

Act 250 comments  
Bruce P. Shields  
6405 Garfield Rd  
Hyde Park, VT 05655 October 8, 2018

I made verbal comments which were recorded on newsprint at Island Pond. I will touch on those points again.

Act 250 has had a depressing effect on commerce and business in the Forest Industry. I am unable to find any positive thing to say about it. First, my personal story.

I bought my present land in 1966 with no restrictions upon it. In 1978 I joined in a partnership with a neighbor who had a small so-called farmer sawmill built by his father about 1940. We bought about 1,500,000 feet of softwood logs from neighboring landowners annually, and produced rough cut lumber which people all through Lamoille and southern Orleans county used for farm structures, barns, sheds, tool storage, garages, and other structures. Our gross turnover annually was about \$180,000 paid for logs, and we paid in wages about \$100,000. We quickly realized that we really needed to rebuild the mill in order to resolve quality issues with our lumber from the nearly 100 year old equipment we were running. We found that we would have to work through Act 250 to make any substantial change to the mill. We were advised by an Act 250 consultant to prepare to spend 3 years and about \$30,000 in that process and we could not commence construction until the permits cleared. So that put the improvements 5 years in the future. That was not economically feasible. We dissolved the partnership, and the mill gradually fell into disuse. So — where do landowners sell their spruce/ fir/ pine logs now?

One place might have been to Mountain View Lumber, a medium sized commercial sawmill with high productivity and good profitability located in West Burke. They paid well for logs, and produced high value lumber which could move anywhere in the New England market. Finish lumber is highly competitive with Canadian lumber, leaving a very tight margin. Their annual turnover was probably in the range of \$10 Million, reflecting their capacity to produce high value-added lumber. But Mountain View was dogged by a hostile neighbor who filed objections whenever any even slight change was made, even those demanded by other State agencies. I do not know the cost Mountain View incurred satisfying Act 250, but it had to be at least \$250,000. Extracting that kind of capital from a highly competitive enterprise, it became unable to meet its covenants and closed — apparently satisfying the ugly neighbor.

Every timber business known to me has struggled with a burden of constant Act 250 intrusions. Many businesses are reluctant to be named for any kind of industry award, because some Act 250 filing seems to follow soon. Ray Colton won many regional awards for devising a very effective, efficient and profitable firewood processor. His kiln dried firewood met every State and Federal guideline regarding transmission of insects or diseases, and reduction of smoke or pollutants from uncured firewood. He was also tortured by an ugly neighbor, who forced a variety of curtailments to the program: limits on truck traffic, on smoke from furnace for his dry kiln, noise from fork-lift operations, dust, &c. He has paid many thousands of dollars in fees for professional designers to accommodate the neighbor's objections.

I cannot name one timber or wood processor who has not been harrassed and billed by Act 250, or by local zoning regulations modeled on Act 250. Several hundred of us have participated in "futures" exercises for how to promote lively economic activity in Vermont's rural counties. It is clear that one great improvement would be to call off the dogs of Act 250. How can a State agency determine that a sawmill "is incompatible with the rural character" of a location?