

Omnibus Housing – Vermont Planners Association Testimony

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Regina Mahony, Legislative Committee Chairperson



Intro:

Vermont Planners Association is a non-profit advocacy and educational organization with nearly 200 planners and related professionals, including municipal and regional planners, state agency staff, and private land use consultants. Dedicated to the advancement of community planning in Vermont at the local, regional, and state levels.

Recommendations

1. Fund/implement water and sewer infrastructure in existing settlements and residential neighborhoods surrounding those settlements. Without this infrastructure, compact settlements, higher-density neighborhoods, and affordable homes are not possible.
2. Make the Neighborhood Development Area and other state designation programs more effective tools for incentivizing housing and supporting our state goal of compact settlements:
 - a. Make the program more accessible to rural communities as a catalyst for new home construction. While zoning should be in place before designation, water and sewer infrastructure might not be. Allow the designation first to incentivize housing developers to come to the table, and then water and sewer can be worked out collectively. Specifically, VPA supports the following bill provisions:
 - i. Removing the requirement that neighborhood development area be served by municipal sewer infrastructure (H.511)
 - ii. Removing the requirement for state water/wastewater permit where the municipality issues a permit (S.101)
 - b. Align state policies and programs to remove barriers to development within the state designations (for reference this is only 0.3% of the state's land area). Eliminating redundant development review, and the application and mitigation fees associated with those reviews, will lower the cost of housing development in areas that have been planned for, and recognized as, suitable locations for growth. Specifically, VPA supports the following bill provisions:
 - i. Evaluation of all the state designation programs (H.511)
 - ii. Extending Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit Program to NDAs along with an increase in the tax credit cap (S.101, as originally introduced)
 - iii. Joint application by more than one municipality (H.511)
 - iv. Inclusion of flood hazard and fluvial erosion areas in the NDA if preexisting development is there and the municipality has adopted flood hazard and river corridor regulations consistent with ANR rule both in the area and municipality wide (H.511)
 - v. Minimum residential densities of greater than or equal to 4 dwelling units per acre for proposed NDAs (H.511)
 - vi. Removal of priority housing project caps for Act 250 exemption in designated downtowns, new town centers, and NDAs (S.226)
3. Support municipalities in reforming development regulations to promote fair housing, create more diverse housing types and opportunities (dwelling unit size, single vs. multi-unit homes, rental and owner-occupied housing), and increase the supply of housing. Establish a study committee, comprised of planners, housing developers, housing

providers, equity professionals, and other key stakeholders to analyze and recommend changes to Chapter 117. In addition, VPA has the following recommendations:

- a. The Bylaw Modernization Grant program and associated program requirements as defined in S.101 is supported.
 - b. Site Plan and Conditional Uses shall not be considered abandoned or expired unless more than two years has passed since the permit was issued is supported (H.511)
 - c. ADU changes that were made last year were very helpful. Further improvement would include state permitting agencies treating a single-family home with an ADU as a single-family home, just as municipalities are required to do. For example, an existing 3-bedroom home on an approved 4-bedroom septic system, should be able to add a 1-bedroom ADU without a ANR water/wastewater permit. Currently ANR treats ADUs as a separate unit and therefore requires a permit. Municipal planners cite wastewater permitting as the biggest stumbling block to creating more ADUs – i.e., far more limiting than the owner occupancy requirement.
4. Continue to fund housing for those experiencing homelessness. Continue to fund supportive housing programs, including first time buyer education and support for historically disadvantaged groups.

VPA Contacts:

- Alex Weinhagen, President, aweinhagen@hinesburg.org, 802-777-3995
- Regina Mahony, Legislative Committee Chairperson, rmahony@ccrpcvt.org, 802-846-4490 x128

VPA is a non-profit advocacy and educational organization of nearly 200 planners and related professionals. We are dedicated to the advancement of community planning in Vermont at the local, regional, and state levels, to foster vibrant communities and a healthy environment.

Our membership is diverse, including municipal planners, regional planning commission staff, private planning consultants, state planning professionals, etc. We also work to coordinate VPA's advocacy and education with other groups involved in planning policy such as VAPDA (VT Association of Planning & Development Agencies), VLCT, and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.



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