. Believing that this alone with being in the 10's of thousands of housing units needed is where I see the fantasy thinking going on. If there's a study of infill development or examples of that housing which can be replicated widely I'd like to see it.

The optics of "smart growth" is also short sighted and not practical, I believe. It can't really pass the "straight faced" test. There's just no convincing information that can persuade me that we can build ourselves out of this housing crisis by limiting growth to "growth centers".

No one wants to see sprawl. Yet sprawl can be in the eye of the beholder. There would be plenty of families who'd love to see affordable housing build in a meadow near them. The "smart growth" value to me seems just another iteration of the zoning practices put in place over the last 40-50 years that wanted to keep Vermont looking like "Vermont". Look where that got us.

Yes, some ag and forest land must be developed. There are few in Moretown that I'd like to see developed. There are water quality laws in place that will protect ground and surface waters when these developments are built. There will be views changed. For they must be in order to meet the need. Some will be manufactured homes. Some developments will be single family stick built and some multifamily dwellings. The look of Vermont will change.. again, just like it has for decades.

Bylaw modernization in towns and cities is underway. That will continue.

If Vermont doesn't adequately build out affordably then Vermont becomes home to the wealthy who want a climate refuge or a place to play and recreate and to "airBandB" or "VRBP". That "development" is continuing. They see smart growth as more space for them to build on lakes

and in mountains. They have the money to meet most any water quality or drinking water issue and ways to “hide” their home from view.

It's way past time to rely on villages and town centers for the bulk of housing. We must look real and honest solutions. It's time say building outside our “Vermont” villages is necessary and should be supported and championed. Using phrases like “built out thoughtfully” is coded language for restricted. Let's be honest. Yes, families living in new developments outside of “growth centers” (also coded language for “cute Vermonty villages”) will have to drive for work, groceries, and school.

I'm looking to get behind some real affordable housing plan. None out there I can see.

I understand the affordable housing efforts and ideas that encourage growth in villages and such. Great and the more the better. What needs better and in some ways more visionary thought is housing outside of villages, town centers and cities. For it seems this has to happen. We can't pack in enough housing into the limited square miles of growth areas.

The Valley News article re-distributed in VTDigger begins to wrestle with development in rural areas, I'm sure you've seen it. <https://vtdigger.org/2023/04/02/can-land-conservation-and-housing-development-coexist-in-the-upper-valley/> The article asks key questions about where to build and keep access to natural areas available, how to do waste water and drinking water. How to create incentives for this growth? How to fund water infrastructure? How to encourage rather than mandate areas for manufactured homes, apartment complexes rather than single family homes?

There's a significant concern, kinda paranoid in some ways, that VT policy makers want to totally shut off development in rural areas. However, I get it since the tone and language is all about “growth centers”. I can understand that statements being made about wanting to “force Vermonters” into town centers. The concept of “30X30” and “50x50” also strikes some Vermonters as cutting off access to rural development.

Affordable housing has to be “everywhere”, in places like Downtown Burlington, Bennington, and Newport along with Norton, Victory and Reading

Where's the initiative for rural development coming from? What NGO or political party is going to make this a priority?

When someone articulates this vision then there'll be hope for making Vermont affordable.

Sincerely,

Clark

Clark Amadon, Moretown Planning Commission

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