

<https://vtdigger.org/2020/02/05/final-reading-progressives-flip-on-paid-leave-bill-act-250-conversation-focuses-on-racial-justice/>

This is a letter in response to recent comments by Vermont's first executive director of racial equity, Xusana Davis, regarding Act 250 and as cited by VTDigger:

I reach out to you as a senior female of lower economic status ... and a long-time resident of central Vermont, with my perspective of having ****successfully**** participated in the Act 250 process to protect natural resources in my community.

Given your testimony about unequal access for people of color with most aspects of property ownership, etc., I want to assure you that the battle raging to preserve citizen access to the Act 250 process in the legislature is equally important for all citizens and residents in Vermont. Act 250, Vermont's Land Use Law, was designed to serve ALL Vermont people with environmental concerns to engage in the development permitting process in their/ our communities. And while Act 250 on its own cannot singularly redress your specific set of grievances, it would serve all of us to protect the integrity of the Act 250 process from the current proposal that would dismantle the heart of this process.

The intention of Act 250 has been to serve and empower citizens to become involved in a process--based on ten criteria-- to protect the ecosystems, natural resources, and aesthetics of our communities.

You are cited as saying the following: "'We need to codify community engagement ... (including) those who don't typically take part in the process.' Too often, she said, people of color and the economically disadvantaged are shut out of 'the quiet closed rooms where decisions are made.'"

Let me agree with you. Act 250 has come fairly close to doing exactly this. This is the battle we are currently fighting (against the Administration's proposal): To maintain at least the level of citizen access to the Act 250 process in the face of potentially larger scale developments. They may impact lower income neighborhoods and/ or rural areas, where (statistically speaking) people of color & indigenous people may reside.

Here in Vermont, I've recently heard the phrase VIMBY- to broaden one's understanding that all of Vermont is our very precious "back yard"; and that, as citizens, it is our responsibility to take action and protect it. Whether it is our love of mountains, or butterflies, bees, and gardens, or woodlands, waters, meadows, and neighborhoods--including all human and ecological communities--what has made Vermont so special over more than the fifty years of the history of Vermont's environmental movement, at the core of which is Act 250, is a sense of mutual self-respect in our goals to protect our environments and ecosystems that support the communities in which we all live. ("Greening Vermont," by Elizabeth Courtney & Eric

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Zencey illustrates this beautifully:
<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9780970551153>)

The current Administrative proposal threatens the components of Act 250 which allow for broad citizen access--all of us, including people of color, low income, and regular people trying to protect our communities (and including from moneyed special interests and political manipulations).

Testimony is available at the HNRFWC website (<https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/document/2020/12/Date#documents-section>) ; YouTube video is available online (search Act 250); and a small group of people are working on some or all of these following issues:

To keep District Commissions empowered to guide a citizen-friendly Act 250 Process, to reinstate the Environmental Board, to add financial resources for citizens, and to maintain a process of easier appeals that can go to Environmental Court.

I invite you to learn more:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPGtu6PUgWc&feature=youtu.be> (Friday Feb 7)

Thank you for your commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice.

Sincerely,

Renée Carpenter