



**Testimony of Brenda Petrella, Alliance for Vermont Communities, before the House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Committee
March 28, 2018**

Good morning Chair Deen and Members of the Committee,

First, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Alliance for Vermont Communities in support of H.R. 20, the House resolution opposing the proposed NewVistas development in the towns of Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge. We want to express our gratitude to Representative Tim Briglin, who introduced the resolution, and to the twelve legislative co-sponsors, who have expressed their bipartisan support for this important resolution.

My name is Brenda Petrella, and I am a resident of Norwich, VT. I have lived in the Upper Valley for nearly 20 years. I first fell in love with rural Vermont while attending graduate school at Dartmouth College, and I have organized my career to allow me to live and work in this area.

The proposed NewVistas development project is not just a local issue for these four towns, but it represents a real threat to the entire State of Vermont. Mr. David Hall's vision for Vermont is to build 50 "megapolises" occupying 5,000 acres and housing 20,000 people each, thereby increasing the population of the State by at least one million residents. In its entirety, the NewVistas footprint would occupy more than 2/3 the size of the Green Mountain National Forest. Mr. Hall plans to build the first of these communities at the intersection of Royalton, Sharon, Strafford, and Tunbridge.

The NewVistas development would include its own education system, food supply, energy resources, currency, and jobs to its members. To belong to the community, one must hand over his or her assets and work for one of the NewVistas for-profit entities. Each community would have 24 centrally located multi-use buildings standing taller than any building currently in Vermont. These buildings would be

connected via an underground podway system, which will also interconnect each of the communities.

The proposed development clearly violates the Vermont land use policy, which states “Development should be undertaken in accordance with smart growth principles” (24 V.S.A. § 4302 (c)(1)(D)).

According to this policy, "smart growth principles" is defined as growth that:

1. Maintains the historic development pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside (24 V.S.A § 2791(13)(A)),
2. Protects the State's important environmental, natural, and historic features, including natural areas, water quality, scenic resources, and historic sites and districts (24 V.S.A § 2791(13)(D)).

The enormity and design of the NewVistas development would ravage our historic village centers and would destroy rather than protect our important environmental, natural, and historic resources.

I would like briefly to clear up some misconceptions about the NewVistas project:

1. **NewVistas would not create jobs for Vermonters.** NewVistas is designed be a self-contained community available only to its participants; therefore, it would not create jobs for residents in the surrounding area.
2. **NewVistas is not conserving land.** In an interview published last week in the *Valley News*, Mr. Hall said, “I’m trying to purchase land to conserve it so that it doesn’t continue to be broken up. I’m simply conserving land at this point” (March 21, 2018). By purchasing thousands of acres of land now for development later, Mr. Hall is stockpiling the land for his own development purposes. He is inappropriately applying the term “conservation” to his intentions, and I argue is misleading to the public.
3. **NewVistas is not environmentally or economically sustainable for Vermont.** NewVistas claims to be a model of sustainability. In actual fact, NewVistas would destroy the biodiversity of our wild spaces, has the potential to introduce blight or invasive species, and would result in the loss of wildlife. It would deplete our water tables and eliminate agricultural and forested lands that support our economy. It would reduce public access to lands used for hunting,

fishing, and outdoor recreation, further compounding its adverse economic impact.

Lastly, I would like to leave you with a quote from Mr. Hall. In an 2016 interview, Mr. Hall was asked to clarify a statement he made that indicated that he would not move forward with the project if local people were not in support. In response he said, "I didn't say I wouldn't do it if the locals aren't for it. I said I won't do it if VERMONT is not for it" (*DailyUV*).

On Town Meeting Day 2017, the voters of the four impacted towns overwhelmingly adopted resolutions that read: "Shall the voters of the town of _____ oppose the NewVistas development?" The non-binding resolution passed with over 90% of the vote in each town.

The locals have spoken, but according to Mr. Hall, our voices are not enough to prevent NewVistas from becoming an unwanted reality for our State. We are grateful to this Committee and the Vermont House of Representatives for taking up this opportunity to express the entire State's opposition to the NewVistas project.

Respectfully,

*Brenda Petrella
Board of Directors
Alliance for Vermont Communities*