

Smart Growth and Housing Legislation

Background:

Vermont needs more housing, especially housing that is affordable to working people. A key question is where will all this housing be built? One thing that makes Vermont special is our strong sense of community. Another is our state's historic landscape of compact cities and villages surrounded by working farms and forests. Unfortunately, this landscape is being incrementally lost to a pattern of unplanned, inefficient development. The result is that our farms, forests and open spaces are being replaced by strip malls and residential subdivisions scattered far outside of our traditional centers.

In recent years, Vermont lawmakers have enacted a number of important land use and development reforms that aim to encourage development in our town centers.

The 2008 Legislature is considering legislation that would create incentives for new housing. The main incentive that seems to be on the table is an easing of the state's development permit laws, Act 250, in specific targeted areas. At the same time, lawmakers are considering proposals to update parts of Act 250 to ensure they reflect modern, smart growth principles.

Talking Points

- 1) Housing incentives should reinforce a commitment to the principles of smart growth set forth in the Growth Center law.
- 2) The bill should build on the successful Downtown, Village Center and Growth Centers Program by supporting Vermont Neighborhoods in identified smart growth locations;
- 3) Easing the permit costs for affordable housing should be balanced with, and respect, our common interest in a healthy environment.

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