

To: members of the Senate Economic Development and Natural Resources Committees

Re: Act 250's Criterion 9L

From: Judy Chaves, interested citizen; resident of North Ferrisburgh

I am here to speak in strong support of Criterion 9L.

I've been an active citizen participant in Ferrisburgh's planning process for several years, involved in two unsuccessful attempts to prevent sprawl-like development on Route 7 in our town, and involved in the town's recent revision of its town plan.

These experiences have shown me that local planning and zoning, at least in the town of Ferrisburgh, are not sufficient to keep sprawl at bay. Our zoning by-laws are outdated, our town plan does not (and the newly revised edition will not) hold up in court, and our local officials lack either the courage, the knowledge, or the desire to change the language of either of these documents in a way that would prevent sprawl. When shown a draft of the newly revised town plan, our select board deleted from it all mention of pedestrian access, sidewalks, bicycle paths, and even the word "village." Without state legislation such as Criterion 9L, the fate of Ferrisburgh, particularly Route 7 in Ferrisburgh, is pretty clear: *there will be sprawl*. I would suggest, if you don't normally drive on Route 7 in Ferrisburgh, that you take a trip there soon for a vivid illustration of how sprawl gets started. Not only did the Champlain Oil Company cover nine acres of our town with a vast gas station, convenience store, and MacDonald's this past year, but a few miles south, a Dollar General store, with its enormous parking lot, is going up. These businesses—totally geared toward car and truck traffic along Route 7—have now set the stage for similar such businesses to fill in the gaps between them. That's what local control has brought us, and it what local control will continue to bring without legislation like 9L. True, 9L has legal authority over only those applications for projects larger than 10 acres, but its intent and its language—its definitions and guidelines and overall goals—provide a context and tools that those of us fighting sprawl on a smaller level can still point to and use.

I urge you not to weaken the Criterion's language. Maintaining Vermont's unique landscape and character—which are probably our state's greatest economic assets—requires boldness. The billboard law and Act 250 were bold—as well as enormously unpopular among many in the business community. But they are ultimately what keeps Vermont from turning into everywhere else, and they have not put an end to growth. I urge you not to cave in.

But there's one more thing I'd urge you to do. Right now, there are many in our town who view 9L as anathema; they see it as death to development. Misinformation about the Criterion is rampant. So not only do I urge you to maintain 9L's language, I also urge you to do whatever is in your power to educate local town officials, to enable them to better understand the Criterion, to see it not as the end of all economic growth, but as a positive force for our state and local communities, and—most important—to enable town officials to understand as specifically as possible how development can happen within 9L's parameters. If you want to see Criterion 9L be successful, then I'd urge you to put some resources toward educating the public about it.

Thank you.