



TWO RIVERS-OTTAUQUECHEE

William B. Emmons, III, Chairman
Peter G. Gregory, AICP, Executive Director

REGIONAL COMMISSION

April 7, 2014

Robert Hartwell, Chair
Senate Natural Resources and Energy
115 State Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05609

RE: H. 823

Dear Senator Hartwell and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear and offer support for this bill. Per your request, I have prepared this letter summarizing the key points of that testimony.

I am Vice Chair of the Downtown Development Board and serve as the Executive Director of the Two Rivers-Ottawuechee Regional Commission. As such, I recommend to my Board the adoption of a Regional Plan that must be consistent with state planning goals. I also conduct reviews of Town Plans when asked by municipalities and recommend approval when they meet the standards outlined in 24 VSA, Section 4350. As required by statute, I implement the adopted Regional Plan by participating in all Act 250 applications in or that affect our planning area.

I am speaking for all regional planning commissions in support of the bill, as it is consistent with 24 VSA, Section 4302, furthers the state land use goals and it reinforces local and regional planning.

By reinforcing compact settlement and encouraging more density, we are simultaneously enhancing the protection of our natural resources, conserving energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, encouraging more housing development, and enhancing our economy in three distinct ways. By encouraging construction activities, locating consumers close to goods and services and protecting working lands that drive Vermont's tourism industry, we are growing our economy.

We must be vigilant in our pursuit of aligning our state appropriations, our tax expenditures and our regulatory programs to ensure progress in meeting these multiple goals in the most effective way possible. This bill moves us in that direction.

Does this bill solve everything or go far enough? No, and I am sure you have heard that. Would this bill spur legal challenges over language or outcomes? Most assuredly. Litigation is already part of the current system.

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But I want to assure you that Vermont's regional planning commissions and the Department of Housing and Community Development have initiated and presided over enormous progress in the last few years in improving local and regional planning, aligning state programs and resources around that planning and reducing the amount of conflict between local, regional and state level activities due to a shared focus on one set of guiding principles, the state land use goals.

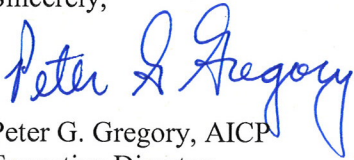
Specifically, we strongly support changing the housing thresholds and jurisdiction triggers. Spurring housing construction within and immediately adjacent to our built up areas will enhance the investments that the public and private sectors have made in these areas. Housing that can be afforded is one of the biggest economic development challenges we face in the Upper Valley of Vermont.

The so called "off ramp" for Act 250, the "existing settlement" and "strip development" definitions are critically important.

Modernizing Act 250 to include a broadening of modes under Criterion 5 is long overdue. And writing a new Criterion 9L is critical as well. The 9L version in current law leads to well-designed nodes of sprawl where scattered commercial development is able to sap the vitality out of our downtowns. Green field commercial development should be denied, it is inconsistent with state land use law.

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony. I look forward to answering any further questions or reviewing any new language that is written.

Sincerely,



Peter G. Gregory, AICP
Executive Director