

Your land, your voice

by Michelle Massa

Remember the Act 181 debate from this spring? The legislature walked back the most egregious parts (road rule and tier 3) — but not the part requiring every regional planning commission to redraw its land use maps by the end of 2026. That process is happening right now.

The Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission has released a 210-page draft plan assigning new Future Land Use categories to land across all 30 towns in its region. One public information session remains — Thursday, July 23 at 6 p.m., Woodstock Town Hall — followed by four formal public hearings: July 28 in Bethel, July 29 in Bradford, July 30 in White River Junction, and July 31 in Woodstock.

The public comment deadline was extended from Aug. 1 to Aug. 10, but the overall timeline is still far more compressed than how other regional commissions rolled out their process. The full draft plan is at trorc.org/regional-chapters-draft.

As chair of the Vershire Planning Commission, I've spent weeks poring over this process and the particulars of the plan. The concern that should get

everyone's attention is overreach: the draft uses "shall" and "must" 273 times in its rural policy sections. That's mandatory, centralized planning language imposed at the regional level — and it directly undermines the local control Vermonters expect over their own land.

Act 181 does not require this mandatory language; only TRORC included this as mandatory, as opposed to offering guidance, which is what they are statutorily allowed to do. It is a choice TRORC made. On process: what other Vermont regional commissions rolled out over many months, with iterative drafts shaped by genuine public input and individual town meetings, TRORC compressed into a few weeks in the middle of summer.

At the Fairlee information session last week, those concerns were raised directly, and they were dismissed. The lack of accountability in that room was staggering. I heard the same was true of the Randolph info session.

Here's what you can do right now. Contact your selectboard and planning commission members: find out if this is even on their radar — and if not, it needs

to be. This plan will govern your community for the next 20 years. Your selectboard appointed a TRORC commissioner (though a few seats are vacant), and that person votes yes or no on whether this plan advances to state review. It needs a 60% supermajority to pass, and that's a leverage point. Send your officials a note or give a call and ask where they stand.

Attend the July 23 information session at Woodstock Town Hall and/or one of the formal hearings July 28–31 in Bethel, Bradford, White River Junction, and Woodstock — all at 6 p.m.

Send written comments to both TRORC at regionalplan@trorc.org and to the Land Use Review Board — the state body that gives final approval — at Act250.Board@vermont.gov. The deadline is Aug. 10.

The phrase "keep it local" brings on a whole new meaning in this context.

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