



Vermont Wood Works Council
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June 1, 2020

To: House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Rep. Michael Marcotte, Chair
Rep. Jean O'Sullivan, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
Sen. Michael Sirotkin, Chair
Sen. Alison Clarkson, Vice Chair

Dear House and Senate Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs,

Thank you for your service during these very challenging times. We appreciate your efforts to get our economy working again while keeping all Vermonters safe and healthy.

As board members of the Vermont Wood Works Council (VWWC), formerly known as the Vermont Wood Manufacturers Association, we are writing to apprise you of our situation and ask for your help. The VWWC is the organization that serves the value-added secondary wood products sector. This sector is best defined as inclusive of any business or individual who add value to primary wood products beyond the manufacturing of lumber.

There is significant diversity within the sector with companies ranging in size from one-person woodshops to several hundred employees. The products vary as well, including but not limited to custom and production furniture, furniture parts, architectural millwork, cabinets, carving and sculpture, molding, toys, turnings, picture frames, and woodenware. Markets may be wholesale, retail, business-to-business, or business-to-consumer. Sales may come from e-commerce websites, brick-and-mortar showrooms, trade and consumer shows, word-of-mouth, or referrals.

The totality of this sector does not neatly fit within any existing agency but rather crosses many boundaries. We are not Agriculture, Food, and Markets. We are not Forests, Parks and Recreation. We are not Commerce and Community Development. We are not Tourism and Marketing. We are, however, all.

Our challenges in the face of COVID-19 also cross many boundaries. Although forestry and forest products were considered essential in the State shutdown, secondary wood products manufacturing was not. The businesses in this sector have suffered substantial losses and need direct assistance. We are requesting that relief and recovery funds be directed to value-added wood products businesses and to Vermont Wood Works Council specifically as a technical assistance provider. We are the organization that can help businesses within the sector access the services needed whether through outside experts or expertise within our members. However, for these efforts to succeed, we need access to capital that flows through the sector rather than around it.

Since the "turning of the spigot," allowing for the reopening of some sector businesses at limited capacity we have been monitoring and assessing needs. Most have seen dramatic business shifts that require both an

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The Vermont Wood Works Council is dedicated to promoting the long-term viability by expanding the presence of members in the marketplace, ensuring a dependable supply of raw materials, increasing workforce skill and creativity, and acting as responsible employers and community members.

immediate and nimble response. Where foot traffic once drove sales, companies must move online and need upgrades to websites, warehouse facilities, shipping services, and fulfillment. Tourism –driven businesses are now catching up on orders already in the pipeline but have no future sales in sight. Some of the larger companies in the sector have production challenges with limited staffing or have found it necessary to delay reopening until there is work on the horizon. Most businesses report revenue losses ranging from 25-75% over last year. All need help with development of new sales and marketing strategies.

While none of us know what the future holds, we do know that the current needs are just the beginning of what will be a long process of recovery. As you are evaluating business sectors in Vermont that need help, please put the value-added wood products sector on this list and the VT Wood Works Council specifically, which needs help to continue serving its members. We are a critical sector in the forest economy and must protect the businesses that add value to our forest products.

As a matter of history, the VWWC was created by the Agency of Commerce in 1995. Twenty five years later, we are still here serving this sector but our future, as well as the future of many wood products businesses, is in jeopardy. As a non-profit trade association, our primary goal is to ensure the long-term viability of our members. We have seen the sector through other hardships including economic downturns, global competition, and workforce shortages. We helped to develop and continue to support a trusted brand for Vermont Quality Wood Products. During the shutdown and since reopening, the VWWC has done its best to bring information and opportunity for virtual networking to woodworking businesses. But, we need your help if we are to continue.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. Any member of our board would be happy to speak to you regarding our very specific and serious needs.

Sincerely,

Vermont Wood Works Council Board
Lucas Jensen, Treehouse Hardwoods, President
Scott Duffy, Rockledge Farm Woodworks, Vice President
David Hurwitz, David Hurwitz Originals, Secretary
Michael Rainville, Maple Landmark, Treasurer
Johnathan Schumacher, Birdseye Building
Brent Karner, ClearLake Furniture
Joel Currier, Currier Forest Products
Andrew Pearce, Andrew Pearce Bowls

CC: Agency of Commerce and Community Development,
Tim Tierney & Ted Brady