

Thank you for adjusting your agenda at the hearing on Dec. 13 to allow public comment in the morning rather than the afternoon. Because of your flexibility, our southern Vermont contingent made it home in daylight. Below is a written version of the remarks I made that day.

My name is Justina Gregory and my address is Amidon Road, West Halifax, Vermont. I am seventy-one years old. Because I was born and grew up in southern Vermont, I remember very well when the problems of the Chimney Hill development in nearby Wilmington came to light in the late 1960s. The lack of planning for septic resulting in acute sewage problems, the construction of roads that gave no access to firetrucks or school buses, the strain on the municipal budget created by a large new development— these issues proved a wake-up call for Windham County and ultimately the entire state. Chimney Hill contributed to the passage of Act 250, which continues to protect Vermont and Vermonters to this day, accomplishing a great deal with limited personnel and budget.

After fifty years, Act 250 can surely benefit from revision. I'd like to raise two general questions as you embark on that process. First, does Act 250 hobble development? Since 98% of all applications are approved, that doesn't seem to be the case. What the act does promote is careful growth. It's true that the permitting process can slow things down, but that's due as often to an incomplete application from the developer as it is to citizens' objections. Moreover, as is all too evident on the national level, haste frequently leads to sloppiness and costly mistakes. A slower process assures more thoughtful deliberation.

Secondly, does citizen participation bog down Act 250 so that it should be restricted even further than it already is? I'd argue to the contrary that such participation is crucial to the law's intent.

Environmental factors such as wildlife habitat, air and water quality, and esthetics have nothing to do with property lines; they affect an entire ecosystem, and when a new development is proposed for a community the abutters and other residents are uniquely situated to articulate the consequences; they are also the ones who most affected if something goes wrong. Furthermore, inclusiveness is a basic principle of democracy. When so much is at stake, as many voices as possible should be heard at every stage of the process.

Thank you