

Region Voices Support for Housing

Central Vermonters are at the forefront in the debate over “New Neighborhoods” legislation. Participants in the Central Vermont Regional Collaborative and Housing Partnership have strongly supported the legislation, and area legislators hold key positions on vital House committees.

Rep. Robert Dostis chairs the House Natural Resources committee. **Rep. Tony Klein** serves on the committee as well.

Rep. Leo Valliere is vice chair of the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs. Both committees are taking testimony.

New Neighborhoods (H.299 redraft) would provide (1) incentives to developers - including Act 250 exemption - to create moderately priced housing on municipal sewer, and (2) incentives to municipalities hosting this housing, providing (3) the housing met identified community needs, in a location designated by the town, adjacent to an existing neighborhood for similar or more dense housing.



Testifying to House General committee...

Nancy Zorn of Green Mountain United Way addressed the breath of interest, concern, and impact of housing in Central Vermont. She stressed the number of people who attended the regional Housing Summit and got personally involved during the past year.

Rick DeWolfe of DeWolfe Engineering cited problems with employees finding housing - even with very good paying jobs. Rick also noted that he has been a consultant on several substantial housing projects all over the state. He said that after arduous local permit hearings, the Act 250 review offered / raised nothing new, but still took weeks of preparation and delayed the start of construction.

Sarah Carpenter (Vermont Housing & Finance Agency) testified eloquently as well.

Although John Fairbanks has been our local participant, Sarah addressed the committee. She was extremely supportive of mixed housing. (Some legislators would prefer to make the bill for low-moderate, subsidized housing only.)

Kathy Simankas (VSECU), **Neal Meier** (Union Institute) and **Dona Bate** (dbate speaking) observed and supported.

Two Montpelier residents, and VNRC, CLF representatives provided opposition testimony.

Eric Seidel of NECI was unable to attend, but wrote, in part, “I am responsible, and have been for 23 years, for supplying good quality, affordable housing for the 300 New England Culinary Institute students we house every year. From the perspective of quality and affordability, this mission has

become more and more challenging over the years. High housing costs get reflected in the tuition our students must pay for their education. That tuition must be competitive with other technical college programs across the country in order for NECI to survive.”

Appraiser **Jeff Kantor** who works with nonprofit housing providers wrote “I understand that some may chaff at not requiring Act 250 oversight as allowed under this bill. I can tell you from my experience that the Act 250 process is a redundant, costly addition to these projects. The Act 250 criteria are covered in detail by the local (zoning or DRB) permitting process; ANR permits; and Energy Efficiency regulations.”

The Regional Planning Commission added “Our Region, like most of Vermont is struggling to address both an affordable housing shortage and dissolution of our traditional settlement patterns. Any legislation that can address both of these issues simultaneously, as these bills are intended to do, is welcome indeed.”

The redraft of H.299 and other information is posted at: www.weneedhousing.com.