

**Selectboard, Town of West Fairlee
870 VT Route 113
West Fairlee, VT 05083**

February 10, 2020

To: Carolyn Partridge, Chair, House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry
Re: Response to H.673

The West Fairlee Selectboard strenuously opposes H.673 which seeks to usurp local control of Town highway rights-of-way and significantly alters the role of Tree Warden. This Bill is the quintessential State-engineered "solution in search of a problem"; and demonstrates an appalling lack of respect for the capable and thoughtful management long-exercised by Vermonts' Selectboards and other Town Officials.

We live here. So do the members of our Highway Department. We love our tree-lined rural roads. We purposely left those encroaching apple trees and tangles of high bush cranberries. That row of old sugar maples won't withstand many more years of snowplow dings and root compaction, but for now, they pose no danger to the traveling public so they remain.

We live here. We're pretty darn good at balancing stewardship and road management. We know the pinch-points where the shoulders disappear and you dread meeting the snowplow or a load of logs. We know the spots where letting in a little more sunshine will go a long way toward accelerating ice melt and reduce the need for environmentally-unfriendly salt. If you are serious about carbon sequestration, let's talk about how tiny West Fairlee has "built" the 1,200+ acre Brushwood Community Forest which backs up to the 1,575 acres of the Fairlee Town Forest.

We live here, and we're taxpayers. Like most Towns, we actually do too little right-of-way clearing and trimming. It is expensive. Other highway projects often take priority; and costly unfunded mandates from Montpelier in recent years increasingly command our time, attention and highway funds.

We live here. We actually talk face-to-face with our neighbors when they'll be affected by road projects. We have an extremely knowledgeable Tree Warden; we welcome his insights and involvement. However, it is extremely unlikely that he or any other credentialed individual has the time or inclination to oversee the ridiculously bureaucratic series of hearings and notifications required by this Bill.

H.673 is a breath-taking over-reach by Forest, Parks & Recreation and part of a disturbing trend to undermine local governance rather than collaborate. If we've missed some revolutionary new practices for roadside vegetation management, we are open to hearing them, but we'll take our notes from VTrans or VTLocal Roads who at least have a working knowledge of highway lay-out, maintenance and safety.

Respectfully,

Town of West Fairlee Selectboard
Delsie Hoyt, Chair

cc: Rep. Rodney Graham, Vice Chair; Rep. John O'Brien; Rep. Sarah Copeland-Hanzas