

Another View of Exit 4

*Editorial from the Barre-Montpelier Times-Argus
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ACT 250 TEST

OCTOBER 1, 2015 — A major residential, retail, business and industrial development at an Interstate 89 exit in Randolph has stumbled over procedural issues as it moves through the state's Act 250 process. But there are larger issues at stake than procedural ones.

A hearing last week adjourned after a squabble about whether the developer had provided adequate information about the preservation of prime farmland. Meanwhile, opposition in Randolph and among environmental groups is growing for a number of reasons related to the immense scale of the project.

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A major issue is I-89 itself. From its southern end at Concord, New Hampshire, all the way to the Canadian border at Highgate, it is one of the grandest highways of the eastern United States. It travels across the granite mountains of New Hampshire, across the Connecticut River at White River Junction, and then it ascends into the mountains of central Vermont.

The highway's course over the high, rolling hills of Sharon, Royalton, Randolph, Brookfield, Williamstown and Barre opens up to broad vistas that are spectacular at any season. For a while the highway follows the White River, then it crosses into the watershed of the Winooski River, passing down the beautiful valley between Montpelier and Burlington.

This stretch of road is one of the most effective of all advertisements for the state of Vermont, and one reason is that it is devoid of the typical sprawling development that creeps up on interstate highways in most other states. Travelers find themselves in a rural landscape untainted by the usual malls and strip developments. They are out there, someplace different, within the real working landscape that Vermonters have labored for centuries to maintain.

Chittenden County is the exception that proves the point. Pressures of population eventually produced the developments in Williston that have long served as a warning to other parts of Vermont. When the highway traverses the metropolitan area of Burlington, travelers understand they are in an urban area. Soon, north of Burlington, they are in open country again.

The District 3 Environmental Commission cannot rule on this case on the basis of a vague preference for rural vistas. It must consider the project in accordance with the criteria of Act 250. One of these has to do with the preservation of prime agricultural land, and the commission does well to consider whether the Randolph project violates this criterion.

To discourage unwise development is not to be anti-development. The town of Randolph has labored over many years to build up its downtown, and making it a thriving center has fueled the economy of the region.

But there are also criteria related to aesthetics and to economic impact. On the latter, there is much to consider.

Every expression of policy that Vermonters have ever devised, including policy backed by legislation, states that Vermonters place great importance on the strength of their village, town and city downtown districts. The corollary is that state policy discourages sprawl.

There are many obvious reasons for this, having to do with fostering local economic strength, promoting energy-efficient travel patterns, and preserving architectural and cultural heritage. Downtowns in many Vermont centers are thriving today because these values have been honored.

Gov. Howard Dean maintained a strict policy opposing development at highway interchanges precisely for these reasons. If someone wants a hamburger, he or she can leave the highway and go into town. Once they are there, they will discover the charm of Vermont's villages, which presumably is why they came to Vermont in the first place.

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downtown, and making it a thriving center has fueled the economy of the region. Cities, towns and villages including Burlington, Rutland, White River Junction, Brattleboro, Barre, Montpelier and St. Albans have put their focus on their downtown districts, and the results have created economic vitality while honoring Vermont values.

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The district commission must weigh the Randolph proposal carefully against the Vermont values that find expression in the criteria of Act 250. Vermonters familiar with the beautiful landscape of central Vermont are paying attention.

—The Editors

WWW.EXIT4OPENSOURCE.ORG

Exit 4 Open Space (E4OS) is a group of Randolph area residents who have come together to alert the citizens of the region as to the consequences of the proposed development, **which we believe will permanently damage the working landscape of the region, the viability of our unique downtown, and our local tourist economy.**

This mixed use project, totaling over a million square feet located on 172 acres, will replace an iconic viewshed and prime agricultural land with large-scale development designed to profit non-local entities, with adverse impacts on our downtown economy.

If the proposed development proceeds, the community we cherish will never recover.



Visit exit4openspace.org for more information and to sign our petition.

Please join us in this state-wide effort to conserve our irreplaceable local resources.

NEXT HEARING: MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

3:00 p.m. – meet at the **Driving Range** across from McDonald's on Route 66. The hearing will be held immediately after the site visit at **Gifford Memorial Hospital**, 41 South Main Street, Randolph, in the Maple Leaf and Red Clover Room. The hearing is open to the public and will not go beyond 7:00 p.m.