



GREENSTONE SLATE®
Vermont Architectural Roofing Slate

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March 29, 2019

Rep. Amy Sheldon

State of Vermont General Assembly

Montpelier, Vermont

Re: Report of the Commission on Act 250—Slate quarries

Dear Rep. Sheldon:

My name is Richard Hill and I represent Greenstone Slate Co. This business was started by my father in mid-50s. I had my first real job sawing slate tile in 1957. The company has its office in Poultney and quarries in the Towns of Wells, Poultney and Pawlet. It is still a family business including my son even though we have three younger owner-managers. Greenstone presently employees about 60 individuals.

I really dislike making this presentation because it appears to be self-serving, immodest, and at times, trivial. However, I think it is import for this committee to understand the attitude this company takes in regard to the environment and our neighbors. We consider the two to be inter-connected. This business obviously has an impact on the environment and subsequently on our neighbors. We cannot discuss one without the other. Having said that, some of the things we do for our neighbors are more immediate, for example to plow snow whenever they are unable to do so. We have fixed their storm-damaged roads and driveways. With our heavy equipment, we have pulled countless cars and trucks out of ditches. On one occasion we even tried to aid a seriously injured automobile driver until professional medical assistance arrived at the scene. On a less serious note, any town is welcome to remove slate tailing for free for their road projects; crushed stone is sold at cost. Since our customers sometime arrange their own trucking, we do our best to notify incoming trucks of the nature of the community: we emphasize no excessive speed and advise where speed limits change; specific warnings are given as to the possibility of children in the roads, no overnight parking and the Vermont rules as to the running of engines unnecessarily is also explained. We hand out fliers with these warnings and post notices in our office.(We also try to force these restrictions on our employees.) Our transportation person tries to intercept and warn trucks, before they are in the area, about road conditions and the viability of truck traffic on individual roads. There are known inaccuracies on some GPS systems and we do not want a truck on a neighbor's lawn. Although, I admit this has happened.

More importantly, we try to be quiet. We do not blast, unless it is absolutely necessary, outside usual working hours and not on holidays or weekends. Fortunately, such an occasion has not happened in over a decade. We try to contact neighbors prior to any large blast. Sometimes we make visits to individual houses if we think our neighbor is sensitive about noise. In the case of one neighbor, we try to refrain from blasting until we know she is at work. On another occasion we completely terminated quarrying operations upon request by an elderly neighbor.

Richard Hill
3/19/2019

Over the fifty plus years of blasting we have had only a couple of complaints that come to my immediate recollect. The one mentioned above of the elderly neighbor who needed after- noon naps. The second was a female part time resident of Wells, who the blasting team thought was out of town. Despite the safety warning signals, she was genuinely surprised and distressed by the actual blast. It was only the blasting manager's numerous pleas for forgiveness and the promise of rivers of maple syrup from his March hobby that quelled her displeasure.

In my opinion damage from blasting vibrations is greatly exaggerated. The fear of blasting is only natural, but not completely warranted. Vibrations in the ground do not travel very far and that is why blasting is common in urban areas. Having made this bold assertion that few will believe, I must admit that blasting is somewhat of an art and things do go wrong. That is why courts have held blasters to a standard of absolute liability relieving the complaining party the burden of proof of negligence. . Therefore, Greenstone seismographs any shot that might remotely trigger a seismograph—most are too small to register. The registering machine automatically calculates the distance and energy and reports if any ground vibrations are unacceptable. We have never had a blast exceed these levels.

Hopefully, in the next few years wire sawing will make blasting obsolete. Once again Greenstone has put time and effort into exploring this procedure and feel we are making progress.

Neighbors are entitled to clear water. Slate production uses only water and stone. We have tested down-water supplies. We were pleasantly surprised to find that water that filters through our tailing piles is cleaner on exit than when first put in the system. This raises an ancillary question of whether re-claimation is appropriate in a world that someday may be short of water. Another way of saying this is slate quarries may someday provide thousands of homes with potable water.

In 2009 Greenstone had a private but complete environmental audit of its properties. The audit was performed by a nationally renowned engineering firm and it did not find one violation.

Along these lines, Greenstone has agreed to lease approximately five acres for solar voltage panels. Construction should be finished this year.

Several years ago Greenstone installed electric voltage transformers to increase our efficiency and the company just finished replacing our mill lighting with energy efficient lighting.

As you are aware, there have been claims that slate quarries are the " Wild West" of the environmental world. I hope that the above is evidence that this is not absolutely true. Since 1995, Greenstone has made additions and changes to its physical structures. We have worked with the District Environment Office on numerous occasions to obtain approval, if necessary, on these projects. Likewise, we have consulted with the towns concerning local approvals.

The above illustrates that Greenstone has attempted to be proactive on environmental issues. The company has always taken the long term outlook in its planning—5 to 10 years. In 1996 the Vermont General Assembly pondered the issue of what to do about slate reserves for the future. After copious amounts of testimony and consultation with Governor Dean, it was decided that registration of slate deposits was the appropriate answer. The legislature acknowledged that the slate industry depends on numerous, geologically speaking, small deposits as colors and qualities vary from pit to pit requiring operations to extract stone from many sources at various times. Greenstone and its owners registered several pits thought to contain good commercial stone for future extraction. We have relied upon this

legislative decision as the basis for our economic survival. The time for extraction has now arisen and we will need this stone for the next twenty years. I would like to point out that we recognized in 1996, as well as today that land near quarries has a discounted sales price and is very tempting, particularly for out-of-area buyers. The registration process places potential buyers on notice of future quarrying activity. Since registration the advent of internet mapping and extensive mapping in slate towns should reasonably provide additional and easily accessible notice to buyers. However, some new-comers have complained, after purchasing such parcels, about not knowing of the viability of a nearby quarry, even when a quarry is in plain sight.

In conjunction with our long term 5-10 year plans and relying upon the protection granted in the registration process, Greenstone has attempted to purchase any land that came up for sale adjoining our quarries. We bought a house and 16 acres in Pawlet plus a second lot of about 25 acres. In Wells we bought an adjoining lot that looked too tempting as a site of an out-of-state hunting camp. We did this to preserve our mineral reserves and to ensure good neighbors. None of Greenstones acquisitions has been for the possibility of resale and have been a cash drain. I want to emphasize that the purchases were for the protection of the nearby quarries. We hope that our rights in our minerals will not be excised or diminished by this Committee's action as it now appears. Otherwise, a half century of our work and financial savings will be at risk.

Since learning of the proposed changes to Act 250 now before this committee, I began to investigate the cost of obtaining a slate quarry permit. I discussed this with a well-known law firm and the estimated cost is about \$150,000 per pit or \$60,000,000 for all of the registered slate reserves.

In conclusion, the removal of protection for future extraction will be extremely painful and eventually existential for Greenstone. As operators deplete immediate deposits, (assuming we are allowed to continue extraction at all) quarries will close; owners will lose their investments, and employment will drop. It is my opinion, as the result of over a half century of experience, that small operations will be the first to disappear and the slate industry will experience the loss of at least 100 jobs in the near future and nearly all jobs in the long run. This will take place in an economic area that is presently desperate and nearly hopeless for employment.

To save time I would like to place in the record my letter to Chairwomen Snelling date Dec.13, 2018.

Respectfully submitted

Richard L. Hill