

Vermont Planners Association (VPA)
2021 Legislative Report
January 11, 2021

Greetings!

As your new reporter on planning-related legislation in Vermont I am pleased to offer the first legislative report for the 2021 legislative season. Events of this this past week in Washington D.C. provided an alarming picture of how democratic systems can unravel. I appreciate now more than ever, the intimate and accessible ways that we as individuals and as an organization can engage to make a difference in crafting legislation to improve our communities and protect the environment here in Vermont.

2021 VPA Legislative Committee - A Team Approach

This year we have no one in the Legislative Liaison role - a position that [Alex Weinhagen](#) ably filled for the last several years, and [Sharon Murray](#) before that. Since the leg liaison position is a heavy lift for one volunteer, the VPA Legislative Committee will try a decentralized approach - at least for the time being. No major planning-related legislation is expected this year so we will proceed as follows:

- Alex and Sharon are helping to get the systems organized
- Other committee members will track and interact with specific legislative committees on legislation as it arises
- I will aggregate the information they produce for weekly reports to the VPA listserv as well as coordinate responses to legislative actions when needed

As we do each year, VPA has an intern, shared with VNRC, to be our eyes and ears in the statehouse. Daniel Jarrad who is pursuing a career in climate and energy policy will be a key member of VPA's legislative team in 2021.

Thanks to Sharon and Alex who provided the content for the following report and for continuing to share the legislative knowledge and experience with us.

First Week

The Legislature convened on January 6 with a new biennium, a new Speaker of the House, [Jill Krowinski](#) of Burlington, and a new Senate president pro tempore, Becca Balint of Windham. Governor Scott delivered his [inaugural address](#) on January 7, touching on topics and potential legislation of interest to VPA including Act 250 reform, economic development in rural VT, etc.

Legislative committees were reconstituted – most with the same committee chairs as last year. Key committees and chairpersons, and others members of note include:

- *House Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife* – Amy Sheldon, chairperson, and newly assigned to the committee, Seth Bongartz, with professional and legislative experience in planning.
- *House General, Housing, and Military Affairs* – Thomas Stevens, chairperson

- *Senate Natural Resources and Energy* – Christopher Bray, chairperson, with Richard Westman as vice chair.
- *Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs* – Michael Sirotkin, chairperson

This Week - January 11

Committee schedules are dominated by state agency overviews, joint fiscal office (JFO) briefings and updates, particularly in regards to state COVID-19 response. Most notably for VPA, a hearing on the technical correction to S.237, the 2020 housing legislation:

S. Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs – accessible via ZOOM

Thu 1/13 -- Affordable Housing--Revisiting S.237 Deed Restrictions Fix – VPA/Alex scheduled to testify along with Ellen Czajkowski/Legislative Counsel, Chris Cochran/DHCD, AJ LaRosa/MSK Attorneys. Follow up discussion on Friday. Last version of the proposed change we've seen was very targeted to reduce the scope of the prohibition on restrictive deeds/covenants so that it only deals with accessory dwelling units rather than any land development authorized in municipal land use regulations.

Other committee schedule items that may be interest to planners:

S. Finance

Fri 1/14 -- Broadband/Use of CRF funds (DPS), COVID 19 Response Telecommunications Plans (Matt Dunne, Rural Innovations)

S. Gov Ops

Tue 1/12 – Town Meeting Bill (under COVID) – VLCT, Sec of State, Kendall Smith/Governor's office

S. Transportation – Agency Overviews (W, Th, Fr)

Thu 1/14—Planning and Research (Joe Segale of VTrans)

Fri 1/15 – Local Road Program

'Tis the season of reports to the legislature from agencies and commissions. The following may be of interest:

- [Covid-19 Emergency Telecommunication Plan Report \(2020, Sec. 15 of H.966, 30 V.S.A. 202\(d\)\)](#), DPS
- [Stormwater Utility Report \(2016, Act 158, Sec. 34\)](#), VTRANS
- [Vermont Public Utility Commission's Report on Recommendations Regarding Revisions to 30 V.S.A. § 248a Pursuant to Act 25 \(2019/2020, Act 25 \(S.301\), Sec. 2\)](#), PUC
- [Vermont Housing & Conservation Board's Report \(2020, Act 137, Sec. 5\(b\)\)](#), VHCB
- [COVID Response Accelerated Broadband Connectivity Program, \(2020, Act 137, Sec. 13\(m\)\)](#), DPS
- [2020 Report on Federal Funding Related to Water Quality Improvement Efforts in Vermont \(10 V.S.A. § 1389a\(d\)\(3\)\)](#), ADMIN

- [Government Accountability Annual Report \(2 V.S.A. § 970\(g\)\)](#), GAC
- [2020 Outcomes Report \(3 V.S.A. §2311 \(c\)\)](#) ADMI

Please let me know if you have any questions, comments or suggestions:
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