

SUMMARY OF TOWN PLAN PUBLIC FORUM – 3/25/2003 **“HINESBURG’S RURAL AREAS”**

The public forum was held at Hinesburg Town Hall from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. on March 25, 2003. The forum began with desserts and drinks and circulation among exhibits – Hinesburg Town Survey, Vermont Land Trust, forest resources, water resources, etc. Approximately 80 Hinesburg residents and other interested parties were in attendance.

Jean Isham, Planning Commission Chair, and Alex Weinhagen, Town Planner, opened the public forum at 7:20 p.m. Alex Weinhagen provided introductions for each of four speakers on rural resource topics. The speakers included:

- Marty Illick, Lewis Creek Association – Wildlife Resources
- Mike Kline and Cathy Kashanski, VT ANR – Water Resources (presented in a panel format, moderated by Andrea Morgante)
- Robert Turner, Forestry/Natural Resources Consultant – Forest Resources
- Steve Kerr, VT Commissioner of Agriculture – Agricultural Resources

The following points were some of those made during the question and answer period that followed each of the four presentations:

Wildlife Resources

- People who are or who could be involved in an inventory of wildlife and habitat – hunters, anglers, trackers.
- Importance of “patch sizes” for wildlife – cover, food, reproduction, etc.
- Patch sizes vary according to different kinds of species; there also are differences in the kinds of uses that are compatible with habitat patches.
- Much habitat is in private ownership. First steps in encouraging landowners to conserve wildlife habitat are providing information and defining goals.
- Hinesburg’s current pattern of development is unique in that access to land for traditional uses.

Water Resources

- Beaver dams create issues and opportunities in river management. Beavers actually can benefit the river system by helping retain sediments. Some places benefit from leaving beavers where they are and making accommodations downstream. However, some places need intensive management of beavers.
- Maintenance of human-built dams poses similar concerns.
- Should we get rivers, such as the LaPlatte, back to meandering channels? The answer is site-specific. Each location needs a site-benefit analysis.
- Do we have maps old enough to see where river/stream channels used to be? We can extrapolate from topographic features that have remained constant.
- Buffers can address a number of issues – wildlife corridors, allowance for stream movement, etc. 300’ on either side is a place to start, at least for larger streams/rivers. Large buffers are good for smaller streams, too; but 100’ is probably adequate as an arbitrary distance. Buffer areas also may vary due to topography and other factors. Currently, a fixed buffer is arbitrary; but better data would be needed for more specific buffer needs.

Forest Resources

- Access to forest land is a big constraint to utilization of productive forest land. Poorly planned development can cut off access.

Agricultural Resources

- The speaker described favorable economic conditions associated with large farms.
- Are there ecological issues that large farms bring to a community? The speaker responded that all such issues can be addressed. For example, the concentration of livestock does pose problems, but the ability to manage these concerns is better now due to technological advances. That technology is affordable and is performance-based.
- How can we better connect the community to farms – both large and small? First, buy locally. Second, address infrastructure concerns. Farms need adequate roads and bridges. Zoning should allow signs along roads for smaller operations.

The public forum ended at 9:15 p.m. Moderator David Spitz thanked all participants and asked people to come to the final two public forums:

- Managing Growth and Development – April 8th, Community Alliance Church
- Bringing It All Together – April 29th, Community Alliance Church

This forum was made possible by funding from a Municipal Planning Grant awarded by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.