

S.234

An act relating to changes to Act 250

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

* * * Municipal Zoning * * *

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

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

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

* * *

(b) Definitions.

(1) “Neighborhood planning area” means an automatically delineated area including and encircling a downtown, village center, or new town center designated under this chapter or within a growth center designated under this chapter. A neighborhood planning area is used for the purpose of identifying locations suitable for new and infill housing that will support a development pattern that is compact, oriented to pedestrians, and consistent with smart

growth principles. To ensure a compact settlement pattern, the outer boundary of a neighborhood planning area shall be located entirely within the boundaries of the applicant municipality, unless a joint application is submitted by more than one municipality, and shall be determined:

* * *

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

* * *

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

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

* * *

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

- ~~(A) municipal sewer infrastructure; or~~
- ~~(B) a community or alternative wastewater system approved by the Agency of Natural Resources. [Repealed.]~~

(7) The municipal bylaws allow minimum net residential densities within the neighborhood development area greater than or equal to four ~~single-family detached~~ dwelling units per acre for all identified residential uses or residential building types, exclusive of accessory dwelling units, or ~~no~~ not fewer than the average existing density of the surrounding neighborhood, whichever is greater. The methodology for calculating density shall be established in the guidelines developed by the Department pursuant to subsection 2792(d) of this title.

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Sec. 2. 24 V.S.A. § 2793b is amended to read:

§ 2793b. DESIGNATION OF NEW TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT
DISTRICTS

* * *

(b) Within 45 days of receipt of a completed application, the State Board shall designate a new town center development district if the State Board finds, with respect to that district, the municipality has:

* * *

(2) Provided a community investment agreement that has been executed by authorized representatives of the municipal government, businesses and property owners within the district, and community groups with an articulated purpose of supporting downtown interests, and contains the following:

* * *

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

* * *

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

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

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

* * *

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

* * * Act 250 * * *

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

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

* * *

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

* * *

(iv) The construction of housing projects such as cooperatives, condominiums, or dwellings, or construction or maintenance of mobile homes or mobile home parks, with 10 or more units, constructed or maintained on a tract or tracts of land, owned or controlled by a person, within a radius of five miles of any point on any involved land and within any continuous period of five years. However:

(I) A priority housing project shall constitute a development under this subdivision (iv) only if the number of housing units in the project is:

(aa) [Repealed.]

(bb) [Repealed.]

(cc) 75 or more, in a municipality with a population of 6,000 or more but less than 10,000.

(dd) 50 or more, in a municipality with a population of ~~3,000 or more but~~ less than 6,000.

(ee) ~~25 or more, in a municipality with a population of less than 3,000.~~ [Repealed.]

(ff) Notwithstanding subdivisions (cc) through (ee) of this subdivision (3)(A)(iv)(I), 10 or more if the construction involves the demolition of one or more buildings that are listed on or eligible to be listed on

the State or National Register of Historic Places. However, demolition shall not be considered to create jurisdiction under this subdivision (ff) if the Division for Historic Preservation has determined that the proposed demolition will have no adverse effect, will have no adverse effect if specified conditions are met, or will have an adverse effect that will be adequately mitigated. Any imposed conditions shall be enforceable through a grant condition, deed covenant, or other legally binding document.

* * *

(D) The word “development” does not include:

* * *

(6) ~~“Floodway” means the channel of a watercourse that is expected to flood on an average of at least once every 100 years and the adjacent land areas that are required to carry and discharge the flood of the watercourse, as determined by the Secretary of Natural Resources with full consideration given to upstream impoundments and flood control projects~~ “Flood hazard area” has the same meaning as under section 752 of this title.

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

* * *

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

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

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

~~(ii) at least 20 percent of the housing units have a purchase price that at the time of first sale does not exceed 90 percent of the new construction, targeted area purchase price limits established and published annually by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency meet the requirements of affordable owner-occupied housing under subdivision (29)(A) of this section, adjusted for the number of bedrooms, as established and published annually by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.~~

(B) Rental housing. ~~At least 20 percent of the housing units that are rented constitute affordable housing and have a duration of affordability of For not less than 15 years following the date that rental housing is initially placed in service, at least 20 percent of the housing units meet the requirements of affordable rental housing under subdivision (29)(B) of this section, adjusted for~~

the number of bedrooms, as established and published annually by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

* * *

Sec. 5. 10 V.S.A. § 6086 is amended to read:

§ 6086. ISSUANCE OF PERMIT; CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

Sec. 6. 10 V.S.A. 6086(g) is added to read:

(g) If a municipality fails to respond to a request by the applicant within 90 days as to the impacts related to subdivision (a)(6) or (7) of this section, the application will be presumed not to have an unreasonable burden on educational, municipal, or governmental services.

* * * Forest Blocks * * *

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

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(C) Forest blocks and connecting habitat. Will not result in an undue adverse impact on forest blocks, connecting habitat, or rare and irreplaceable natural areas. If a project as proposed would result in an undue adverse impact, a permit may only be granted if effects are avoided, minimized, and mitigated in accordance with rules adopted by the Board.

Sec. 9. CRITERION 8(C) RULEMAKING

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

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

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

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

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

(3) Criteria to identify when a forest block or connecting habitat is eligible for mitigation.

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

(A) appropriate ratios for compensation;

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

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

(b) The Board shall convene a working group to provide input to the rule prior to prefiling with the Interagency Committee on Administrative Rules.

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

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

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

§ 127. RESOURCE MAPPING

(a) ~~On or before January 15, 2013, the~~ The Secretary of Natural Resources shall complete and maintain resource mapping based on the Geographic Information System (GIS) or other technology. The mapping shall identify natural resources throughout the State, including forest blocks, that may be relevant to the consideration of energy projects and projects subject to

chapter 151 of this title. The Center for Geographic Information shall be available to provide assistance to the Secretary in carrying out the ~~GIS-based~~ resource mapping.

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

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

* * * Roads * * *

Sec. 11. 10 V.S.A. § 6001 is amended to read:

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

As used in this chapter:

* * *

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

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(xi) The construction of a road, roads, driveway, or driveways, which as a single road or driveway is greater than 800 feet, or which in combination is greater than 2,000 feet, to provide access to or within a tract or tracts of land of more than one acre owned or controlled by a person.

(I) For the purposes of determining jurisdiction under this subdivision (xi), any tract or tracts of land that will be provided access by the road or driveway is involved land.

(II) As used in this subdivision (xi), “road” shall include any new road or upgrade of a class 4 highway by a person other than a municipality, including a road that will be transferred to or maintained by a municipality after its construction or upgrade. For the purposes of this subdivision (II), routine maintenance of a class 4 highway or stormwater improvement required pursuant to section 1264 of this title shall not constitute an “upgrade.”

(aa) Routine maintenance shall include replacing a culvert or ditch, increasing the size or configuration of an existing drainage structure to improve resiliency, applying new stone, grading, or making repairs after adverse weather.

(bb) Routine maintenance shall not include changing the size of the road, changing the location or layout of the road, or adding

pavement unless undertaken to improve the function of an existing drainage structure.

(III) For the purpose of determining the length under this subdivision (xi), the length of all roads and driveways within the tract or tracts of land constructed within any continuous period of 10 years after October 1, 2020 shall be included.

(IV) This subdivision (xi) shall not apply to:

(aa) a road constructed for a municipal, county, or State purpose; a utility corridor of an electric transmission or distribution company; or a road located entirely within a designated downtown or neighborhood development area; and

(bb) a road used primarily for farming or forestry purposes unless used for a residential purpose.

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* * * Wood Products Manufacturers * * *

Sec. 12. 10 V.S.A. § 6001 is amended to read:

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

* * *

(47) “Wood products manufacturer” means a manufacturer that aggregates wood products from forestry operations and adds value through processing or marketing in the wood products supply chain or directly to

consumers through retail sales. “Wood products manufacturer” includes sawmills; veneer mills; pulp mills; pellet mills; producers of firewood, woodchips, mulch, and fuel wood; and log and pulp concentration yards. “Wood products manufacturer” does not include facilities that purchase, market, and resell finished goods, such as wood furniture, wood pellets, and milled lumber, without first receiving wood products from forestry operations.

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

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

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

(2) Permit conditions on a wood products manufacturer.

(A) A permit condition that sets hours of operation for a wood products manufacturer shall only be imposed to mitigate an impact under subdivision (a)(1), (5), or (8) of this section.

(B) If an adverse impact under subdivision (a)(1), (5), or (8) of this section would result, a permit with conditions shall allow the manufacturer to operate while mitigating these impacts. A permit with conditions that mitigate these impacts shall allow for deliveries of wood products from forestry operations to the manufacturer outside permitted hours of operation, including nights, weekends, and holidays, for the number of days demonstrated by the manufacturer as necessary to enable business operations, not to exceed 90 days per year.

(3) Permit with conditions on the delivery of wood heat fuels. A permit with conditions issued to a wood products manufacturer that produces wood chips, pellets, cord wood, or other fuel wood used for heat shall allow shipment of that fuel wood from the manufacturer to the end user outside permitted hours of operation, including nights, weekends, and holidays, from October 1 through April 30 of each year. Permits with conditions shall mitigate the undue adverse impacts while enabling the operations of the manufacturer.

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

* * * One-acre towns * * *

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

§ 6001. DEFINITIONS

* * *

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

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

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

* * *

* * * Reports * * *

Sec. 15. REPORT; ACT 250 JURISDICTION OVER AGRICULTURAL
BUSINESSES

On or before January 15, 2023, the Natural Resources Board shall submit to the General Assembly a report with recommendations on how Act 250 jurisdiction should be applied to agricultural businesses, including those located on properties already operating as farms. The report shall address the current land use planning requirements for farms and farms with accessory on-farm businesses and whether different types of businesses associated with farms and farming require different levels of review. The report may consider whether or not the location of such businesses is relevant and may consider the designation or adoption of agricultural business innovation zones with different levels of review.

* * * Study Committee; Effective Date * * *

Sec. 16. STUDY COMMITTEE; NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD
STRUCTURE

(a) There is created a study committee on the structure and function of the Natural Resources Board. The group shall consist of eight Legislative members, four appointed by the Speaker of the House and four appointed by the Committee on Committees.

(b) The group shall hear from various stakeholder groups on how to enhance the administration of the Act 250 program, including considerations of:

(1) the membership of the Board;

(2) the appointment process;

(3) grounds for removing a member from the Board;

(4) the responsibilities and authorities of the Board and District

Commissions;

(5) funding of the operation of the Board, District Commissions, and the Act 250 program; and

(6) the handling of appeals issued by the District Commissions and the Board.

(c) On or before December 31, 2022, the group shall report back to the General Assembly with any proposed changes to the structure and function of the Natural Resources Board.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 17. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2022, except that Sec. 8 (10 V.S.A. § 6086(a)(8)) shall take effect on September 1, 2024.