

Better(not bigger)Vermont



<https://www.betternotbiggervt.org/>

John Bossange, Better(not bigger)Vermont's president, and two members of BnbVT's Board - Jerry Ward and Wolfgang Schneider - wrote an excellent commentary questioning the claims being made by the Vermont Futures Project, Let's Build Homes, and other pro-excessive-growth activists. It was published by *The White River Herald*

(<https://www.ourherald.com/pageview/viewer/2025-12-04#page=11>, page B2 "Shifting the focus on the 'Housing Crisis'") and The Charlotte News

(<https://www.charlottenewsvt.org/2025/12/11/letters-to-the-editor-dec-11/>). Their commentary was also sent to VT Digger, but they didn't publish it. We are reproducing it below.

We wish you all a wonderful Holiday Season!

HIJACKING THE ABUNDANCE MYTH

The panic stirred up by some of our leaders regarding the so-called “housing crisis” seems to be based in part on hijacking the thesis in Ezra Klein’s book, “Abundance”.

Recent commentaries published in VT Digger by Julie Moore, Kerrick Johnson, and Miro Weinberger try to assert that we “need” to build 40,000 new homes within the next four years. Even Governor Scott has issued a controversial executive order to boost housing production. Adding to this rush to grow, the Vermont Futures Project has proposed increasing the Vermont population to 802,000. We feel that these initiatives, when combined, are leading us down a path toward growth that will not serve us well.

Growth will inevitably continue in Vermont, but is growth something we want to promote or try to manage? Healthy growth occurs naturally when we foster the conditions that support growth. It is unnecessary and irresponsible to start by building 40,000 new homes by 2030, and we certainly don’t need to increase our population by 150,000 within the decade, especially in Chittenden County, as promoted by the Vermont Futures Project.

(<https://vtdigger.org/2023/04/08/john-bossange-do-we-really-need-40000-new-homes-by-2030/>)

We have no argument with those who believe Vermont desperately needs more affordable apartments, duplexes, multi-family homes, condominiums, and single-family starter homes. But that is not what has been happening for the last 20 years in Chittenden County, and that’s not what the housing industry is proposing for the future. As we know, there are numerous negative impacts from short-sighted, unsustainable, sprawling growth on municipal services, and it’s the

taxpayers who ultimately bear the burden from expensive, market-driven development projects.

https://www.vtcng.com/otherpapersbvt/opinion/opinion_columns/more-housing-will-mean-higher-taxes-in-south-burlington/article_1ccffcf0-b8b3-11ef-8089-ebb8f83c210a.html

The most disappointing and glaring omission in the abundance discussion is simply defining abundance--- of what? Klein focuses on more energy and less regulation to promote economic development while those advocates in Vermont are focusing on housing. But what happens if we unfetter the constraints imposed by energy, natural resources, and Vermont's strong environmental regulations, and we build those new homes?

Do we not then need an abundance of more clean water, agricultural land to produce more food, more storm, sewer, and water treatment systems, more waste and recycle facilities, more municipal personnel in our towns and village offices, teachers for the new children, police, fire responders, and maintenance workers for our roads and parklands, to mention just a few impacts of more energy, housing, and people? Abundance leads to a need for more abundance, and that has not been adequately addressed by Klein or the proponents of the "Abundance agenda" in Vermont. That's the major failing of the Abundance agenda.

<https://vtdigger.org/2024/07/19/john-bossange-the-myth-of-sustainable-economic-growth/>

As a nation, we are conflicted about growth and yet addicted to it. Our existential challenge is to accept a vision of growth within our limited financial capacity and shrinking natural resources. Short-sighted,

unsustainable growth is enticing because of the apparent short-term improvements to our standard of living. However, the long-term impacts can bring irreparable damage to what feels like home. Increasingly, we are dealing with the consequences of negative impacts and not planning accordingly for sustainable growth.

Struggling to find an affordable place to live, to pay for all the impacts resulting from an abundance of excessive growth, is the unavoidable but unaddressed elephant in the room. So far, none of the individuals mentioned at the beginning of this commentary or any representative from the organizations they represent, have addressed this issue. Ezra Klein would be aghast with this, and how his abundance agenda is being exploited in Vermont.

Here in Vermont, the home affordability crisis is exacerbated by the growing capture of the housing market by large equity firms and out-of-state investors who purchase single-family homes and rental properties, reducing homeownership opportunities and driving up the cost of rents and housing prices. For those abundance advocates concerned with inhibitors of growth, it is large corporations with lobbying teams that deserve everyone's greater scrutiny, not necessarily state or local regulations enforced by our small town and villages.

<https://vtdigger.org/2025/03/21/john-bossange-solutions-for-the-housing-shortage/>

So, when the Secretary, Commissioner, Executive Chair, and the Governor talk about “reducing costs,” or about opponents “preserving the existing regulatory barriers,” or write “we need affordable housing,” or that “Vermont needs an abundance agenda,”

or that environmentalists are “creating political theater,” or that “too many families remain priced out of the communities where they grew up” keep in mind the exploitation of the Abundance agenda, that unspoken elephant in the room. Abundance inevitably leads to a need for more services and natural resources. For private investors, corporations and out-of-state profiteers, that’s not their concern. Vermont’s proposed Abundance agenda is a gold mine for them, unattainable for most struggling Vermonters.

Abundance needs to be for everyone, not just for those who will destroy our environment, deplete our natural resources, and make excessive profits. If it does not, Abundance, now defined by influential leaders in Vermont, will remain a hijacked myth and a tool for the rich to get richer.

Jerry Ward lives in Randolph and is a retired physician

John Bossange lives in South Burlington and is a retired school principal.

Wolfger Schneider is a retired electrical systems engineer who lives in Charlotte.

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But we still have expenses such as our website and special projects.

We very much appreciate your donation, which can be mailed to us at...

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