

—Slug:.....COMM-0864.opin.legisl.carris_duncan
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—For section.....Voices/Legislative Update
—Format.....Opinions
—Dateline.....Whitingham
—Article Number:.....43576



Notes from editor (not for publication):



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Act 181 has potential, but it falls far short of our needs

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 As lawmakers move to amend the controversial land use
3 bill, Vermont has an opportunity to develop a collaborative,
4 bottom-up process that centers our diverse rural communities

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 I HAVE BEEN spending time sitting with Act 181, listening
7 intently to the community's concerns. I've been sitting with my
8 own concerns about the law.

9 We have many interests to balance as we look to the
10 future: the needs of our community members, youth and adults

11 alike; the needs of our natural environment; and the needs of our
12 built environment, including preserving our existing homes.

13 From what I have seen, Vermont has a vision for the
14 future.

15 We have set forward on a path that builds on the
16 longstanding regenerative stewardship of our beautiful Green
17 Mountains by protecting and maximizing our wild, recreational,
18 and working lands, multimodal trails from the top to the bottom
19 of the state, and crystal-clear waterways for swimming, boating,
20 and fishing.

21 This vision also includes vibrant, bustling, convenient
22 village, town, and city centers filled with arts, entertainment,
23 shopping, farmers markets, and restaurants.

24 We want a beautiful state where people can age in place
25 with dignity.

26 * * *

27 ACT 181 HAS the potential to get us there. The law has the
28 potential to ease the zoning restrictions in village, town, and city
29 centers, and we could welcome some of the housing the state
30 needs.

31 But Act 181 falls short of our needs at the moment. The
32 law's tight deadlines limit thoughtful community input. Increased
33 regulation — Tier 3 regulations and the “road rule” — will have
34 impacts on rural communities. It also lacks support for the
35 preservation of existing homes, and that creates an imbalance in
36 the development work that we need to do.

37 But I believe that the message is being heard.

38 As the House Committee on Environment works on
39 S.325 — legislation designed to provide “technical clarification,
40 transitional certainty, and implementation alignment” with Act
41 181 — lawmakers are listening to comments and concerns from
42 the community to find a way forward.

43 They are evaluating what is working and what is not, and
44 they are working toward a community-driven process, including
45 repealing the “road rule,” Tier 3 rulemaking, and the Tier 2 report.

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VERMONT HAS an opportunity to develop a collaborative, bottom-up process that centers our diverse rural communities. Like our more urban centers, our rural communities contain a variety of lived experiences that include multigenerational community stewards as well as indigenous, queer, trans, immigrants, and Vermonters of color. We are bound together in our love of nature and desire to live in close relationship to it.

We must move forward with a process that includes all of these voices — a process that builds on the good work that is already being done at the local level.

A town planning process, completed or is underway in many communities, offers defined land use priorities and clarity about what should be built where. Land-use regulation in Vermont needs to expand on this process and include our rural voices to ensure that we don't fall prey to the pitfalls of gentrification, which drive inequity, cultural splintering, political division, and displacement.

* * *

THIS MOMENT is a crisis, but we must not panic. We have the opportunity to get this right and build stronger communities for our efforts.

Our rural communities and urban areas agree on the desire to conserve Vermont for the long term. They positively feed off each other, as our urban areas and town centers offer bustling energy, creative inspiration, and marketplaces to share our goods or services.

Our rural communities are home to our natural resources. They offer a space to slow down, to connect to our natural surroundings, and to provide respite from an uncertain world — all within a serene working landscape.

In the face of an artificial future, the community and authenticity that Vermont offers is a beacon.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

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80 represents the Windham-6 district (Wilmington, Whitingham, and
81 Halifax) in the Vermont House of Representatives.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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