

VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

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26 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602 (802) 223-2328 Editor, Arthur Williams

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY --- VERMONT COUNTRY ROADS, OR UNNEEDED AND COSTLY STATE HIGHWAYS?

Everyone of us knows of at least one Vermont town road in our area which, in the last few years, has been straightened, widened, and paved, its shade trees cut and its bordering stonewalls bulldozed under, even though no one in town wanted the costly "improvement," and even though no one could see any traffic which required the demolition of the old road. The fault doesn't lie with our selectmen or our road commissioners who are doing the best job they can under the circumstances. The fault is an outmoded State statute which allocates an amount of State revenue to each town which must not only be used exclusively for highways, but also can only be used to "improve" roads to the specific construction standards imposed by State Highway Department. There is minimal discussion of whether or not the town needs the 24 foot wide, bulldozed, straightened high speed highway which is the State minimum. The result is only human; the selectmen see money "lost" if they don't spend it, even though what really may be needed (a wider bridge, a little work on a bad curve, or paving only the bad section of a hill road), would cost only one-tenth of the State's required "improvement." So the town accepts the State's gift, but on the State's conditions, and yet another beautiful Vermont town road, with its trees and walls and traditions, disappears forever. And to add insult to injury, the "improvement" spends Vermont taxpayers' dollars where the extravagant expenditure of public funds wasn't needed and, often, wasn't wanted.

We think, particularly now when Vermont thrift may become more of a national necessity than a Vermont tradition, that it's time to stop this waste.

What will be most effective are facts, and each of you can help:

(1) Send us photographs, before and after, of any substantial town road improvements that, in your opinion, had a deteriorating impact on the character of your town; (2) with the photographs, send a clear description of where and when the construction took place; (3) if you can -- and this is important -- see if you can find in the Town Clerk's office or District Highway office, or both, what the actual, not projected, traffic was on the road; how much the improvement cost; and if an actual safety or traffic problem existed. Also research what specific portions of the road, rather than the reconstructed stretch, could have been improved to solve the problem.

VERMONT COUNTRY ROADS (con't)

With your help, we will be able to show all Vermonters what is happening to country roads at an expense the people of the State can ill-afford. With gasoline in short supply there will be even less reason than before to continue improving country roads in Vermont.

TENTH VNRC ANNUAL MEETING

On Saturday, December first, about one hundred VNRC members gathered in Montpelier to conduct the 1973 Annual Meeting. The purpose of the yearly meeting is to give all members the opportunity to review and discuss Council policies and programs and to elect members to the Board of Directors.

Chairman Jonathan Brownell and Executive Director Seward Weber reported on the Council's activities and financial status. A "1973 Projects Report," summarizing principal activities was distributed to all attending the meeting. Project areas include: natural areas; environmental education; visual integrity; eastern wilderness; land preservation; land use planning and Act 250; highway construction and planning; population policy; air quality; conservation commissions; and the practice of environmental law in Vermont. All VNRC members will be mailed an annual report in January with membership renewal notices.

The Council has been hard pressed to raise enough funds to meet the expenses of carrying on its 1973 programs. Possible solutions were presented at the meeting, but the membership did not want the Council to curtail its present level of activity. During 1973 a Finance Committee chaired by board member Hugo Meyer was formed and has initiated new fund raising programs. This committee must find new sources of financial support immediately if the Council's activities are not to be sharply reduced.

Re-elected to the Board of Directors as members-at-large were: Judith M. Buechner, Pawlet; Deane C. Davis, Montpelier; A. John Holden, Jr., East Montpelier; and Leonard Wilson, Waitsfield. Elected to fill at-large vacancies were: Catherine Beattie, Danville and John Shuell, Peru. Elected as representatives of member organizations were: David Marvin, Johnson, of the Green Mountain Profile Committee and Bruce Nye, Monkton, of the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers. Leaving the Board are Sylvia Ferry, Peg Garland and Edward Killian.

The meeting concluded with an after-luncheon speech by Martin L. Johnson, Secretary of Environmental Conservation, which will be reported upon in the January issue of the Report.

THE BOARD AND STAFF OF THE VNRC WISHES YOU A VERY
MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR