

# *February* **Newsletter**

## **Better(not bigger)Vermont**



## ***Tim Newcomb - Better(not bigger)Vermont's Award Winner for 2023***

Through his cartoons, Tim Newcomb has accomplished so much to remind the public and policy/opinion makers about the threats imposed by overpopulation. In great appreciation for his contributions, Tim was chosen as Better(not bigger)Vermont's first recipient of our Award in 2023. Congratulations Tim!



## ***Invitation for new Board Members***

Better(not bigger)Vermont would appreciate hearing from candidates for new Directors. If you want to nominate a new candidate (including yourself), please email us at [betternotbiggervt@gmail.com](mailto:betternotbiggervt@gmail.com)!

## ***Goings-on in the VT Legislature***

by Bob Fireovid, Executive Director

The pro-growth advocates are very active in Montpelier now that the 2023 session of the Vermont Legislature has begun. This time, these special interests are exploiting Vermont's affordable housing crisis to force high-density housing onto rural towns. However, their Build!-Build!-Build!-In-Rural-Towns craze is not an acceptable long-term solution to affordable housing. And it aims to liquidate much of what makes Vermont's rural towns unique, special, healthy, and beloved by the people who live there. Things like peace and quiet, access to natural ("unimproved" in development parlance) woods, streams, or lakes just a short walk from one's home, views of the Milky Way unblocked by light pollution, no traffic congestion, and room for home vegetable gardens and chicken coops.

Significant increases in the number of housing units in rural towns where there are few jobs and no public transportation will result in increased GHG emissions because the new residents will have to commute to distant employment. Alternatively, increasing the number of residents will require more local employers, that then require... more residents, so that ultimately, the small town is no more.

But this destruction of Vermont values and beauty is totally unnecessary. There are much better approaches for increasing the supply of affordable housing. For instance, where excess septic capacity exists, accessory dwelling units are already allowed. H.68 includes a reasonable mandate that duplexes can be built anywhere where a single-family home is allowed.

Further, many of the residential units already in Vermont are second homes, and the State can leverage this market to help low- and moderate-income families purchase homes in localities where high-density housing makes sense. Rep. Emilie Kornheiser said that the committee she co-chairs would examine how Vermont's second homes, which often sit vacant for entire seasons, might be taxed at a higher rate. The additional revenues collected from higher taxes levied on second homes can then be used to subsidize home purchases by first-time, low- and moderate-income homeowners and to help alleviate the homeless problem, created in part by rising real estate values.

However, using a flawed tops-down, one-size-fits-all assumption, bill [H.68](#) would REQUIRE (1) fourplexes, (2) five or more dwelling units per acre, and (3) buildings that are an additional story higher be allowed in neighborhoods served by public water and sewer. Although H.68 includes a reasonable mandate that duplexes can be built anywhere where a single-family home is allowed, it seems that this bill was written by developers for them to hijack a great deal of control over local zoning. H.68 is currently being considered by the [House Committee on Environment and Energy](#). Please communicate your thoughts about H.68 to Committee members (we can share an email that our Executive Director sent them).

It gets worse. The State-funded pro-development planning commissions are attacking direct democracy in Vermont. On Feb 1<sup>st</sup> the Executive Director for both the Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission encouraged the [Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs](#) to amend its Omnibus Housing Bill (DR 23-0091) to...

“...remove the ability to vote by Australian ballot in rural towns, and increase the percentage of voters needed to petition a vote after adoption to 10%.”

To explain, Vermont law currently gives voters in rural towns where voting for town meetings is done by Australian ballot the legal right to vote on changes in both zoning regulations and new town plans. But now

quasi-State agencies, which are supposed to help ensure that local zoning regulations reflect the vision of the citizens in the municipality, want to block citizen input into the development of those regulations. Please let Committee members know your thoughts about this recommendation (we can share an email that our Executive Director sent them).

Better(not bigger)Vermont works to improve the lives and natural surroundings of present and future Vermonters. Please support our efforts by making a donation and/or forwarding this newsletter to others.

**Thank you!**

p.s., Please forward this newsletter to others