

BEYOND THE GIBB COMMISSION

An Interview with Arthur Gibb

"I never could see any reason why people had to be so paranoid about a land use plan."



In his personal files, Arthur Gibb keeps the original of a memo written by planner Walter Blucher in October, 1969. The memo outlines an idea for a development permitting process, and the foundation for ten criteria by which to evaluate proposals.

As chair of the commission appointed by Governor Deane Davis to review Vermont's development problems, Gibb was an active shepherd of Blucher's ideas — as modified by the "Gibb Commission" — as they were worked into bill form and finally, into Act 250.

A Republican member of the Vermont House from 1963-1970 and the Senate from 1971-1986, Gibb chaired both Natural Resources Committees. Now a member of the Environmental Board, Gibb maintains an even-handed perspective on development and environmental control. And his expertise in Vermont's growth issues is far-reaching. Susan Clark and Kimberly Hagen interviewed Gibb at his home in Weybridge.

Gibb on the progress of Vermont environmental laws:

"The late sixties saw a great deal of environmental legislation. The Planning Act, the billboard law — that was the beginning of it. You wouldn't have activated Act 250, I don't think, without the fact that you had already laid the groundwork with local zoning and control. Look back on the early sixties and you will see that there was literally nothing, no environmental law; and you couldn't bring actions for environmental reasons.

"It was in 1967 that we worked on, and then in 1968 passed, the Planning Act. That was the first step in comprehensive planning and zoning, and the 1970s carried that out. Now in the 1980s we've hit an acceleration of development, which has made us realize we have got to go beyond simply controlling things project-by-project on a strictly local basis.

"I'm not against development. But this is the basic difference between the '80s and the '70s: the pace of development is much faster."

On Act 250 today:

"Generally speaking, it definitely works. I'm sure you're familiar with the statistics. The number



of turndowns is relatively small, but the number of approvals is all with mitigating conditions, which you wouldn't have had otherwise. I mean, in the '60s developers just stuck things down as they wanted to. Now, you have controlled development. It's brought some problems, it's brought a complicated procedure. But in the long run, it's certainly worth it."

On Act 200 and planning:

"Of course there are a few problems with Act 200; when you pass a 90-page bill in one session like that, you're bound to have a lot of sticky points. But the thing I like most about it is the state-wide goals — they're going to be your framework.

"I never could see any reason why people had to be so paranoid about a land use plan, because all it needs to be is a general framework. For instance, if you say the Champlain Valley sections of Addison and Franklin County are suitable primarily for agricultural use, that's there and there's no argument about it. So you don't put a steel mill in the middle of it, and I don't see what's so complicated about that." ●