

Town of Charleston

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ATTN:

Vermont House Committee on Environment – Chair Rep. Amy Sheldon and members
Vermont Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – Chair Sen. Anne Watson
Speaker of the House Rep. Jill Krowinski
House Majority Leader Rep. Lori Houghton
Governor Phil Scott
Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers
Sen. John Morley (Orleans)

April 14, 2026

We are writing to object to Act 181 for: (1) the process by which it was developed and considered; (2) the policies it advances; (3) the players imposing it on Vermont citizens; and (4) its real purpose. Act 59 lies at the heart of this and is included in our objections.

Process: Act 181 surfaced publicly over the past few months and has met with widespread dismay and anger. The scale and strength of this response are clear proof that claims of an open process with extensive public participation are false. From the start, Act 181 was crafted and advanced by an insular group of organizations and individuals who benefit from its policies or believe deeply in its purpose. This failure of genuine citizen engagement—whether by design or ineptitude—is a matter of public record. The same institutional players have dominated key decision-making moments.

Policies: For over fifty years, Act 250 has regulated building and development projects in Vermont with an environmental focus. Act 181 profoundly distorts Act 250 by creating broad state powers to control every acre in Vermont to limit or eliminate land use by the owner. It transforms Act 250 from a project-based environmental law into a land-based conservation law. A newly created Land Use Review Board sets rules that place all of Vermont's land into one of three Tiers, with each Tier dictating what landowners can or cannot do on their property. Town Plans are placed under command of this Land Board to turn them into rigid enforcement tools instead of genuine expressions of a town's hope for its future. The "Road Rule" limits the lengths of driveways and roads allowed on private property. Together, the Tier system and the Road Rule cluster new homes and commercial buildings tightly closer to the roadside—or eliminate them entirely.

Act.59: Quietly passed the year before Act 181, Act 59 requires that 30% of Vermont's land be placed into conservancy by 2030 and 50% by 2050. Land placed into conservancy is held by a legally binding contract that forbids any other use forever. A 2025 Vermont land inventory shows that 1.577 million acres—roughly 27 percent—are already permanently conserved. Under Act 59, half the land in Vermont is destined for conservancy by 2050. The land-use controls in Act 181 are the mechanism for reaching Act 59 conservancy goals.

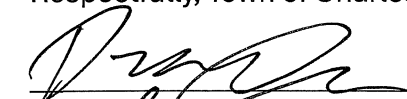
Players: Act 181 and Act 59 did not arise organically from Vermont citizens or the state legislature. Outside organizations developed them. Public records and reporting by Vermonter Alexsys Thompson and others document the players: the United Nations created the global “30X30 / 50X50” framework; The Nature Conservancy developed the science and the maps; lobbying and funding in the Vermont legislature came from the Conservation Law Foundation and the Sierra Club; the international consulting firm Future iQ provided statewide mapping technology; and numerous national and Vermont nonprofit conservation organizations played key roles in drafting, funding, facilitating, and benefiting from Acts 59 and 181. Vermont State Representative Amy Sheldon brought this into Vermont by sponsoring both Act 59 and Act 181, and driving them through the legislature over the Governor’s veto. Her training and professional work are in conservation and land-use planning rather than the deep experience of generational families who work Vermont’s farms, lands, and sugarhouses.

Purpose: The aim of Acts 181 and 59 is to herd rural Vermonters into crowded, tightly controlled population centers—the “sustainable cities” model promoted by global planners who have decided that humans are bad for the earth. The 50X50 goal can be achieved only by moving Vermonters off our land so it can be acquired for conservancy. Act 181 ignites this land grab by confining people and businesses to compact “walkable” village and urban centers, funneling scarce state funding primarily to those centers, lowering rural land values, raising the per-acre tax burden, and making it far more expensive for families, farmers, and others to subdivide land or expand businesses. The result is increased pressure to sell land outright to large, well-funded—often out-of-state—conservation groups.

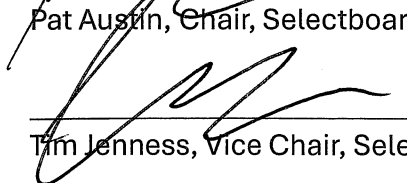
Some lawmakers already know what we write here is true. We send this letter so they know that we know. To lawmakers who do not yet know: open your eyes and see. Act 181 is unenforceable and will fail—just as the Road Rule failed when it was first tried under Act 250. Experts know the Tier 3 maps are environmentally indefensible. The outsized ambitions of Act 59 will cripple our state’s fragile economy by taking half our land out of productive use.

Repeal Act 181 and Act 59 now to avoid the trouble they will bring. This is not your land to play with. It is our land to nurture and protect for families to pass to their children and descendants. For many, it is their only real wealth. The next time you decide to make policy for our homes, forests, and fields, start by talking with us first.

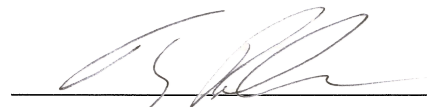
Respectfully, Town of Charleston



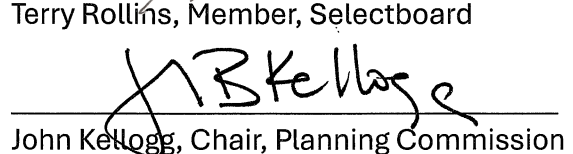
Pat Austin, Chair, Selectboard



Tim Jenness, Vice Chair, Selectboard



Terry Rollins, Member, Selectboard



John Kellogg, Chair, Planning Commission