

- Thank you madam chair and members of this committee for the opportunity to address you today
- My name is Chris Smid, I work at New England Slate in Poultney, VT and speak on behalf of many of the slate producers in Western Rutland County
- Slate has played a tremendous role in the social and economic history of our region
  - The industry employed thousands of people during the late 1800s and early 1900s, drawing immigrants from across Europe that populated our villages and created a cultural legacy that endures today
  - Today, between 300 and 400 people work directly in the slate industry
    - with few exceptions, we are small family run operations
  - The industry generates an estimated \$40 million dollars/year in sales, almost all of that is out side VT, bringing in “fresh” dollars to our local economy
- Vermont produces some of the highest quality slate in the world, in a unique range of natural colors
  - It is 100% all natural, real stone
  - Slate is still split by hand, one piece at a time by proud, hard working, independent minded people
  - Roofing slate lasts over 100 years, a stark contrast to asphalt shingles or synthetic slates made from petroleum products that end up in the land fill after 25-30 years
    - Church in NH, originally roofed with a Vermont Sea Green slate in 1876, re-roofing now b/c nails had rusted, roofer salvaging over 80% of the old slate for future use
  - Slate also used for flooring, wall cladding, structural pieces and more
  - Like Maple Syrup and Ben and Jerry’s, Vermont is known for its world class, all natural, hand crafted slate and stone products. It is a product we can all be proud of.

- The Slate Valley
  - Runs just over 20 miles from Castleton to West Pawlet and Rupert, and is only 1-2 miles wide
  - 3 to 400 quarry holes on more than 100 parcels were registered with District 1 office in the 1990s
  - Registration allowed quarries that predated Act 250 to continue operating or be held in reserve for future use as market demands changed
  - Families and businesses have invested in these mineral assets
  - In many cases quarries are considered a retirement plan, a nest egg, a family asset to be passed through the generations
  
- **Members of the slate production community feel that the changes to Act 250 proposed in the draft legislation would be severely detrimental to our businesses, to our industry, to our local economy and to our community.**
  
- Recently, the announced closing of GMC in Poultney spurred a series of public meetings about the economic future of Western Rutland County
  - Rightfully, much of the discussion focused on ways to bring new jobs to Poultney
  - I suggest that we should **ALSO** be looking at ways to protect and grow the few industries we already have
    - The working landscape of farming, forestry and the stone industry is a critical part of our state, and it should not be regulated out of existence
  - Attracting remote workers is certainly a worthy goal, but Vermont needs a diverse economy to support its economic future.
    - Changes to Act 250's treatment of the slate industry may be appropriate, but they should be thoughtful and deliberate.
    - It is our collective challenge to find that critical balance of economic and environmental consideration.

- To that end, my colleagues and I were discouraged by the language and approach taken in the draft legislation
  - But, we are encouraged by this committee's April 5<sup>th</sup> draft letter requesting the formation of a stakeholder group.
- We welcome the opportunity to address the common goals of the region with a local process
- We are optimistic that the concerns of neighbors can be addressed while still supporting the small businesses that are the fabric of our local communities
- While change is difficult, and the proposed process unfamiliar, we are hopeful the stakeholder group approach will yield the best possible results for all involved.

**In closing, I'd like to thank the members of this committee and the entire Rutland County delegation for your work on this issue, and ask all of you to support the local stakeholder group approach to updating Act 250 for the slate industry.**