

December 13, 2017

To: Commission on Act 250
From: Diane Snelling
Chair, Natural Resources Board
Re: Public outreach used for Shorelands Protection

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the public outreach process used for eight meetings to discuss the Shoreland Protection legislation. In my legislative experience, this outreach process was one of the most successful efforts to connect with the public and to reach consensus on complex issues.

Many of you will remember the controversy surrounding Shorelands, and as a Legislative Commission we were very aware of the difficulty in planning for a helpful and robust dialog with the public that would not be dominated by misinformation and angry comments.

We made several decisions in advance that I believe were important to the success of the outreach process and to the subsequent passage of the legislation.

First, the Commission determined that we needed to start from a place of common knowledge, and that it would be helpful to present an introduction at each meeting that gave an overview of the history of clean water regulation, and itemized the science of impacts on Shorelands. I volunteered to create a presentation, working closely with staff from the Lakes and Ponds division and with ANR leadership. We used the twenty minute presentation to begin each meeting, combining education and information with clarification of the issues for discussion. I strongly recommend this approach because it helped give the public a common vocabulary and it helped people at each meeting to distinguish between facts, perceptions, and misrepresentations. That information became more important as the process went forward.

Second, we reached out to the Regional Planning Commissions to help the Legislative Commission find appropriate venues, and to be a local presence at each of the meetings. In many cases, members of the Regional Planning Commissions acted as moderators for the Commission.

Third, the Commission felt it was important to collect and review the many public comments, and we received thousands. All of the public's comments were collected into categories for review by the Commission, and became very helpful to the decisions following the process.

It's a big step forward that the Commission on Act 250 has an appropriation to work with a facilitator, because the Shorelands outreach process relied heavily on Legislative Council and administrative support from our Committee assistant.

I would also suggest, that if possible, the Commission on Act 250 convene a group of stakeholders, prior to the other meetings, to discuss and preview your approach. The Advisors could be very helpful in this.