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Better(not bigger)Vermont



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

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How a Number Becomes Policy: The Circular Logic Behind Vermont's Housing Targets

“Alexsys knocked it out of the park again.” - Jerry Ward, a Better(not bigger)VT Board Member...

<https://alexsys.substack.com/p/how-a-number-becomes-policy-the-circular>

Ugly housing developments

HOUSING GROWTH: VERMONTERS DESERVE BETTER by John Bossange

No one would deny that we have a shortage of lower and moderately priced housing available for hard working Vermonters. Sadly, what is being constructed now is mostly for wealthy second home and out-of-state buyers. Worse, the new housing is often built in the wrong location and is either an unsightly scar on the natural landscape or a depressing looking blight along a major road, in a commercial development, or in a village center.

Here's a glimpse of new housing on a hillside off Kennedy Dr. in South Burlington on what was once a wooded forest. The land was first scraped clean of all natural ground cover and trees removed to build this apartment complex.



Vermonters need a place to live, but watching the developers cut down every tree and bush in sight and then carved a road up the hill without making an attempt to preserve the old growth forest that was there is disheartening. This type of development exemplified putting the profit for investors and developers before aesthetes or care for the environment. It will take decades before young saplings take root and grow tall enough to replace what nature created on this hillside long before most of these renters were born.

One can only wonder how renters feel living on this stark landscape? Anyone who now sees this building from the roadside below must also wonder if this is the future look of Vermont's landscape around newer housing. Is this what people think will attract younger workers and families to move to Vermont? Will the destruction of other beautiful hillsides and

natural and open spaces be what we see throughout Vermont twenty years from now? Who will move here to live in that type of housing? For those already living here, would they prefer to be somewhere else?

Fortunately, there are a few properly sited, newer housing developments in village, town and city centers, some close to transportation networks, and most within walking distance to stores and other municipal services. That's a step in the right direction and prevents more sprawling, car-centric developments.

But even when the issue is not the location, the concern remains the design and overall appearance of new housing. Again, of course, people need a place to call home. That's understood. But the gray, old Soviet-style, eastern-European looking buildings seen below in the Market St. complex in South Burlington are depressing to look at. With so little character, one must wonder how residents feel driving into their complex, and calling it their home. Vermonters deserve so much better than this box design with little style or character.



Does the cost of materials and labor justify building this type of housing? That's what we have been told. I'd like to see the financial statements from developers showing all their expenses. Just how much profit or loss was there when building these homes for hard working Vermonters?

Will the next generation of Vermonters find the conveniences of location enticing enough to accept the look of such stark buildings surrounded by so much asphalt, with so little vegetation and open green spaces? Are these the types of buildings we are willing to live with for the next twenty to thirty years? If this is our future landscape, then we've lost our opportunity to build appropriately and preserve our historic and much valued natural landscape.

Even the new single-family homes, as important as they are for families, have been built on open fields and old forests, miles from work locations, schools, stores, libraries, and other essential quality-of-life services. Most are equally stark looking with few windows, lacking individual character and any signs of original trees or natural greenery. Given the excessive housing prices to rent or buy, again Vermonters deserve more, and are forced to consider a house like this one, recently built this past winter in the South Village complex off Spear St. in South Burlington.



Can we build better? We have and still can. Below is an example of housing a development built on Farrell St. that has far more style and character than what we are seeing today. Notice how these units are set back from the road and create a much more open feel for the community and its residents.



If we are going to build more new homes, we must not allow developers to permanently scar our landscape by clear cutting the natural growth damaging the natural environment, and placing unsightly housing with drab, uncreative designs on those spaces. Regardless of the location, style or character of any new project, the critical question about any environmental degradation must be an essential discussion for any proposed housing development.

Even when constructing more affordable and simpler single-family homes, the original landscape must be preserved as much as possible, as illustrated in this home nearby in Chittenden County. Surrounded by trees and natural shrubbery, the lack of design and style is not as stark looking because the

home is not surrounded or squeezed next to other homes back to back on cleared land. This is a good example of the natural environment creating a setting that offsets “cookie cutter” development, even though there are many other homes clustered in the same lot.



A community also needs to require developers to pay for upgraded infrastructure to accommodate more fresh water, new storm water and waste treatment plants, roads carrying more traffic, more school classrooms and teachers, more man-made recreational options, even essential police and fire safety coverage, and not allow developers to saddle long-standing residents with the increasing costs for these public services through complex tax schemes, like TIFs and CHIPs.

These questions about the economic sustainability must be asked by town and village Select Boards, City Councils, DRB Committees, Planning Commissions, and interested residents before any building permits are approved.

Addressing these topics is not more “red tape,” designed to delay the building of homes and apartments making it more costly and time consuming. Instead, these issues are about sustaining the economic and environmental livability of a community. The failure to preserve Vermont’s most valuable assets: --attractive communities surrounded by the natural beauty of our environment, -- will forever change the characteristics that make Vermont the beautiful state we call home. We deserve better.

Better(not bigger)VT Summer gathering

Mark your calendars - Sunday, July 12th we'll host a late-afternoon get-together for our friends at Health Hero Farm in South Hero (<https://healthherofarm.com/>). For food, we request your pot-luck offerings and will serve Health Hero hamburgers. Register by emailing us at betternotbiggervt@gmail.com. See you there!

Please support our work

Better(not bigger)Vermont is a registered 501(c)3 with no paid members or staff; we are a 100% volunteer organization.

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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