

To: House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife

Marc Grimes, Committee Assistant

From Pádraic Smith, Bare Town Resident

RE: proposed changes to Act 250

I am writing to urge you to maintain a high level of citizen participation and the current role of the District Commissions.

I have been a participant in the Act 250 process several times over the last 30+ years both as a resident commenting on proposed projects and as an applicant whose proposal was being reviewed. Throughout this process I have always been impressed at the level of dedication, the local insights brought to bear and the consideration of participant's concerns demonstrated by the District Commissions.

I understand one of the concerns expressed by the Administration and VNRC is inconsistency in decision making across the various districts. In my opinion, that is exactly why we should keep the District Commission model in place. This is the "entree point" for citizen participation and the body best placed to address the needs, concerns and wishes of the local community. While we must be even handed in applying the provisions of the Act, by its design and original intent the differences in communities across the State can be taken into consideration as part of the process. Thus the District Commissions were created to provide that view. Citizen participation, local control, is a part of the fabric of Vermont and at the root of all our legislation. Turning the process on its head is an anathema to our culture.

Taking out the role of the District Commission in considering proposals makes the process a "top down" system that may not take local concerns into full consideration. A proposed project that might fit perfectly into one community might be an inappropriate one for another. The District Commission and Citizen Participation allow that nuance to be recognized and respected. Likewise a project that is welcomed into the community is going to be more successful and benefit from the support of its neighbours.

Again I urge you, in your deliberations on this matter, take the benefits of our cultural norms into consideration as well as the value of community involvement and maintain the role of the District Commissions and Citizen Participation.

Thank You!

Pád Smith