

**Parcelization and Forest Fragmentation Roundtable  
Convened by the Vermont Natural Resources Council  
February 20, 2007  
Meeting Summary**

**Meeting Participants:** John Austin, Amos Baehr, Putnam Blodgett, Michelle Boomhower, Paul Costello, Cindy Cook (Facilitator), Jamey Fidel, Ehrhard Frost, Ken Gagnon, George Gay, Jens Hilke, Tom Kennedy, Leo Laferriere, Jane Lazorchak, Hugo Liepmann, Mark Lorenzo, John Meyer, David Paganelli, Ethan Parke, Carl Powden, John Roe, Lisa Sausville, Steve Sinclair, Eric Sorenson, Steve Springer, Peter Upton, George Weir and Jonathan Wood

**On-Going Roundtable Meetings**

Jamey welcomed everyone, and noted that interest in the Roundtable is steadily growing. The project's listserv is up to 110 members. VNRC plans to hold one more Roundtable meeting to work on the group's recommendations, and that after that, he would like to continue to meet regularly to continue discussions re forest policy, but probably on a scaled back basis w/o facilitation services. Participants agreed that there is a significant benefit to having a forum for continuing discussions about forest issues.

**Legislative Update**

Jamey noted that one big issue in the Legislature this year is property taxes and education funding. The House Ways and Means Committee recently took testimony about the Current Use Program. Jamey testified, and described the work of the Roundtable. Allison Clarkson is sponsoring a bill that would initiate a study of the Use Value Program. Jonathan commented that his department has not yet been consulted about the study, and he doesn't know what might be considered. Jamey commented that the Department of Forests and Parks clearly should be consulted regarding the study. He will circulate the draft legislation to the Roundtable when it becomes available.

Senator Lyons is also interested in sponsoring a bill to initiate a study on the Current Use Program. She sees a relationship to ongoing work in the Natural Resources Committee regarding working and rural lands as part of the Growth Centers legislation passed last year.

Steve noted that the Legislature is also considering a bill regarding the relationship of recreational use of land and the Current Use Program.

**Process for Developing Roundtable Recommendations**

Cindy noted that recommendations from the roundtable will be written so that the all perspectives will be included.

**Discussion regarding Draft Interim Report**

Jamey gave an overview of the draft Interim Report that he distributed at the outset of the meeting. The group agreed that the report should focus on fragmentation and parcelization related issues.

After discussion, the group agreed that rather than issue an interim report, participants will revise the draft language and strengthen the recommendations, using the four categories in the draft interim report. Participants agreed that the recommendations will be stronger in this format, and noted that it's always possible to issue a supplemental report.

The group agreed to a number of other changes to the draft including:

- ▶ Clearly stating the case increasing public awareness regarding the affects of parcelization and fragmentation,
- ▶ Clarifying the definitions on page 3,
- ▶ Writing to the reader who has little or no understanding of the issues, and giving examples, where appropriate,
- ▶ More forcefully stating the need to slow the pace of parcelization,
- ▶ Emphasizing the most important recommendations,
- ▶ Checking to ensure that the assertions that "one of the largest ..." on page 3 is accurate, and
- ▶ Create a distinctive cover.

Jamey will take the results of today's discussions, and work with the drafting committee to put together a revised draft by mid-March. He will then convene a Roundtable meeting in mid to late March to review and approve the report.

### **Discussion Regarding Recommendations**

It was agreed that the report will:

- ▶ Include text in the report describing the information that the Roundtable has reviewed, and
- ▶ Include a statement of the problem that each recommendation is meant to address.

### *Tax Policy*

Participants agreed to:

1. Include a strong endorsement for Use Value Appraisal Program (UVA) and its full funding, clarify what "full funding" means, and recommend better education to towns so that they understand that towns are fully reimbursed for the costs of the program,
2. Ensure that there are sufficient resources to administer the UVA, and consider ways to improve programmatic efficiency,
3. Conduct an independent study of the UVA that includes an assessment of the program's effectiveness w/ respect to it's original goals, an analysis of ways to expand enrollment, an analysis of ways to address the conservation of ecological systems and non-timber resources, and other recommendations for programmatic improvements.
4. Consider mechanisms for taxing land with conservation easements at a lower assessed rate,
5. Allocate revenues from the property transfer tax to their intended recipients according to the formula set in statute.

6. Track revenue from timber sales and ensure that appropriate land gains taxes are assessed,
7. Consider disincentives to parcelization including:
  - Footprint taxes and impact fees,
  - A second home and/or luxury home tax,
  - Strengthening of the Land Gains tax, and
  - Possibly increasing penalties for withdrawal from the UVA program

### Conservation Planning

The group agreed to recommend:

1. Integrating existing plans and information sources to address parcelization and fragmentation,
2. Better tracking at the state level of parcelization and fragmentation,
3. Prioritizing areas with forest and wildlife resource (forest blocks) to assist conservation and local planning efforts that have community support,
4. Encourage and support local and regional planning commissions in their work to prevent fragmentation,
5. Support education and awareness about the values that forests provide.
6. Assess policy gaps (e.g. Act 250), and
7. Integrate state and local planning processes.

### Conservation, Stewardship and Valuation of Ecosystem Services

The groups agreed:

- ▶ to combine the bullets regarding education and awareness.
- ▶ that homeowners should not be singled out for footprint fees. If these fees are adopted, they should apply to all development,
- ▶ to combine recommendations 1-5 and 7. These make sense as incentives, as opposed to disincentives.

### Long-Term Sustainability of the Forest Products Industry

The group agreed to adopt draft recommendations 1 through 6,

### **Next Meeting**

Jamey will circulate potential dates for the March meeting via e-mail.