



10/20/88

GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND SOLID WASTE: *TIME FOR ACTION!*

This fall's environmental agenda includes two familiar topics: solid waste management and growth control. *We need your help on these issues. Your letters and comments to agencies and legislators can be our most effective way of protecting Vermont's environment.*

Act 200 - The new "Growth Management" law

Background. Last fall, the Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future heard the concerns of thousands of Vermonters about our state's growth and quality of life. This spring, the Legislature passed Act 200 -- the "growth management" bill -- to provide policy and funding for a whole new planning process all over the state. Vermont is changing rapidly, Vermonters want action, and the Governor and Legislature responded quickly.

Act 200's basic premise is that towns should make the tough choices about where and how future development should occur. Until now, most of that decision-making has been project-specific, in reaction to Act 250 permit applications. After Act 200 takes effect next summer, we'll have better planning tools to guide and shape development in ways that protect some of our common values: the character of our villages, our "working rural landscape," our natural resources, with bountiful recreation opportunities and wildlife.

Some people say that the new law eliminates "local control." This simply isn't accurate. In most ways Act 200 enhances the power of towns over public and private development; the law itself contains a provision that planning should occur at the most local level appropriate for the level of decision. If a decision has only local impacts, the town should dictate the decision -- not the state or the region.

But the bill does provide towns with a way of addressing development that may have regional impacts. Many Vermonters have asked why one town should, under the guise of "local control," be permitted to encourage growth that creates the need for new schools, sewers, roads, and parks in *other* towns--towns which are not entitled to tax revenue from the development? Under the new law, regional planning commissions, made up of the towns within the regions, may decide not to accept town plans because of their regional impacts. Towns may appeal their regional planning commission's decisions to a new Council of Regional Commissions made up of town and state representatives. If a town plan ultimately isn't accepted, the town's zoning and planning powers aren't affected, but it loses rights to share in new state funds for planning, to levy impact fees for development, and to influence state regulatory and permitting actions via the plan.

What you can do. Vermonters need to work together to implement Act 200 as forcefully and fairly as possible. Later this fall VNRC will be starting up a new Implementation Center that will (in part) focus a lot of time and attention on the planning issues, rules, budgets, and town plans emerging from the Act 200 process. Here's how VNRC members can help ensure the viability and integrity of Act 200:

- * *Read materials describing the law and the new planning process.* VNRC can provide you with information -- we'll be mailing out a detailed newspaper on the topic in a few weeks. The Department of Housing and Community Affairs has also issued a "Citizen's Guide" to Act 200 (mailed out to VNRC members this summer and available from DHCA at 1-800-622-4553).
- * *Help your town begin to focus on the planning process.* You can contact your selectmen, planning commissioners, and town planners to express your interest in the Act 200 process. What issues matter most to you? Open space? Water quality? Agricultural and forestry land uses? Wildlife habitat protection? Industrial uses? Affordable housing?

* *Speak up to defend Act 200.* If you support protecting our Vermont lifestyle and planning for development, let your leaders know -- in the newspapers, at the barbershop, in line at the grocery store. Contact VNRC if you want to be involved in an Act 200 network for information about the planning process and the law.

* *Oppose changes to the original bill unless they're clearly needed.* Right now a lot of people are calling for changes in Act 200. It's clear that many of these people haven't read the legislation or don't understand it. So far, VNRC doesn't see any major flaws in the Act 200 process that need correction. We are, however, concerned that local towns and governments have adequate funding for a good planning process.

Solid Waste

Background. Solid waste management in Vermont seems expensive and complicated, but that's partly because we've ignored the problem for so long. Now, with a new law on the books and agency staff to implement it, we can keep the environment clean and save costs over future years. The Agency of Natural Resources is about to issue the second draft of a state-wide solid waste plan that VNRC members will definitely be interested in.

The plan responds to a 1987 law that has a far-sighted view of solid waste management. The law emphasizes reducing the amount of solid waste we generate and recycling whenever we can. It also calls for comprehensive planning criteria that will direct facility siting. Unfortunately, the first draft plan issued last spring didn't seem to reflect these statutory directives (as you have probably read in the Summer '88 Vermont Environmental Report).

Now things look better. We expect the new and improved plan to be released very soon, with a month-long public comment period. After it's finalized the plan will go before the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules, which will decide if the plan conforms to the law. So far the Committee hasn't been very happy with the Agency's solid waste rules, but this time we hope they'll have reason to react differently.

What you can do. Now that we're about to see the last draft of the solid waste plan, here's how you can help get it into effect quickly.

- * *Learn what's in the plan.* Call VNRC if you want to know our comments on the second draft. The Agency of Natural Resources should send you a copy of the plan on request (Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation, Solid Waste Plan, 103 S. Main St., Waterbury, Vt. 05676).
- * *Support the parts of the plan that you like.* We expect to support the plan's new (and appropriate!) emphasis on waste reduction and recycling. We also like the inclusion of physical siting criteria to protect water supplies and other resource values.
- * *Get involved wherever you can.* Attend workshops or public hearings on the plan, or send a letter with your comments to the Agency (address above).
- * *Most importantly, tell your legislators that you support the plan and strong solid waste management controls!* Sometime after mid-November, contact the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (c/o Legislative Council, State House, Montpelier, VT 05602) to express your support for the solid waste plan and the specific points mentioned above. Make sure your legislators and candidates are aware of your position.

PLEASE CALL VNRC (223-2328) IF YOU HAVE COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS ON THESE ISSUES. ALSO PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND LOCAL VNRC CONSERVATION WORKSHOPS NEAR YOU THIS FALL AND WINTER -- YOU'LL HEAR MORE FROM US ON THIS SOON!

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