

20 YEARS OF ACT 250: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? *Quotes from the Field*



◆ **Public Participation**

"If a person can demonstrate that their interests may be affected by a proposed development, they can be granted 'party status' which puts them on an equal footing with the state, the board of selectmen, and the developer. They may testify, present evidence, cross-examine witnesses and appeal a decision of the local commission to the Environmental Board. This kind of meaningful, individual participation in the decision-making process is central to Vermont's democratic tradition.

"The amount of power that Act 250 gives the average citizen is not without problems. For example, the fact that John Doe may be able to stop XYZ Corporation's \$2 million gravel pit because 85 trucks per day will rumble within 25 feet of his home makes a lot of people uncomfortable. They would prefer that Mr. Doe not have this kind of power. Perhaps it should make us all uncomfortable, because along with the gravel pit may go some good jobs. However, a solution to the conflict which says, 'Sorry, Mr. Doe, you don't count' should make us even more uncomfortable."

John Lippincott,
District 2 Environmental Commissioner

◆ **Energy Conservation:** "Act 250 has been the most cost effective energy savings program in this state. Since 1983, we have avoided adding about 21-22 megawatts of electric demand — the amount of electric demand of a city the size of Barre. A recent national survey showed that the level of insulation in residential construction in Vermont is the highest in the nation."

Dave Lamont, *VT Public Service Dept.*

◆ "While electric heat is the cheapest to install, it is not the cheapest to operate ... so it translates to an increase in cost for power for all ratepayers. We've been very successful in this state, through Act 250, in discouraging the use of electricity for space heating. The push now is to require energy-conserving lighting systems in commercial/industrial developments."

George Campbell,
Central VT Public Service Corporation

◆ **Economy:** "It's hard to prove, but I believe that Act 250 should get some credit for tempering speculation in real estate in Vermont so that we are not as subject to economic downturns. Act 250 has had a positive effect on the real estate market by weeding out the ill-conceived larger projects. Act 200 should extend this principle further — that good planning does result in a healthier real estate market."

John Ewing,
Vice President, Bank of Vermont

◆ **Fish and Wildlife:** "Act 250 has made Vermont a leader — light years ahead of most other states — by establishing a state-wide regulatory mechanism for protection of fish and wildlife resources. As opposed to following a zoo approach of saving the last one or two of a species, Act 250 is enabling Vermont to assure the state-wide survival of a healthy population."

Stephen Wright, *former Commissioner,*
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Dept.

◆ **Aesthetics:** "How a project looks, its design and how it fits into its surroundings has more effect on people — because it is so obvious — than most other aspects of a project. Through Act 250, major gains have been made through the conditioning of the appearance of development in this state."

Stephen Sease, *Planning Director,*
Vermont Agency of Natural Resources

◆ **Water Resources:** "Last year Vermont had 900 Act 250 permit applications and out of those 143 involved wetlands. Through the permit process we were able to get 103 of those projects out of the wetlands, and the remaining 40 were reduced to a minor impact. Act 250 protects water resources which have yet to gain protection under other statutes or regulations.

"The true strength of Act 250 is that it can consider a watershed nutrient control plan or the overall change in the hydrology of the watershed. A permit, on the other hand, generally is project specific."

Tom Willard,
Vermont Water Quality Division

Compiled by Peg Elmer and Jim Shallow.

Some people would prefer that John Doe not have this kind of power.