

Vermont Environmental Report

Open Letter on Pyramid Mall -- Bradley Explains Strategy for Act 250 Hearings

To Members and Friends of VNRC:

I wish to respond to people who have asked me what VNRC's strategy would be at the Act 250 hearings on the Pyramid Mall project.

In August, a coalition of environmental organizations under the name of "Citizens for Responsible Growth" requested formal party status in the Act 250 hearings on Pyramid Mall. The coalition included: the Williston Committee for Responsible Growth, the Vermont Public Interest Research Group, the Lake Champlain Committee, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and the VNRC.

The District Commission ruled against granting the coalition party status because State, regional and local governmental bodies were participating in the hearings. The Commission felt that these bodies were capable of representing the interests of all citizens, including the coalition.

The Commission did, however, leave open the possibility of the coalition's participation in the hearing process. Following the completion of formal testimony on each criterion of Act 250, the public will be permitted to address questions to the Commission. If it becomes apparent from the questions that further information is needed, the Commission has indicated that further witnesses could be called.

The strategy of the coalition, then, will be to attend all the hearings and develop questions as needed for the Commission. The coalition will retain several technical experts to evaluate the written documents and verbal testimony to determine whether the parties have presented all of the relevant data. If additional testimony appears to be appropriate, the coalition will offer this testimony either directly to the Commission or through one of the parties.

Thus far, the District Commission has run the hearings competently and fairly. It is now up to the parties, VNRC and the coalition to see that all the relevant information is developed for the Commission.

It is also up to us to strengthen the regional planning process in this State so that in the future Vermont can deal more effectively with developments of the size of Pyramid Mall as part of an overall growth strategy. Regional planning is a subject which must be addressed in the next session of the General Assembly.

More will be said about this subject in future issues of the VER.

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