



## Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy

January 29, 2015

### VPA Chapter 117 Planning Initiative

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you regarding the Vermont Planners Association's proposed two-year initiative to amend planning statutes under the Vermont Planning and Development Act (24 VSA Chapter 117). As noted, this includes:

1. Extending the period that municipal plans are in effect, and the municipal plan update cycle, from 5 to 10 years, and
2. Updating required plan elements to be more strategic, relevant, and functional for use locally, by regional commissions and state agencies, and in local and state regulatory proceedings.

#### **10-Year Municipal Plans**

The first, which we'd like to address this year, has gained broad support among the planning community since initially suggested in 2010 in association with Challenges for Change – with some noted reservations that should be clearly addressed in statute. VLCT, VNRC and many RPCs also support 10-year plans in concept. VAPDA has not yet weighed in as an organization. DHCD also has not taken a formal position, but welcomes the discussion and has agreed to host a meeting to discuss and outline proposed legislation. Their interest is also tied to the update of the state planning manual, now underway.

Our intent and suggested starting point for proposed legislation, based on discussions to date, is to extend the municipal plan expiration date from five to 10 years to give municipalities the time and resources to do better planning (especially those without staff support) –including increased access to municipal planning funds –and, most importantly, more time to implement their plans. As envisioned, this would also include:

- The opportunity to amend plans on a regular basis, without changing the expiration date;
- Requirements for comprehensive, coordinated, internally consistent 10-year updates, supported by broad-based community involvement, prior to plan readoption; and
- Establishing a robust 5-year RPC check-in/review, e.g., as part of enhanced municipal consultations—to include both a review of the current plan as it may have been amended, recommendations for amendment/update as appropriate (in advance of or in association with a 10-year update), and the status of implementation programs or measures referenced in the plan.

Your help in moving this forward this year would be greatly appreciated. I'd be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss our proposal in more detail.

## **Plan Requirements**

The second—updating plan requirements, including required plan elements — calls for a much broader, more considered discussion that will likely extend into 2016. There is a growing consensus however, that the planning statutes, as amended since Act 200, include a daunting, laundry list of required elements, many of which are not especially relevant (at least in the detail anticipated) in many communities, depending on their situation and priorities. There has been some initial discussion within the planning community on how we can make plans shorter, more strategic and useful, to more clearly define and better support community goals, objectives, standards and priorities.

We are initiating this effort by putting together a working group to review Vermont’s planning statutes in relation to model enabling legislation from the American Planning Association, and those from other states. We’ll also be looking at plan requirements in relation to the use of plans in regulatory contexts, including Act 250 and PSB proceedings.

Given your committee’s past support for sound local and regional planning, we’d appreciate your involvement in this process as it moves forward, as your time and interest permit.

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