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From: Tom Reed <tom@desirepath.com>
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Bradford Public Hearing Comment, 7/29/26

Tom Reed, Corinth

"I have submitted more detailed written comments on the draft Plan already, so I won't repeat those tonight. Instead, I'd like to offer a broader observation that grew out of reading the Plan and listening to these public discussions.

I want to stipulate that I don't doubt the good intentions and hard work behind this Plan. We all value Vermont's landscape, and we all want to see it protected. My concern is that good intentions can still produce unintended consequences if they're calibrated to the wrong conditions.

And as I've reflected on the Plan, the TRORC's charter, and on these conversations, I keep coming back to one question: **What is Three Rivers' theory of rural prosperity?**

Planning is not just about preventing undesirable outcomes. It should also help create desirable ones.

Vermont's landscape is not static. It has been, and continues to be, created by thousands of individual decisions made by farmers, foresters, landowners, small businesses, and rural communities over generations. Those Farmers, foresters, and landowners need economic conditions where they can thrive to continue that stewardship.

Sure, the viewsheds that people come to Vermont to experience require the cows and the trees. But the cows and the trees also require the farmer, the veterinarian, the equipment dealer, the feed supplier, the mechanic, the school, the local businesses, and ultimately a viable community where the next generation can imagine building a life of its own (instead of feeling like the need to move to North Carolina).

In other words, a working landscape worthy of protection is the product of a working

economy created by rural communities that are equally worthy of protection.

That's why I hope this Plan will place equal emphasis on sustaining the communities that created the landscape you're trying to conserve.

I also hope you'll think about the idea of **geographic fairness**.

Different parts of Vermont face different dominant risks. A planning approach that makes perfect sense in places with thriving economies that are experiencing intense development pressure is probably not the right fit for communities where the larger challenge is economic stagnation, shrinking schools, aging populations, and the gradual loss of younger families.

To me, geographic equity means recognizing those different realities and calibrating policy accordingly.

So, as you continue refining this Plan, I hope you'll ask one additional question of every major recommendation:

Will this make it more likely that someone can continue to build a life in rural Vermont?

Because if the answer is no, this plan may temporarily protect the rural Vermont landscape while gradually losing the very communities that created and sustain it.

Thank you again for your time and for the good work you're doing."

Tom

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