



NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD

10 Baldwin Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-3201

April 8, 2022

To: House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife
From: Sabina Haskell
Subject: Response from the Natural Resources Board to committee questions

Chair Sheldon and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.234 last week.

At the end of my remarks, I was asked to provide a clarification to my comments regarding an apparent “contradiction” in the Administration’s position between support for housing and development in designated areas and our opposition to the road rule and forest fragmentation sections of the bill.

Let me begin by saying these are not contradictions, but rather what we believe will achieve the goals. Expanded, full exemptions in designated areas are integral to driving housing and development to the areas we want it. Alternatively, the road rule and forest fragmentation criteria will not push development to downtowns.

It’s easy and tempting to think additional criteria will protect forests, but that’s not reality. The truth is, a majority of business owners, developers, homeowners, etc. will choose to build where there are fewer regulatory obstacles – and by exempting projects in our designated areas and growth centers we can promote development in the very places we want to see responsible growth.

Look no further than the road rule. All the road rule accomplished was “creative” thinking and workarounds. It encouraged developers to design around the triggers, like a 799-foot driveway instead of 800 feet. The road rule was repealed July 1, 2001, because it didn’t achieve the results the state hoped for.

We have an opportunity to make meaningful and comprehensive reform to modernize Act 250. There is clearly broad agreement on the need to better manage environmental and economic issues, including climate change, forest fragmentation, demographics, and economic inequity in different regions of the state. But as currently drafted, S.234 is not a bill the Administration can support. It fails to provide comprehensive policies that balance smart development with environmental protections.

Also attached is the list of wood products projects you requested. Please let me know if you would like additional information.

Sabina Haskell
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