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Better(not bigger)Vermont



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Why is Vermont losing population?

This following essay proposes a reasonable explanation for why Vermont's population continues to decline. FYI, Digger received this piece on February 9th but hasn't even acknowledged receipt.

POPULATION DECLINE AND THE VERMONT WEATHER

Once again, Vermont's population has remained relatively flat. In fact, this past year, according to a recently published article in VTDigger, it actually declined a bit. We've had a steady population of around 650,000 residents for years now. And if you have lived here for a while, you also know how the winter weather affects those of us who live here all year.

No matter the size of a town, snow totals, wind chills, the expense of clothing, heating, food and gas, car corrosion, snow removal, and just getting around have made living in the North harsh and expensive. Sustaining essential services like snow plowing and routine infrastructure and road maintenance are reflected in higher taxes.

Vermonters like to talk about the weather, and rightfully so. It can be cold, windy, and cloudy, and we pride ourselves in making it through another season. We live for the quiet, peaceful serenity, outdoor sports, and beauty of the wintry landscape. However, for some people who live to the south of us Vermont's winters are harsh and last too long. For them, Vermont is a beautiful place to visit or own a second vacation home, and that's it.

Historically, there was never a great migration from the South. We had some early farming immigration from Quebec lately followed by many young people (Yippies?) escaping the madness of the Vietnam War period as well as asylum seekers from overseas. There was the Covid bubble but it has seemed to dissipate as the reality of our weather and economics was experienced.

There is no question our climate is a factor keeping Vermont's population relatively flat; we are not Florida. Are there other

factors? Sure. The high cost of living, expensive and limited housing, and taxes are important examples.

Will we eventually have climate refugees escaping the massive heat domes and droughts occurring in the South? Or will some states become too politically intolerant and restrictive, causing an increase in people of all ages escaping to a more inclusive and friendly Vermont? Will there be immigrant refugees fleeing from somewhere looking to settle in the North? Who knows? Time will be our judge and patience should be our guide.

I believe our population will grow more naturally and slowly over time. But we need to be patient and proceed with caution to be well prepared to manage the environmental and municipal impacts of a growing population. However, the current business community's emphasis on "If you build it they will come" may just back fire as the baby boom bubble dissipates with time.

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Charlotte, VT

[Some legislators want to give your town's land to the homeless](#)

Just when you thought that Montpelier surely can't get any crazier, a bill introduced in the legislature - [H.885](#) - would force towns to let homeless people live on town property. (Follow the link for this bill to see which legislators co-sponsored it.)

Fortunately, it doesn't look like this bill will make it off the wall of the House Committee on Human Services.

Update on Act 250 discussions in the legislature

Act 181 (2024) created four "tiers" to identify lands that are subject to Act 250 requirements, and lands that may not be subject to Act 250. For instance, Act 181 allows compact housing developments in Tier 1A and Tier 1B areas; and projects of 50 housing units (or less) on 10 acres (or less) in Tier 1B areas are exempt from Act 250 review.

Some estimate that two to three percent of the state could be eligible for designation as Tier 1B, compared with only about 0.3 percent for legacy downtowns and villages. Act 181 requires that towns must opt-into designating Tier 1B areas, and data indicate that most towns which could opt-in for Tier 1B designations have done so.

But some legislators can't stand it that some towns don't want to opt-in, so the legislature is considering amending Act 181 to allow regional planning commissions to designate Tier 1B areas and to require that any municipality which does not want a particular Tier 1B designation must actively opt-out of that designation. These deliberations are occurring in the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy (SNRE) and are

identified on its agenda as “S.325” or “Act 181.” You might want to let SNRE members know that you don’t want towns to be automatically assigned Tier 1B areas.

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