

1 TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES:

2 The Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife to which was
3 referred Senate Bill No. 234 entitled “An act relating to changes to Act 250”
4 respectfully reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the
5 House propose to the Senate that the bill be amended by striking out all after
6 the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 * * * Municipal Zoning * * *

8 Sec. 1. 24 V.S.A. § 2793e is amended to read:

9 § 2793e. NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AREAS; DESIGNATION OF
10 NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT AREAS

11 (a) Purpose. This section is intended to encourage a municipality to plan
12 for new and infill housing in the area including and immediately encircling its
13 designated downtown, village center, new town center, or within its designated
14 growth center in order to provide needed housing and to further support the
15 commercial establishments in the designated center. To support this goal, this
16 section sets out a two-component process.

17 * * *

18 (b) Definitions.

19 (1) “Neighborhood planning area” means an automatically delineated
20 area including and encircling a downtown, village center, or new town center
21 designated under this chapter or within a growth center designated under this

1 chapter. A neighborhood planning area is used for the purpose of identifying
2 locations suitable for new and infill housing that will support a development
3 pattern that is compact, oriented to pedestrians, and consistent with smart
4 growth principles. To ensure a compact settlement pattern, the outer boundary
5 of a neighborhood planning area shall be located entirely within the boundaries
6 of the applicant municipality, unless a joint application is submitted by more
7 than one municipality, and shall be determined:

8 * * *

9 (c) Application for designation of a neighborhood development area. The
10 State Board shall approve a neighborhood development area if the application
11 demonstrates and includes all of the following elements:

12 * * *

13 (5) The proposed neighborhood development area consists of those
14 portions of the neighborhood planning area that are appropriate for new and
15 infill housing, excluding identified flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas,
16 except those areas containing preexisting development in areas suitable for
17 infill development as defined in § 29-201 of the Vermont Flood Hazard Area
18 and River Corridor Rule. In determining what areas are most suitable for new
19 and infill housing, the municipality shall balance local goals for future land
20 use, the availability of land for housing within the neighborhood planning area,
21 and the smart growth principles. Based on those considerations, the

1 municipality shall select an area for neighborhood development area
2 designation that:

3 (A) Avoids or ~~that~~ minimizes to the extent feasible the inclusion of
4 “important natural resources” as defined in subdivision 2791(14) of this title.
5 If an “important natural resource” is included within a proposed neighborhood
6 development area, the applicant shall identify the resource, explain why the
7 resource was included, describe any anticipated disturbance to such resource,
8 and describe why the disturbance cannot be avoided or minimized. If the
9 neighborhood development area includes flood hazard areas or river corridors,
10 the local bylaws shall contain provisions consistent with the Agency of Natural
11 Resources’ rules required under 10 V.S.A. § 754(a) to ensure that new infill
12 development within a neighborhood development area occurs outside the
13 floodway and will not cause or contribute to fluvial erosion hazards within the
14 river corridor. If the neighborhood development area includes flood hazard
15 areas or river corridors, local bylaws shall also contain provisions to protect
16 river corridors outside the neighborhood development area consistent with the
17 Agency of Natural Resources’ rules required under 10 V.S.A. § 754(a).

18 * * *

19 (6) ~~The neighborhood development area is served by:~~

20 (A) ~~municipal sewer infrastructure; or~~

1 property owners within the district, and community groups with an articulated
2 purpose of supporting downtown interests, and contains the following:

3 * * *

4 (B) Regulations enabling ~~high~~ densities that are ~~greater~~ not less than
5 four dwelling units, including all identified residential uses or residential
6 building types, per acre and not less than those allowed in any other part of the
7 municipality not within an area designated under this chapter.

8 * * *

9 Sec. 3. 24 V.S.A. § 4449 is amended to read:

10 § 4449. ZONING PERMIT, CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY, AND
11 MUNICIPAL LAND USE PERMIT

12 (a) Within any municipality in which any bylaws have been adopted:

13 * * *

14 (4) No municipal land use permit issued by an appropriate municipal
15 panel or administrative officer, as applicable, for a site plan or conditional use
16 shall be considered abandoned or expired unless more than two years has
17 passed since the permit approval was issued.

18 * * * Municipal Bylaw Grants * * *

19 Sec. 4. 24 V.S.A. § 4306 is amended to read:

20 § 4306. MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING FUND

1 (4) reasonable and necessary costs of administering the Fund by the
2 Department of Housing and Community Development, not to exceed six
3 percent of the municipality allocation.

4 (d) New funds allocated to municipalities under this section may take the
5 form of municipal bylaw modernization grants in accordance with section
6 4307 of this title.

7 Sec. 5. 24 V.S.A. § 4307 is added to read:

8 § 4307. MUNICIPAL BYLAW MODERNIZATION GRANTS

9 (a) There are created Municipal Bylaw Modernization Grants to assist
10 municipalities in updating their land use and development bylaws. Bylaws
11 updated under this section shall increase housing choice, affordability, and
12 opportunity in areas planned for smart growth. The Grants shall be funded by
13 monies allocated from the municipality allocation of the Municipal and
14 Regional Planning Funds established in subdivision 4306(a)(3)(C) of this title
15 and any other monies appropriated for this purpose.

16 (b) Disbursement to municipalities shall be administered by the
17 Department of Housing and Community Development through a competitive
18 process providing the opportunity for all regions and any eligible municipality
19 to compete regardless of size.

20 (c) Funds may be disbursed by the Department in installments to ensure the
21 municipal bylaw updates meet the goals of this section.

1 (d) Funding may be used for the cost of regional planning commission staff
2 or consultant time and any other purpose approved by the Department.

3 (e) A municipality grantee shall use the funds to prepare amendments to
4 bylaws to increase housing choice, affordability, and opportunity and that
5 support a neighborhood development pattern that is pedestrian oriented in
6 areas planned for smart growth consistent with the smart growth principles
7 established in section 2791 of this title and that prioritize projects in designated
8 areas in accordance with chapter 76A of this title.

9 (f) To receive the grant, the municipality shall:

10 (1) identify municipal water and wastewater disposal infrastructure,
11 municipal water and sewer service areas, and the constraints on that
12 infrastructure based on the best available data;

13 (2) increase allowed housing types and uses, which may include
14 duplexes to the same extent as single-family homes;

15 (3) include parking waiver provisions in areas planned for smart growth
16 consistent with smart growth principles as defined in section 2791 of this title
17 and appropriate situations;

18 (4) review and modify street standards that implement the complete
19 streets principles as described in 19 V.S.A. § 309d and that are oriented to
20 pedestrians;

1 (5) reduce nonconformities by making the allowed standards principally
2 conform to the existing settlement within any area designated under chapter
3 76A of this title and increase allowed lot/building/dwelling unit density by
4 adopting dimensional, use, parking, and other standards that allow compact
5 neighborhood form and support walkable lot and dwelling unit density, which
6 may be achieved with a standard allowing at least four units per acre or
7 allowing the receipt of a State or municipal water and wastewater permit to
8 determine allowable density or by other means established in guidelines issued
9 by the Department;

10 (6) restrict development of and minimize impact to important natural
11 resources, including new development in flood hazard areas, undeveloped
12 floodplains, and river corridor areas, unless lawfully allowed for infill
13 development in §29-201 of the Vermont Flood Hazard Area and River
14 Corridor Rule;

15 (7) update the municipal plan's housing element as provided in
16 subdivision 4382(a)(10) of this title related to addressing lower- and moderate-
17 income housing needs, implement that element of the plan including through
18 the bylaw amendments, and demonstrate how those bylaws support the
19 implementation of the housing element; and

20 (8) comply with State and Federal Fair Housing Act, including the fair
21 housing provisions of Vermont's Planning and Development Act.

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* * * Wastewater Connection Permits * * *

Sec. 8. 10 V.S.A. § 1974 is amended to read:

§ 1974. EXEMPTIONS

Notwithstanding any other requirements of this chapter, the following projects and actions are exempt:

* * *

(9) A project completed by a person who receives an authorization from a municipality that administers a program registered with the Secretary pursuant to section 1983 of this title.

Sec. 9. 10 V.S.A. § 1983 is added to read:

§ 1983. REGISTRATION FOR MUNICIPAL WASTEWATER SYSTEM AND POTABLE WATER SUPPLY CONNECTIONS

(a) A municipality may issue an authorization for a connection or an existing connection with a change in use to the municipal sanitary sewer collection line via a sanitary sewer service line or a connection to a water main via a new water service line in lieu of permits issued under this chapter, provided that the municipality documents the following in a form prescribed by the Secretary:

(1) The municipality owns or has legal control over connections to a public community water system permitted pursuant to chapter 56 of this title

1 and over connections to a wastewater treatment facility permitted pursuant to
2 chapter 47 of this title.

3 (2) The municipality shall only issue authorizations for:

4 (A) a sanitary sewer service line that connects to the sanitary sewer
5 collection line; and

6 (B) a water service line that connects to the water main.

7 (3) The building or structure authorized under this section connects to
8 both the sanitary sewer collection line and public community water system.

9 (4) The authorizations from the municipality comply with the technical
10 standards for sanitary sewer service lines and water service lines in the
11 Wastewater System and Potable Water Supply Rules.

12 (5) The municipality requires documentation issued by a professional
13 engineer or licensed designer that is filed in the land records that the
14 connection authorized by the municipality was installed in accordance with the
15 technical standards.

16 (6) The municipality requires the retention of plans that show the
17 location and design of authorized connections.

18 (b) The municipality shall notify the Secretary 30 days in advance of
19 terminating any authorization. The municipality shall provide all
20 authorizations and plans to the Secretary as a part of this termination notice.

1 ~~that are required to carry and discharge the flood of the watercourse, as~~
2 ~~determined by the Secretary of Natural Resources with full consideration given~~
3 ~~to upstream impoundments and flood control projects~~ “Flood hazard area” has
4 the same meaning as under section 752 of this title.

5 (7) ~~“Floodway fringe” means an area that is outside a floodway and is~~
6 ~~flooded with an average frequency of once or more in each 100 years, as~~
7 ~~determined by the Secretary of Natural Resources with full consideration given~~
8 ~~to upstream impoundments and flood control projects~~ “River corridor” has the
9 same meaning as under section 752 of this title.

10 * * *

11 (27) ~~“Mixed income housing” means a housing project in which the~~
12 ~~following apply:~~

13 (A) ~~Owner-occupied housing. At the option of the applicant, owner-~~
14 ~~occupied housing may be characterized by either of the following:~~

15 (i) ~~at least 15 percent of the housing units have a purchase price~~
16 ~~that at the time of first sale does not exceed 85 percent of the new construction,~~
17 ~~targeted area purchase price limits established and published annually by the~~
18 ~~Vermont Housing Finance Agency; or~~

19 (ii) ~~at least 20 percent of the housing units have a purchase price~~
20 ~~that at the time of first sale does not exceed 90 percent of the new construction,~~
21 ~~targeted area purchase price limits established and published annually by the~~

1 ~~Vermont Housing Finance Agency~~ meet the requirements of affordable owner-
2 occupied housing under subdivision (29)(A) of this section, adjusted for the
3 number of bedrooms, as established and published annually by the Vermont
4 Housing Finance Agency.

5 (B) Rental housing. ~~At least 20 percent of the housing units that are~~
6 ~~rented constitute affordable housing and have a duration of affordability of~~ For
7 not less than 15 years following the date that rental housing is initially placed
8 in service, at least 20 percent of the housing units meet the requirements of
9 affordable rental housing under subdivision (29)(B) of this section, adjusted for
10 the number of bedrooms, as established and published annually by the
11 Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

12 (35) “Priority housing project” means a discrete project located on a
13 single tract or multiple contiguous tracts of land that consists exclusively of:

14 (A) mixed income housing or mixed use, or any combination thereof,
15 and is located entirely within a designated downtown development district,
16 designated new town center, designated growth center, or designated village
17 center ~~that is also a designated~~ neighborhood development area under
18 24 V.S.A. chapter 76A; ~~or~~

19 (B) ~~mixed income housing and is located entirely within a designated~~
20 ~~Vermont neighborhood or designated neighborhood development area under~~
21 ~~24 V.S.A. chapter 76A.~~

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Sec. 11. 10 V.S.A. § 6081(p) is amended to read:

~~(p)(1) No permit or permit amendment is required for any change to a project that is located entirely within a downtown development district designated pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 2793, if the change consists exclusively of any combination of mixed use and mixed income housing, and the cumulative changes within any continuous period of five years, commencing on or after May 28, 2002, remain below any applicable jurisdictional threshold specified in subdivision 6001(3)(A)(iv)(I) of this title.~~

~~(2) No permit or permit amendment is required for a priority housing project in a designated center other than a downtown development district if the project remains below any applicable jurisdictional threshold specified in subdivision 6001(3)(A)(iv)(I) of this title and will comply with all conditions of any existing permit or permit amendment issued under this chapter that applies to the tract or tracts on which the project will be located. If such a priority housing project will not comply with one or more of these conditions, an application may be filed pursuant to section 6084 of this title.~~

* * * Criterion 1(D) * * *

Sec. 12. 10 V.S.A. § 6086 is amended to read:

§ 6086. ISSUANCE OF PERMIT; CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

1 (a) Before granting a permit, the District Commission shall find that the
2 subdivision or development:

3 * * *

4 (D) ~~Floodways~~ Flood hazard areas; river corridors. A permit will be
5 granted whenever it is demonstrated by the applicant that, in addition to all
6 other applicable criteria:

7 (i) the development or subdivision of lands within a ~~floodway~~
8 flood hazard area or river corridor will not restrict or divert the flow of ~~flood~~
9 waters floodwaters, cause or contribute to fluvial erosion, and endanger the
10 health, safety, and welfare of the public or of riparian owners during flooding;
11 and

12 ~~(ii) the development or subdivision of lands within a floodway~~
13 ~~fringe will not significantly increase the peak discharge of the river or stream~~
14 ~~within or downstream from the area of development and endanger the health,~~
15 ~~safety, or welfare of the public or riparian owners during flooding.~~

16 * * *

17 * * * Municipal Response to Act 250 Requests * * *

18 Sec. 13. 10 V.S.A. 6086(g) is added to read:

19 (g) If a municipality fails to respond to a request by the applicant within
20 90 days as to the impacts related to subdivision (a)(6) or (7) of this section, the

1 application will be presumed not to have an unreasonable burden on
2 educational, municipal, or governmental services.

3 * * * Forest Blocks * * *

4 Sec. 14. 10 V.S.A. § 6001 is amended to read:

5 § 6001. DEFINITIONS

6 As used in this chapter:

7 * * *

8 (43) “Connecting habitat” means land or water, or both, that links
9 patches of habitat within a landscape, allowing the movement, migration, and
10 dispersal of wildlife and plants and the functioning of ecological processes. A
11 connecting habitat may include features including recreational trails and
12 improvements constructed for farming, logging, or forestry purposes.

13 (44) “Forest block” means a contiguous area of forest in any stage of
14 succession and not currently developed for nonforest use. A forest block may
15 include features including recreational trails, wetlands, or other natural features
16 that do not themselves possess tree cover and improvements constructed for
17 farming, logging, or forestry purposes.

18 (45) “Habitat” means the physical and biological environment in which
19 a particular species of plant or wildlife lives.

20 Sec. 15. 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a)(8) is amended to read:

21 (8) Ecosystem protection; scenic beauty; historic sites.

1 (A) Aesthetics. Will not have an undue adverse effect on the scenic
2 or natural beauty of the area, aesthetics, or historic sites ~~or rare and~~
3 ~~irreplaceable natural areas.~~

4 ~~(A)~~(B) Necessary wildlife habitat and endangered species. A permit
5 will not be granted if it is demonstrated by any party opposing the applicant
6 that a development or subdivision will destroy or significantly imperil
7 necessary wildlife habitat or any endangered species; and:

8 (i) the economic, social, cultural, recreational, or other benefit to
9 the public from the development or subdivision will not outweigh the
10 economic, environmental, or recreational loss to the public from the
11 destruction or imperilment of the habitat or species; ~~or~~

12 (ii) all feasible and reasonable means of preventing or lessening
13 the destruction, diminution, or imperilment of the habitat or species have not
14 been or will not continue to be applied; or

15 (iii) a reasonably acceptable alternative site is owned or controlled
16 by the applicant ~~which~~ that would allow the development or subdivision to
17 fulfill its intended purpose.

18 (C) Forest blocks and connecting habitat. Will not result in an undue
19 adverse impact on forest blocks, connecting habitat, or rare and irreplaceable
20 natural areas. If a project as proposed would result in an undue adverse

1 impact, a permit may only be granted if effects are avoided, or minimized and
2 mitigated in accordance with rules adopted by the Board.

3 Sec. 16. CRITERION 8(C) RULEMAKING

4 (a) The Natural Resources Board (Board), in collaboration with the Agency
5 of Natural Resources, shall adopt rules to implement the requirements for the
6 administration of 10 V.S.A. § 6086(a)(8)(C). Rules adopted by the Board shall
7 include:

8 (1) How forest blocks and connecting habitat are further defined,
9 including their size, location, and function, which may include:

10 (A) information that will be available to the public to determine
11 where forest blocks and connecting habitat are located; or

12 (B) advisory mapping resources, how they will be made available,
13 how they will be used, and how they will be updated.

14 (2) Standards establishing how impacts can be avoided or minimized,
15 including how fragmentation of forest blocks or connecting habitat is avoided
16 or minimized, which may include steps to promote proactive site design of
17 buildings, roadways and driveways, utility location, and location relative to
18 existing features such as roads, tree lines, and fence lines.

19 (3)(A) As used in this section “fragmentation” generally means dividing
20 land that has naturally occurring vegetation and ecological processes into
21 smaller and smaller areas as a result of land uses that remove vegetation and

1 create physical barriers that limit species’ movement and interrupt ecological
2 processes between previously connected natural vegetation. However, the
3 rules shall further define “fragmentation” for purposes of avoiding,
4 minimizing, and mitigating undue adverse impacts on forest blocks and
5 connecting habitat. “Fragmentation” does not include the division or
6 conversion of a forest block or connecting habitat by an unpaved recreational
7 trail or by improvements constructed for farming, logging, or forestry purposes
8 below the elevation of 2,500 feet.

9 (B) As used in this subsection, recreational trail shall have the same
10 meaning as “trails” in 10 V.S.A. § 442.

11 (4) Criteria to identify the circumstances when a forest block or
12 connecting habitat is eligible for mitigation.

13 (5) Standards for how impacts to a forest block or connecting habitat
14 may be mitigated. Standards may include:

15 (A) appropriate ratios for compensation;

16 (B) appropriate forms of compensation such as conservation
17 easements, fee interests in land, and other forms of compensation; and

18 (C) appropriate uses of on-site and off-site mitigation.

19 (b) The Board shall convene a working group of stakeholders to provide
20 input to the rule prior to pre-filing with the Interagency Committee on

1 Administrative Rules. The Board shall convene the working group on or
2 before June 1, 2023.

3 (c) The Board shall file a final proposed rule with the Secretary of State
4 and Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules on or before June 15,
5 2024.

6 Sec. 17. 10 V.S.A. § 127 is amended to read:

7 § 127. RESOURCE MAPPING

8 (a) ~~On or before January 15, 2013, the~~ The Secretary of Natural Resources
9 shall complete and maintain resource mapping based on the Geographic
10 Information System (GIS) or other technology. The mapping shall identify
11 natural resources throughout the State, including forest blocks and connecting
12 habitat, that may be relevant to the consideration of energy projects and
13 projects subject to chapter 151 of this title. The Center for Geographic
14 Information shall be available to provide assistance to the Secretary in carrying
15 out the ~~GIS-based~~ resource mapping.

16 (b) ~~The Secretary of Natural Resources~~ shall consider the ~~GIS-based~~
17 resource maps developed under subsection (a) of this section when providing
18 evidence and recommendations to the Public Utility Commission under
19 30 V.S.A. § 248(b)(5) and when commenting on or providing
20 recommendations under chapter 151 of this title to District Commissions on
21 other projects.

1 (c) The Secretary shall establish and maintain written procedures that
2 include a process and science-based criteria for updating resource maps
3 developed under subsection (a) of this section. Before establishing or revising
4 these procedures, the Secretary shall provide opportunities for affected parties
5 and the public to submit relevant information and recommendations.

6 * * * Wood Products Manufacturers * * *

7 Sec. 18. 10 V.S.A. § 6001 is amended to read:

8 § 6001. DEFINITIONS

9 * * *

10 (47) “Wood products manufacturer” means a manufacturer that
11 aggregates wood products from forestry operations and adds value through
12 processing or marketing in the wood products supply chain or directly to
13 consumers through retail sales. “Wood products manufacturer” includes
14 sawmills; veneer mills; pulp mills; pellet mills; producers of firewood,
15 woodchips, mulch, and fuel wood; and log and pulp concentration yards.
16 “Wood products manufacturer” does not include facilities that purchase,
17 market, and resell finished goods, such as wood furniture, wood pellets, and
18 milled lumber, without first receiving wood products from forestry operations.

19 (48) “Wood product” means logs, pulpwood, veneer wood, bolt wood,
20 wood chips, stud wood, poles, pilings, biomass, fuel wood, maple sap, and
21 bark.

1 Sec. 19. 10 V.S.A. § 6086(c) is amended to read:

2 (c)(1) Permit conditions. A permit may contain such requirements and
3 conditions as are allowable proper exercise of the police power and ~~which~~ that
4 are appropriate within the respect to subdivisions (a)(1) through (10) of this
5 section, including those set forth in 24 V.S.A. §§ 4414(4), 4424(a)(2),
6 4414(1)(D)(i), 4463(b), and 4464, the dedication of lands for public use, and
7 the filing of bonds to ensure compliance. The requirements and conditions
8 incorporated from Title 24 may be applied whether or not a local plan has been
9 adopted. General requirements and conditions may be established by rule of
10 the Natural Resources Board.

11 (2) Permit conditions on a wood products manufacturer.

12 (A) When issuing a permit with conditions on wood products
13 manufacturing and delivery, the District Commission shall consider the
14 importance of the wood products industry to the Vermont economy and in
15 sustaining forested land. The District Commission shall consider the seasonal
16 and varied conditions unique to the industry.

17 (B) A permit condition that sets hours of operation for a wood
18 products manufacturer shall only be imposed to mitigate an impact under
19 subdivision (a)(1), (5), or (8) of this section. If an adverse impact under would
20 result, a permit with conditions shall allow the manufacturer to operate while
21 allowing for flexible timing of deliveries of wood products from forestry

1 operations to the manufacturer outside permitted hours of operation, including
2 nights, weekends, and holidays, for the number of days demonstrated by the
3 manufacturer as necessary to enable deliveries, not to exceed 90 days per year.

4 (C) Permit with conditions on the delivery of wood heat fuels. A
5 permit with conditions issued to a wood products manufacturer that produces
6 wood chips, pellets, cord wood, or other fuel wood used for heat shall allow for
7 flexible delivery of that fuel wood from the manufacturer to the end user
8 outside permitted hours of operation, including nights, weekends, and holidays,
9 from October 1 through April 30 of each year. Permits with conditions shall
10 mitigate the undue adverse impacts while enabling deliveries by the
11 manufacturer.

12 (D) Permit amendments. A wood products manufacturer holding a
13 permit may request an amendment to existing permit conditions related to
14 hours of operation and seasonal restrictions to be consistent with subdivisions
15 (2) and (3) of this subsection. Requests for condition amendments under this
16 subsection shall not be subject to Act 250 Rule 34(E).

17 Sec. 20. 10 V.S.A. § 6093 is amended to read:

18 § 6093. MITIGATION OF PRIMARY AGRICULTURAL SOILS

19 (a) Mitigation for loss of primary agricultural soils. Suitable mitigation for
20 the conversion of primary agricultural soils necessary to satisfy subdivision
21 6086(a)(9)(B)(iv) of this title shall depend on where the project tract is located.

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(5) Wood products manufacturers. Notwithstanding any provision of this chapter to the contrary, a conversion of primary agricultural soils by a wood products manufacturer shall be allowed to pay a mitigation fee computed according to the provisions of subdivision (1) of this subsection, except that it shall be entitled to a ratio of 1:1 protected acres to acres of affected primary agricultural soil.

* * * One-acre towns * * *

Sec. 21. INTENT; AMENDMENT OF 10 V.S.A. § 6001(3)(A)(ii)

The General Assembly’s intent in the amendments to 10 V.S.A. § 6001(3)(A)(ii) set forth in Sec. 22 of this act is to clarify the text to reflect the way jurisdiction over commercial and industrial development in towns without permanent zoning and subdivision bylaws has been determined since the passage of Act 250 in 1970. The General Assembly does not intend any provision of this act to be interpreted as a substantive change to determining jurisdiction under 10 V.S.A. § 6001(3)(A)(ii).

Sec. 22. 10 V.S.A. § 6001 is amended to read:

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

* * *

(3)(A) “Development” means each of the following:

1 (i) The construction of improvements on a tract or tracts of land,
2 owned or controlled by a person, involving more than 10 acres of land within a
3 radius of five miles of any point on any involved land, for commercial or
4 industrial purposes in a municipality that has adopted permanent zoning and
5 subdivision bylaws.

6 (ii) The construction of improvements on a tract or tracts of land,
7 owned or controlled by a person, involving more than one acre of land within a
8 radius of five miles of any point on any involved land, for commercial or
9 industrial purposes ~~on more than one acre of land within~~ in a municipality that
10 has not adopted permanent zoning and subdivision bylaws.

11 * * *

12 * * * Reports * * *

13 Sec. 23. REPORT; ACT 250 JURISDICTION OVER AGRICULTURAL
14 BUSINESSES

15 On or before January 15, 2023, the Natural Resources Board shall submit to
16 the General Assembly a report with recommendations on how Act 250
17 jurisdiction should be applied to agricultural businesses, including those
18 located on properties already operating as farms. The Board shall consult with
19 the Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets, the Vermont Planners
20 Association, the regional planning commissions, and other interested
21 stakeholders. The report shall include recommendations as to how to clarify

1 the definition of an accessory on-farm business. The report shall address the
2 current land use planning requirements for farms and farms with accessory on-
3 farm businesses and whether different types of businesses associated with
4 farms and farming require different levels of review. The report may consider
5 whether or not the location of such businesses is relevant and may consider the
6 designation or adoption of agricultural business innovation zones with different
7 levels of review.

8 Sec. 24. DESIGNATED AREA REPORT; APPROPRIATION

9 (a) The sum of \$150,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
10 Department of Housing and Community Development in fiscal year 2023 for
11 the purpose of hiring a consultant to evaluate the State designation programs
12 established in 24 V.S.A. chapter 76A pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.

13 (b)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall hire
14 an independent consultant to:

15 (A) review and assess the State designation programs and incentives
16 established in 24 V.S.A. chapter 76A that recognize and invest in the vitality of
17 Vermont's compact settlement areas; and

18 (B) conduct statewide stakeholder outreach to support the evaluation
19 of and future improvements to the programs, including participation by State,
20 regional, municipal, and advocacy and non-governmental organizations.

1 (2) The consultant shall make recommendations on how to:

2 (A) objectively define and map existing compact settlements as a
3 basis for broader recognition;

4 (B) improve the consistency between and among regional plans and
5 future land use maps;

6 (C) modernize these programs, including consideration of program
7 reform or consolidation;

8 (D) make the designation programs and associated benefits more
9 accessible to municipalities;

10 (E) apply regulatory and non-regulatory benefits;

11 (F) strengthen designation and incentives as a platform for place-
12 based economic development, climate-action, complete streets, and equity and
13 efficiency of public investment and service delivery;

14 (G) implement the smart growth principles established by 24 V.S.A.
15 § 2791; and

16 (H) achieve the goals established in 24 V.S.A. § 4302.

17 (3) On or before July 15, 2023, the consultant shall submit a written
18 report to the General Assembly with its findings and any recommendations for
19 legislative action.

1 Sec. 25. REPORT; NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD

2 (a) On or before December 31, 2023, the Chair of the Natural Resources
3 Board shall report to the House Committees on Natural Resources, Fish, and
4 Wildlife and on Ways and Means and the Senate Committees on Finance and
5 on Natural Resources and Energy on necessary updates to the Act 250
6 program.

7 (b) The report shall include:

8 (1) how to transition to a system in which Act 250 jurisdiction is based
9 on location, which shall encourage development in appropriate locations, the
10 maintenance of intact rural land, including working lands, and protect natural
11 resources of statewide significance, including biodiversity. Location-based
12 jurisdiction would adjust the threshold for Act 250 jurisdiction based on the
13 characteristics of the location. This section of the report shall consider whether
14 to develop thresholds and tiers of jurisdiction as recommended in the
15 Commission on Act 250: the Next 50 Years Report;

16 (2) how to use the Capability and Development Plan to meet the
17 statewide planning goals;

18 (3) an assessment of the current level of staffing of the Board and
19 District Commissions, including whether there should be a district coordinator
20 located in every district;

1 (4) whether the permit fees are sufficient to cover the costs of the
2 program and, if not, a recommendation for a source of revenue to supplement
3 the fees;

4 (5) whether the permit fees are effective in providing appropriate
5 incentives; and

6 (6) whether the Board should be able to assess their costs on applicants.

7 *** Natural Resources Board ***

8 Sec. 26. PURPOSE

9 The purpose of this act is to strengthen the administration of the Act 250
10 program by changing the structure, function, and name of the Natural
11 Resources Board. This act requires that appeals of Act 250 permit decisions be
12 heard by a five-member board called the Environmental Review Board. The
13 Environmental Division of the Superior Court would continue to hear the other
14 types of cases within its jurisdiction. The Environmental Review Board would
15 keep the current duties of the Natural Resources Board in addition to hearing
16 appeals. This change would allow the Act 250 program to return to how it was
17 originally envisioned when enacted by being a citizen-friendly process. The
18 Board would provide oversight, management, and training to the Act 250
19 program staff and District Commissions and develop Act 250 program policy
20 through permit decisions and rulemaking.

1 Sec. 27. 10 V.S.A. § 6021 is amended to read:

2 § 6021. BOARD; VACANCY; REMOVAL

3 (a) ~~A Natural Resources Board established.~~ The Environmental Review
4 Board is created to administer the Act 250 program and hear appeals.

5 (1) The Board shall consist of five members appointed by the Governor,
6 after review and approval by the Environmental Review Board Nominating
7 Committee in accordance with subdivision (2) of this section and confirmed
8 with the advice and consent of the Senate, so that one appointment expires in
9 each year. The Chair shall be a full-time position, and the other four members
10 shall be half-time positions. In making these appointments, the Governor and
11 the Senate shall give consideration to candidates who have experience,
12 expertise, or skills relating to ~~the environment or land use~~ one or more of the
13 following areas: environmental science, natural resources law and policy, land
14 use planning, community planning, or environmental justice.

15 (A) The Governor shall appoint a chair of the Board, a position that
16 shall be a full-time position. The Governor shall ensure Board membership
17 shall reflect, to the extent possible, the racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic
18 diversity of the State. The Board shall not contain two members who reside in
19 the same county.

20 (B) Following initial appointments, the members, ~~except for the~~
21 Chair, shall be appointed for terms of ~~four~~ five years. All terms shall begin on

1 July 1 and expire on June 30. A member may continue serving until a
2 successor is appointed. The initial appointments shall be for staggered terms.

3 (2) ~~The Governor shall appoint up to five persons, with preference given~~
4 ~~to former Environmental Board, Natural Resources Board, or District~~
5 ~~Commission members, with the advice and consent of the Senate, to serve as~~
6 ~~alternates for Board members.~~

7 (A) ~~Alternates shall be appointed for terms of four years, with initial~~
8 ~~appointments being staggered~~ The Environmental Review Board Nominating
9 Committee shall advertise the position when a vacancy will occur on the
10 Environmental Review Board.

11 (B) ~~The Chair of the Board may assign alternates to sit on specific~~
12 ~~matters before the Board in situations where fewer than five members are~~
13 ~~available to serve~~ The Nominating Committee shall review the applicants to
14 determine which are well-qualified for appointment to the Board and shall
15 recommend those candidates to the Governor. The names of candidates shall
16 be confidential.

17 (C) The Governor shall appoint, with the advice and consent of the
18 Senate, a chair and four members of the Board from the list of well-qualified
19 candidates sent to the Governor by the Committee.

20 (b) ~~Any vacancy occurring in the membership of the Board shall be filled~~
21 ~~by the Governor for the unexpired portion of the term~~ Terms; vacancy;

1 succession. The term of each appointment subsequent to the initial
2 appointments described in subsection (a) of this section shall be five years.
3 Any appointment to fill a vacancy shall be for the unexpired portion of the
4 term vacated. A member may seek reappointment by informing the Governor.
5 If the Governor decides not to reappoint the member, the Nominating
6 Committee shall advertise the vacancy.

7 (c) Removal. Notwithstanding the provisions of 3 V.S.A. § 2004, members
8 shall only be removable for cause ~~only, except the Chair, who shall serve at the~~
9 ~~pleasure of the Governor~~ by the remaining members of the Board in
10 accordance with the Vermont Administrative Procedures Act. The Board shall
11 adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 to define the basis and process for
12 removal.

13 (d) Disqualified members. The Chair of the Board, upon request of the
14 Chair of a District Commission, may appoint and assign former Commission
15 members to sit on specific Commission cases when some or all of the regular
16 members and alternates of the District Commission are disqualified or
17 otherwise unable to serve.

18 (e) Retirement from office. When a Board member who hears all or a
19 substantial part of a case retires from office before the case is completed, the
20 member may remain a member of the Board, at the member's discretion, for
21 the purpose of concluding and deciding that case and signing the findings and

1 judgments involved. A retiring Chair shall also remain a member for the
2 purpose of certifying questions of law if a party appeals to the Supreme Court.
3 For the service, the member shall receive a reasonable compensation to be
4 fixed by the remaining members of the Board and necessary expenses while on
5 official business.

6 Sec. 28. 10 V.S.A. § 6032 is added to read:

7 § 6032. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW BOARD NOMINATING

8 COMMITTEE

9 (a) Creation. The Environmental Review Board Nominating Committee is
10 created for the purpose of assessing the qualifications of applicants for
11 appointment to the Environmental Review Board in accordance with section
12 6021 of this title.

13 (b) Members. The Committee shall consist of seven members who shall be
14 appointed as follows:

15 (1) The Governor shall appoint three members from the Executive
16 Branch, with at least one being an employee of the Department of Human
17 Resources.

18 (2) The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint two
19 members from the House of Representatives.

20 (3) The Senate Committee on Committees shall appoint two members
21 from the Senate.

1 (c) Terms. The members of the Committee shall serve for terms of two
2 years. Members shall serve until their successors are appointed. Members
3 shall serve not more than three consecutive terms in any capacity. A
4 legislative member who is appointed as a member of the Committee shall
5 retain the position for the term appointed to the Committee even if the member
6 is subsequently not reelected to the General Assembly during the member's
7 term on the Committee.

8 (d) Chair. The members shall elect their own chair.

9 (e) Quorum. A quorum of the Committee shall consist of four members.

10 (f) Staff and services. The Committee is authorized to use the staff and
11 services of appropriate State agencies and departments as necessary to conduct
12 investigations of applicants.

13 (g) Confidentiality. Except as provided in subsection (h) of this section,
14 proceedings of the Committee, including the names of candidates considered
15 by the Committee and information about any candidate submitted to the
16 Governor, shall be confidential. The provisions of 1 V.S.A. § 317(e)
17 (expiration of Public Records Act exemptions) shall not apply to the
18 exemptions or confidentiality provisions in this subsection.

19 (h) Public information. The following shall be public:

20 (1) operating procedures of the Committee;

1 (2) standard application forms and any other forms used by the
2 Committee, provided they do not contain personal information about a
3 candidate or confidential proceedings;

4 (3) all proceedings of the Committee prior to the receipt of the first
5 candidate's completed application; and

6 (4) at the time the Committee sends the names of the candidates to the
7 Governor, the total number of applicants for the vacancies and the total number
8 of candidates sent to the Governor.

9 (i) Reimbursement. Legislative members of the Committee shall be
10 entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement for expenses in
11 accordance with 2 V.S.A. § 23. Compensation and reimbursement shall be
12 paid from the legislative appropriation.

13 (j) Duties.

14 (1) When a vacancy occurs, the Committee shall review applicants to
15 determine which are well-qualified for the Board and submit those names to
16 the Governor. The Committee shall submit to the Governor a summary of the
17 qualifications and experience of each candidate whose name is submitted to the
18 Governor, together with any further information relevant to the matter.

19 (2) An applicant for the position of member of the Environmental
20 Review Board shall not be required to be an attorney. If the candidate is
21 admitted to practice law in Vermont or practices a profession requiring

1 licensure, certification, or other professional regulation by the State, the
2 Committee shall submit the candidate's name to the Court Administrator or the
3 applicable State professional regulatory entity, and that entity shall disclose to
4 the Committee any professional disciplinary action taken or pending
5 concerning the candidate.

6 (3) Candidates shall be sought who have experience, expertise, or skills
7 relating to one or more of the following areas: environmental science, natural
8 resources law and policy, land use planning, community planning, or
9 environmental justice.

10 (4) The Committee shall ensure a candidate possesses the following
11 attributes:

12 (A) Integrity. A candidate shall possess a record and reputation for
13 excellent character and integrity.

14 (B) Impartiality. A candidate shall exhibit an ability to make judicial
15 determinations in a manner free of bias.

16 (C) Work ethic. A candidate shall demonstrate diligence.

17 (D) Availability. A candidate shall have adequate time to dedicate to
18 the position.

19 Sec. 29. 10 V.S.A. § 6025 is amended to read:

20 § 6025. RULES

1 (a) The Board may adopt rules of procedure for itself and the District
2 Commissions. The Board shall adopt rules of procedure that govern appeals
3 and other contested cases before it that are consistent with this chapter.

4 * * *

5 Sec. 30. 10 V.S.A. § 6027 is amended to read:

6 § 6027. POWERS

7 (a) The Board and District Commissions ~~each~~ shall have supervisory
8 authority in environmental matters respecting projects within their jurisdiction
9 and shall apply their independent judgment in determining facts and
10 interpreting law. Each shall have the power, with respect to any matter within
11 its jurisdiction, to:

12 (1) administer oaths, take depositions, subpoena and compel the
13 attendance of witnesses, and require the production of evidence;

14 (2) allow parties to enter upon lands of other parties for the purposes of
15 inspecting and investigating conditions related to the matter before the Board
16 or Commission;

17 (3) enter upon lands for the purpose of conducting inspections,
18 investigations, examinations, tests, and site evaluations as it deems necessary
19 to verify information presented in any matter within its jurisdiction; and

20 (4) apply for and receive grants from the federal government and from
21 other sources.

1 (b) The powers granted under this chapter are additional to any other
2 powers ~~which~~ that may be granted by other legislation.

3 (c) The ~~Natural Resources~~ Board may designate or establish ~~such~~ regional
4 offices as it deems necessary to implement the provisions of this chapter and
5 the rules adopted ~~hereunder~~. The ~~Natural Resources~~ Board may designate or
6 require a regional planning commission to receive applications, provide
7 administrative assistance, perform investigations, and make recommendations.

8 (d) At the request of a District Commission, if the Board Chair determines
9 that the workload in the requesting district is likely to result in unreasonable
10 delays or that the requesting District Commission is disqualified to hear a case,
11 the Chair may authorize the District Commission of another district to sit in the
12 requesting district to consider one or more applications.

13 (e) The ~~Natural Resources~~ Board may by rule allow joint hearings to be
14 conducted with specified State agencies or specified municipalities.

15 (f) The Board shall publish its decisions online. The Board may publish
16 online or contract to publish annotations and indices of its decisions, the
17 decisions of the Environmental Division of the Superior Court and the
18 Supreme Court, and the text of those decisions. The published product shall be
19 available at a reasonable rate to the general public and at a reduced rate to
20 libraries and governmental bodies within the State.

1 (g) The ~~Natural Resources~~ Board shall manage the process by which land
2 use permits are issued under section 6086 of this title, may initiate enforcement
3 on related matters under the provisions of chapters 201 and 211 of this title,
4 and may ~~petition the Environmental Division~~ initiate and hear petitions for
5 revocation of land use permits issued under this chapter. Grounds for
6 revocation are:

7 (1) noncompliance with this chapter, rules adopted under this chapter, or
8 an order that is issued that relates to this chapter;

9 (2) noncompliance with any permit or permit condition;

10 (3) failure to disclose all relevant and material facts in the application or
11 during the permitting process;

12 (4) misrepresentation of any relevant and material fact at any time;

13 (5) failure to pay a penalty or other sums owed pursuant to, or other
14 failure to comply with, court order, stipulation agreement, schedule of
15 compliance, or other order issued under Vermont statutes and related to the
16 permit; or

17 (6) failure to provide certification of construction costs, as required
18 under subsection 6083a(a) of this title, or failure to pay supplemental fees as
19 required under that section.

1 (h) ~~The Natural Resources Board~~ may hear appeals of fee refund requests
2 under section 6083a of this title. The Board shall hear appeals of decisions
3 made by District Commissions and district coordinators.

4 (i) The Chair, subject to the direction of the Board, shall have general
5 charge of the offices and employees of the Board and the offices and
6 employees of the District Commissions.

7 (j) ~~The Natural Resources Board may participate as a party in all matters~~
8 ~~before the Environmental Division that relate to land use permits issued under~~
9 ~~this chapter.~~ [Repealed.]

10 * * *

11 Sec. 31. 10 V.S.A. § 6022 is amended to read:

12 § 6022. PERSONNEL

13 (a) Regular personnel. The Board may appoint legal counsel, scientists,
14 engineers, experts, investigators, temporary employees, and administrative
15 personnel as it finds necessary in carrying out its duties, ~~unless the Governor~~
16 ~~shall otherwise provide~~ in providing personnel to assist the District
17 Commissions and in investigating matters within its jurisdiction.

18 (b) Executive Director. The Board shall appoint an Executive Director.
19 The Director shall be a full-time State employee, shall be exempt from the
20 State classified system, and shall serve at the pleasure of the Board. The
21 Director shall be responsible for:

1 (1) supervising and administering the operation and implementation of
2 this chapter and the rules adopted by the Board as directed by the Board;

3 (2) assisting the Board in its duties and administering the requirements
4 of this chapter;

5 (3) employing such staff as may be required to carry out the functions of
6 the Board; and

7 (4) preparing an annual budget for submission to the Board.

8 Sec. 32. 10 V.S.A. § 6084 is amended to read:

9 § 6084. NOTICE OF APPLICATION; HEARINGS; COMMENCEMENT OF
10 REVIEW

11 (a) ~~On or before the date of~~ Upon the filing of an application with the
12 District Commission, the ~~applicant~~ District Commission shall send, by
13 electronic means, notice ~~and a copy~~ of the ~~initial~~ application to the owner of
14 the land if the applicant is not the owner; the municipality in which the land is
15 located; the municipal and regional planning commissions for the municipality
16 in which the land is located; the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources; and
17 any adjacent Vermont municipality and municipal and regional planning
18 commission if the land is located on a municipal or regional boundary. The
19 ~~applicant shall furnish to the~~ District Commission ~~the names of those furnished~~
20 ~~notice by affidavit, and shall post~~ send by electronic means a copy of the notice
21 in to the town clerk's office of the town or towns in which the project lies. The

1 town clerk shall post the notice in the town office. The applicant shall also
2 provide a list of adjoining landowners to the District Commission. Upon
3 request and for good cause, the District Commission may authorize the
4 applicant to provide a partial list of adjoining landowners in accordance with
5 Board rules.

6 * * *

7 (e) Any notice for a major or minor application, as required by this section,
8 shall also be published by the District Commission in a local newspaper
9 generally circulating in the area where the development or subdivision is
10 located and on the Board's website not more than ten days after receipt of a
11 complete application.

12 * * *

13
14 Sec. 33. 10 V.S.A. § 6086(f) is amended to read:

15 (f) Prior to any appeal of a permit issued by a District Commission, any
16 aggrieved party may file a request for a stay of construction with the District
17 Commission together with a declaration of intent to appeal the permit. The
18 stay request shall be automatically granted for seven days upon receipt and
19 notice to all parties and pending a ruling on the merits of the stay request
20 pursuant to Board rules. The automatic stay shall not extend beyond the 30-
21 day appeal period unless a valid appeal has been filed with the Environmental

1 Division. The automatic stay may be granted only once under this subsection
2 during the 30-day appeal period. Following appeal of the District Commission
3 decision, any stay request must be filed with the Environmental Division
4 pursuant to the provisions of chapter 220 of this title Board. A District
5 Commission shall not stay construction authorized by a permit processed under
6 the Board's minor application procedures.

7 Sec. 34. 10 V.S.A. § 6089 is amended to read:

8 § 6089. APPEALS

9 ~~Appeals of any act or decision of a District Commission under this chapter~~
10 ~~or a district coordinator under subsection 6007(c) of this title shall be made to~~
11 ~~the Environmental Division in accordance with chapter 220 of this title. For~~
12 ~~the purpose of this section, a decision of the Chair of a District Commission~~
13 ~~under section 6001e of this title on whether action has been taken to~~
14 ~~circumvent the requirements of this chapter shall be considered an act or~~
15 ~~decision of the District Commission.~~

16 (a)(1) An appeal of any act or decision of a District Commission shall be to
17 the Board and shall be accompanied by a fee prescribed by section 6083a of
18 this title.

19 (2) Participation before District Commission. A person shall not appeal
20 an act or decision that was made by a District Commission unless the person
21 was granted party status by the District Commission pursuant to subdivision

1 6085(c)(1)(E) of this title, participated in the proceedings before the District
2 Commission, and retained party status at the end of the District Commission
3 proceedings. In addition, the person may only appeal those issues under the
4 criteria with respect to which the person was granted party status. However,
5 notwithstanding these limitations, a person may appeal an act or decision of the
6 District Commission if the Board determines that:

7 (A) there was a procedural defect that prevented the person from
8 obtaining party status or participating in the proceeding;

9 (B) the decision being appealed is the grant or denial of party status;
10 or

11 (C) some other condition exists that would result in manifest injustice
12 if the person's right to appeal was disallowed.

13 (3) An appellant to the Board, under this section, shall file with the
14 notice of appeal a statement of the issues to be addressed in the appeal, a
15 summary of the evidence that will be presented, and a preliminary list of
16 witnesses who will testify on behalf of the appellant.

17 (4) The Board shall hold a de novo hearing on all findings requested by
18 any party that files an appeal or cross appeal, according to the rules of the
19 Board. The hearing shall be held in the municipality where the project subject
20 to the appeal is located, if possible, or as close as possible.

1 (5) Notice of appeal shall be filed with the Board within 30 days
2 following the act or decision by the District Commission. The Board shall
3 notify the parties who had party status before the District Commission of the
4 filing of any appeal.

5 (6) Prehearing discovery.

6 (A) A party may obtain discovery of expert witnesses who may
7 provide testimony relevant to the appeal. Expert witness prefiled testimony
8 shall be in accordance with the Vermont Rules of Evidence. The use of
9 discovery for experts shall comply with the requirements in the Vermont Rules
10 of Civil Procedure 26–37.

11 (B) Interrogatories served on nonexpert witnesses shall be limited to
12 discovery of the identity of witnesses and a summary of each witness'
13 testimony, except by order of the Board for cause shown. Interrogatories
14 served on expert witnesses shall be in accordance with the Vermont Rules of
15 Civil Procedure.

16 (C) Parties may submit requests to produce and requests to enter
17 upon land pursuant to the Vermont Rule of Civil Procedure 34.

18 (D) Parties may not take depositions of witnesses, except by order of
19 the Board for cause shown.

20 (E) The Board may require a party to supplement, as necessary, any
21 prehearing testimony that is provided.

1 (b) Prior decisions of the former Environmental Board, Water Resources
2 Board, Waste Facilities Panel, and Environmental Division of the Superior
3 Court shall be given the same weight and consideration as prior decisions of
4 the Environmental Review Board.

5 (c) An appeal from a decision of the Board under subsection (a) of this
6 section shall be to the Supreme Court by a party as set forth in subsection
7 6085(c) of this title.

8 (d) No objection that has not been raised before the Board may be
9 considered by the Supreme Court, unless the failure or neglect to urge such
10 objection shall be excused because of extraordinary circumstances.

11 (e) An appeal of a decision by the Board shall be allowed pursuant to
12 3 V.S.A. § 815, including the unreasonableness or insufficiency of the
13 conditions attached to a permit. An appeal from the District Commission shall
14 be allowed for any reason, except no appeal shall be allowed when an
15 application has been granted and no hearing was requested.

16 (f) Precedent from the former Environmental Board and of the
17 Environmental Review Board that interpret Act 250 shall be provided the same
18 deference by the Supreme Court as precedents accorded to other Executive
19 Branch agencies charged with administering their enabling act. On appeal to
20 the Supreme Court from the Environmental Review Board, decisions of the

1 Environmental Review Board interpreting this act also shall be accorded that
2 deference.

3 (g) Upon appeal to the Supreme Court, the Board’s findings of fact shall be
4 accepted unless clearly erroneous.

5 (h) Completion of case. A case shall be deemed completed when the Board
6 enters a final decision even though that decision is appealed to the Supreme
7 Court and remanded by that Court.

8 (i) Court of record; jurisdiction. The Board shall have the powers of a
9 court of record in the determination and adjudication of all matters within its
10 jurisdiction. It may initiate proceedings on any matter within its jurisdiction.
11 It may render judgments and enforce the same by any suitable process issuable
12 by courts in this State. An order issued by the Board on any matter within its
13 jurisdiction shall have the effect of a judicial order. The Board’s jurisdiction
14 shall include:

15 (1) the issuance of declaratory rulings on the applicability of this chapter
16 and rules or orders issued under this chapter, pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 808; and

17 (2) the issuance of decisions on appeals pursuant to sections 6007 and
18 6089 of this title.

1 Sec. 35. 10 V.S.A. § 6007 is amended to read:

2 § 6007. ACT 250 DISCLOSURE STATEMENT; JURISDICTIONAL
3 DETERMINATION

4 * * *

5 (c) With respect to the partition or division of land, or with respect to an
6 activity that might or might not constitute development, any person may
7 submit to the district coordinator an “Act 250 Disclosure Statement” and other
8 information required by the rules of the Board and may request a jurisdictional
9 opinion from the district coordinator concerning the applicability of this
10 chapter. If a requestor wishes a final determination to be rendered on the
11 question, the district coordinator, at the expense of the requestor and in
12 accordance with rules of the Board, shall publish notice of the issuance of the
13 opinion in a local newspaper generally circulating in the area where the land
14 that is the subject of the opinion is located and shall serve the opinion on all
15 persons listed in subdivisions 6085(c)(1)(A) through (D) of this title. In
16 addition, the requestor who is seeking a final determination shall consult with
17 the district coordinator and obtain approval of a subdivision 6085(c)(1)(E) list
18 of persons who shall be notified by the district coordinator because they are
19 adjoining property owners or other persons who would be likely to be able to
20 demonstrate a particularized interest protected by this chapter that may be
21 affected by an act or decision by a District Commission.

1 § 8501. PURPOSE

2 It is the purpose of this chapter to:

3 (1) consolidate existing appeal routes for municipal zoning and
4 subdivision decisions and acts or decisions of the Secretary of Natural
5 Resources, ~~district environmental coordinators, and District Commissions,~~
6 excluding enforcement actions brought pursuant to chapters 201 and 211 of
7 this title and the adoption of rules under 3 V.S.A. chapter 25;

8 (2) standardize the appeal periods, the parties who may appeal these acts
9 or decisions, and the ability to stay any act or decision upon appeal, taking into
10 account the nature of the different programs affected;

11 ~~(3) encourage people to get involved in the Act 250 permitting process~~
12 ~~at the initial stages of review by a District Commission by requiring~~
13 ~~participation as a prerequisite for an appeal of a District Commission decision~~
14 ~~to the Environmental Division;~~

15 ~~(4)~~ ensure that clear appeal routes exist for acts and decisions of
16 the Secretary of Natural Resources; and

17 ~~(5)~~(4) consolidate appeals of decisions related to renewable energy
18 generation plants and telecommunications facilities with review under,
19 respectively, 30 V.S.A. §§ 248 and 248a, with appeals and consolidation of
20 proceedings pertaining to telecommunications facilities occurring only while
21 30 V.S.A. § 248a remains in effect.

1 § 8502. DEFINITIONS

2 As used in this chapter:

3 (1) ~~“District Commission” means a District Environmental Commission~~
4 ~~established under chapter 151 of this title. [Repealed.]~~

5 (2) ~~“District coordinator” means a district environmental coordinator~~
6 ~~attached to a District Commission established under chapter 151 of this title.~~
7 ~~[Repealed.]~~

8 (3) “Environmental Court” or “Environmental Division” means the
9 Environmental Division of the Superior Court established by 4 V.S.A. § 30.

10 (4) ~~“Natural Resources~~ Environmental Review Board” or “Board”
11 means the Board established under chapter 151 of this title.

12 (5) “Party by right” means the following:

13 (A) the applicant;

14 (B) the landowner, if the applicant is not the landowner;

15 (C) the municipality in which the project site is located and the
16 municipal and regional planning commissions for that municipality;

17 (D) if the project site is located on a boundary, any Vermont
18 municipality adjacent to that border and the municipal and regional planning
19 commissions for that municipality;

1 (E) the solid waste management district in which the land is located,
2 if the development or subdivision constitutes a facility pursuant to subdivision
3 6602(10) of this title;

4 (F) any State agency affected by the proposed project.

5 (6) “Person” means any individual; partnership; company; corporation;
6 association; joint venture; trust; municipality; the State of Vermont or any
7 agency, department, or subdivision of the State; any federal agency; or any
8 other legal or commercial entity.

9 (7) “Person aggrieved” means a person who alleges an injury to a
10 particularized interest protected by the provisions of law listed in section 8503
11 of this title, attributable to an act or decision by ~~a district coordinator, District~~
12 ~~Commission, the Secretary, or the Environmental Division~~ that can be
13 redressed by the Environmental Division or the Supreme Court.

14 (8) “Secretary” means the Secretary of Natural Resources or the
15 Secretary’s duly authorized representative. As used in this chapter,
16 “Secretary” shall also mean the Commissioner of Environmental Conservation,
17 the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, and the Commissioner of
18 Fish and Wildlife, with respect to those statutes that refer to the authority of
19 that commissioner or department.

1 § 8503. APPLICABILITY

2 (a) This chapter shall govern all appeals of an act or decision of the
3 Secretary, excluding enforcement actions under chapters 201 and 211 of this
4 title and rulemaking, under the following authorities and under the rules
5 adopted under those authorities:

6 * * *

7 (b) ~~This chapter shall govern:~~

8 ~~(1) all appeals from an act or decision of a District Commission under~~
9 ~~chapter 151 of this title, excluding appeals of application fee refund requests;~~

10 ~~(2) appeals from an act or decision of a district coordinator under~~
11 ~~subsection 6007(c) of this title;~~

12 ~~(3) appeals from findings of fact and conclusions of law issued by the~~
13 ~~Natural Resources Board in its review of a designated growth center for~~
14 ~~conformance with the criteria of subsection 6086(a) of this title, pursuant to~~
15 ~~authority granted at 24 V.S.A. § 2793e(f). [Repealed.]~~

16 (c) This chapter shall govern all appeals arising under 24 V.S.A.
17 chapter 117, the planning and zoning chapter.

18 (d) This chapter shall govern all appeals from an act or decision of the
19 Environmental Division under this chapter.

1 (e) This chapter shall not govern appeals from rulemaking decisions by the
2 ~~Natural Resources~~ Environmental Review Board under chapter 151 of this title
3 or enforcement actions under chapters 201 and 211 of this title.

4 (f) This chapter shall govern all appeals of acts or decisions of the
5 legislative body of a municipality arising under 24 V.S.A. chapter 61,
6 subchapter 10, relating to the municipal certificate of approved location for
7 salvage yards.

8 (g) This chapter shall govern all appeals of an act or decision of the
9 Secretary of Natural Resources that a solid waste implementation plan for a
10 municipality proposed under 24 V.S.A. § 2202a conforms with the State Solid
11 Waste Implementation Plan adopted pursuant to section 6604 of this title.

12 § 8504. APPEALS TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION

13 (a) ~~Act 250 and~~ Agency appeals. Within 30 days of the date of following
14 the act or decision, any person aggrieved by an act or decision of the Secretary,
15 ~~a District Commission, or a district coordinator~~ under the provisions of law
16 listed in section 8503 of this title, or any party by right, may appeal to the
17 Environmental Division, except for an act or decision of the Secretary under
18 subdivision 6086b(3)(E) of this title or governed by section 8506 of this title.

19 * * *

20 (c) Notice of the filing of an appeal.

1 (g) Consolidated appeals. The Environmental Division may consolidate or
2 coordinate different appeals where those appeals all relate to the same project.

3 * * *

4 (i) ~~Deference to Agency technical determinations. In the adjudication of~~
5 ~~appeals relating to land use permits under chapter 151 of this title, technical~~
6 ~~determinations of the Secretary shall be accorded the same deference as they~~
7 ~~are accorded by a District Commission under subsection 6086(d) of this title.~~
8 [Repealed.]

9 * * *

10 (k) Limitations on appeals. Notwithstanding any other provision of this
11 section;

12 ~~(1) there shall be no appeal from a District Commission decision when~~
13 ~~the Commission has issued a permit and no hearing was requested or held, or~~
14 ~~no motion to alter was filed following the issuance of an administrative~~
15 ~~amendment;~~

16 ~~(2) a municipal decision regarding whether a particular application~~
17 ~~qualifies for a recorded hearing under 24 V.S.A. § 4471(b) shall not be subject~~
18 ~~to appeal;~~

19 ~~(3) if a District Commission issues a partial decision under subsection~~
20 ~~6086(b) of this title, any appeal of that decision must be taken within 30 days~~
21 ~~of the date of that decision.~~

1 (l) Representation. The Secretary may represent the Agency of Natural
2 Resources in all appeals under this section. ~~The Chair of the Natural~~
3 ~~Resources Board may represent the Board in any appeal under this section,~~
4 ~~unless the Board directs otherwise.~~ If more than one State agency, ~~other than~~
5 ~~the Board,~~ either appeals or seeks to intervene in an appeal under this section,
6 only the Attorney General may represent the interests of those agencies of the
7 State in the appeal.

8 (m) Precedent. Prior decisions of the Environmental Board, Water
9 Resources Board, and Waste Facilities Panel shall be given the same weight
10 and consideration as prior decisions of the Environmental Division.

11 (n) Intervention. Any person may intervene in a pending appeal if that
12 person:

13 (1) appeared as a party in the action appealed from and retained party
14 status;

15 (2) is a party by right;

16 (3) ~~is the Natural Resources Board;~~ [Repealed.]

17 (4) is a person aggrieved, as defined in this chapter;

18 (5) qualifies as an “interested person,” as established in 24 V.S.A.

19 § 4465, with respect to appeals under 24 V.S.A. chapter 117; or

20 (6) meets the standard for intervention established in the Vermont Rules
21 of Civil Procedure.

1 (o) With respect to review of an act or decision of the Secretary pursuant to
2 3 V.S.A. § 2809, the Division may reverse the act or decision or amend an
3 allocation of costs to an applicant only if the Division determines that the act,
4 decision, or allocation was arbitrary, capricious, or an abuse of discretion. In
5 the absence of such a determination, the Division shall require the applicant to
6 pay the Secretary all costs assessed pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 2809.

7 (p) Administrative record. The Secretary shall certify the administrative
8 record as defined in chapter 170 of this title and shall transfer a certified copy
9 of that record to the Environmental Division when:

10 ~~(1) there is an appeal of an act or decision of the Secretary that is based~~
11 ~~on that record; or~~

12 ~~(2) there is an appeal of a decision of a District Commission, and the~~
13 ~~applicant used a decision of the Secretary based on that record to create a~~
14 ~~presumption under a criterion of subsection 6086(a) of this title that is at issue~~
15 ~~in the appeal.~~

16 § 8505. APPEALS TO THE SUPREME COURT

17 (a) Any person aggrieved by a decision of the Environmental Division
18 pursuant to this subchapter, any party by right, or any person aggrieved by a
19 decision of the Environmental Review Board may appeal to the Supreme Court
20 within 30 days ~~of~~ following the date of the entry of the order or judgment
21 appealed from, provided that:

1 (1) the person was a party to the proceeding before the Environmental
2 Division; ~~or~~

3 (2) the decision being appealed is the denial of party status; or

4 (3) the Supreme Court determines that:

5 (A) there was a procedural defect that prevented the person from
6 participating in the proceeding; or

7 (B) some other condition exists that would result in manifest injustice
8 if the person's right to appeal were disallowed.

9 * * *

10 * * * Environmental Division * * *

11 Sec. 38. 4 V.S.A. § 34 is amended to read:

12 § 34. JURISDICTION; ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION

13 The Environmental Division shall have:

14 (1) jurisdiction of matters arising under 10 V.S.A. chapters 201 and 220;

15 and

16 (2) jurisdiction of matters arising under 24 V.S.A. chapter 61,

17 subchapter 12 and 24 V.S.A. chapter 117; ~~and~~

18 ~~(3) original jurisdiction to revoke permits under 10 V.S.A. chapter 151.~~

1 * * * Appropriation; Transition; Revision Authority * * *

2 Sec. 39. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW BOARD POSITIONS;

3 APPROPRIATION

4 (a) The following new positions are created at the Environmental Review
5 Board for the purposes of carrying out this act:

6 (1) one Staff Attorney 1; and

7 (2) four half-time Environmental Review Board members.

8 (b) The sum of \$384,000.00 is appropriated to the Environmental Review
9 Board from the General Fund in fiscal year 2023 for the positions established
10 in subsection (a) of this section and for additional operating costs required to
11 implement the appeals process established in this act.

12 Sec. 40. NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD TRANSITION

13 (a) The Governor shall appoint the members of Environmental Review
14 Board on or before July 1, 2023, and the terms of any Natural Resources Board
15 member not appointed consistent with the requirements of 10 V.S.A.

16 § 6021(a)(1)(A) or (B) shall expire on that day.

17 (b) As of July 1, 2023, all appropriations and employee positions of the
18 Natural Resources Board are transferred to the Environmental Review Board.

19 (c) The Environmental Review Board shall adopt rules of procedure for its
20 hearing process pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 6025(a) on or before July 1, 2024.

1 Sec. 41. ENVIRONMENTAL DIVISION; CONTINUED JURISDICTION

2 Notwithstanding the repeal of its jurisdictional authority to hear appeals
3 relative to land use permits under Sec. 36 of this act, the Environmental
4 Division of the Superior Court shall continue to have jurisdiction to complete
5 its consideration of any appeal that is pending before it as of July 1, 2024 if the
6 act or appeal has been filed. The Environmental Review Board shall have
7 authority to be a party in any appeals pending under this section until July 1,
8 2024.

9 Sec. 42. REVISION AUTHORITY

10 In preparing the Vermont Statutes Annotated for publication in 2022, the
11 Office of Legislative Counsel shall replace all references to the “Natural
12 Resources Board” with the “Environmental Review Board” in Title 3, Title 10,
13 Title 24, Title 29, Title 30, and Title 32.

14 * * * Effective Dates * * *

15 Sec. 43. EFFECTIVE DATES

16 This act shall take effect on passage except that Sec. 15 (10 V.S.A.
17 § 6086(a)(8)) shall take effect on September 1, 2024 and Secs. 37 and 38 (10
18 V.S.A. chapter 220; 4 V.S.A. § 34) shall take effect on July 1, 2024.

19
20
21

1 (Committee vote: _____)

2

3

Representative _____

4

FOR THE COMMITTEE

DRAFT