



House Natural Resources Testimony

4-12-18

Lyle P. Jepson, Executive Director Rutland Economic Development Corporation

Thank you for providing us with time to explain our support for and desire that H.665 be taken up as soon as possible in the future. To support the goal of protecting Vermont, it is essential that we grow the tax base upon which financial support can be drawn. We need strategic and incremental growth of business and industry, which in turn can contribute to maintaining the way of life to which we have become accustomed. We need a healthy tax base upon which to draw funding so that we can clean up our lakes and waterways, protect our air, and secure a healthy future for our grandchildren.

The Joint Policy Committee of Rutland Economic Development Corporation and Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce suggest that actions be taken to strengthen our state's and, in particular, the Rutland Region's ability to grow economically and to pay for our future.

H.665 proposes three simple yet far reaching and economically necessary steps. H.665 as introduced by the entire House delegation from Rutland County and others "proposes to require the District Environmental Commission under 10 V.S.A. chapter 151 (Act 250) to issue a decision on an application within 20 days following the close of a hearing, to allow them to grant land use permits on condition that other State approvals are received, and to direct that certain State and municipal permits and approvals constitute conclusive evidence on specified Act 250 criteria."

Why is making this change so important? The need for economic growth is completely intertwined and dependent upon growing our population and the resulting workforce. We hear a great deal about Vermont's population stagnation and decline. We hear a lot about how our population is aging. In fact, a recent Rutland Herald editorial pointed out that in three to four years, in every county but Chittenden County, there will be only one person working for every retiree, child or dependent in the state. One person who is working, for every three that are not. Unless we grow our population we are destined to increase taxes on fewer people. Our ability to protect Vermont's natural environment will be unsustainable.

Therefore, to help fuel a robust economy, each and every action taken by each and every legislative committee must be laser focused on supporting population growth. We ask that of this committee as well. Population growth can be supported by allowing businesses to grow and create high skill, high paying, high demand jobs, each of which will generate revenue for the state of Vermont.

Businesses and local leaders tell us that a leading contributor to limited private investment, job and wage growth, and productivity is the lack of predictable, timely, and cost effective permitting procedures. Our Joint Policy Committee has been and will continue to be participants in the “Commission on Act 250: The Next 50 Years” by providing recommendations and by attending Commission hearings. We are hopeful that recommendations will result from that review that will, in fact, result in highly predictable, timely and cost effective permitting procedures.

But there is no reason to wait. Today we come to you to support the elimination of untimely delays, to encourage the elimination of duplication of effort, and to inspire you to trust the agencies empowered to provide permits with the authority to do their jobs, thus allowing businesses to grow, jobs to be created, our population to grow, and funding to be made available to protect Vermont.

Blair Enman, from Enman Kesselring Consulting Engineers, will provide you with examples that have hindered such growth. Jim Goss from Facey Goss & McPhee Attorneys at Law, will provide specific opportunities for change. And Larry Jensen, President of the College of St. Joseph will point out how Vermont must come together and pull in the same direction for the benefit of the entire State.

Comments or questions can be directed to Lyle Jepson, Executive Director of Rutland Economic Development Corporation at lyle@rutlandeconomy.com or Mary Cohen, Executive Director of the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce at mcohen@rutlandvermont.com.