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To: House Committee on Government Operations

From: Alex Weinhagen, VPA Legislative Liaison

Date: April 18, 2017

Re: Rural Economic Development Infrastructure districts – H.459 & S.135

To Chair Townsend and members of the committee,

I'm writing on behalf of the Vermont Planners Association (VPA) regarding S.135.

VPA is a non-profit advocacy and educational organization of planners and related professionals. We are dedicated to the advancement of community planning in Vermont at the local, regional, and state levels, to foster vibrant communities and a healthy environment. Our membership is diverse, including municipal planners, regional planning commission staff, state employees, and planning consultants.

We understand that you are considering adding to S.135 language from H.459 to enable the creation of Rural Economic Development Infrastructure (REDI) Districts. VPA's understanding is that the bill broadly enables "the creation of special municipal districts to finance, own, and maintain infrastructure that provides economic development opportunities in rural and underresourced communities."

"Infrastructure" is not defined, and in addition to broadband, could conceivably include other types of infrastructure, like sewer and water.

It's well documented that sewer and water infrastructure can drive development. Since the districts are intended for rural areas, VPA wants to ensure that enabling these infrastructure districts does not have the unintended consequence of creating more intensive land uses than envisioned by municipal and regional plans.

To ensure that these districts enable infrastructure that upholds, and does not undermine, the land uses and patterns envisioned by local and regional plans, VPA would like to respectfully suggest the following changes, indicated by an underline. These are built from Draft No 2.1 of S.135, p. 14, §5702:

The application shall describe the infrastructure to be built or acquired; the plan for financing its acquisition; the anticipated economic benefit; the source of revenues for loan, bond, or lease payments; and plans for retention and disbursement of excess revenues, if any. For infrastructure districts involving the construction of water or sewer infrastructure, the application shall also demonstrate, via letters from the legislative bodie(s) and regional planning commission(s) of the involved municipalities, that the development of the infrastructure proposed for the district is consistent with the future land use map and is in conformance with duly adopted municipal and regional plans.

Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions.