

TOWN OF SHELDON
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April 30, 2026

To: Rep. Thomas Oliver, Rep. Matthew Walker, Sen. Robert Norris, Sen. Randy Brock
Cc: Governor Phil Scott, Speaker Jill Krowinski, President Phil Baruth
Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Vermont League of Cities & Towns

Re: Act 181

The Town of Sheldon Selectboard wishes to register its concerns regarding the implementation of Act 181 as currently enacted. The Town generally supports the stated goals of this legislation - namely, to promote housing development while protecting critical natural resources - as these same principles have guided the creation of our local Town plan and zoning bylaws. However, in its current form, we believe Act 181 imposes an inequitable burden on rural landowners and predominantly rural communities. We encourage the General Assembly and Governor Scott to repeal Tier 3 designation and the so-called "road rule" as currently enacted.

The Town of Sheldon is a predominantly rural and agricultural community which also contains two village centers, Sheldon Creek and Sheldon Springs. Aided by our longtime partners at Northwest Regional Planning, the Town Planning Commission has worked diligently to ensure that the Town plan and zoning bylaws address development and environmental issues as required by state law. Critically, development within areas of Sheldon which would be subject to the 800-ft "road rule" is already strongly controlled by local zoning regulations, with most land use in those areas being restricted or requiring review and approval by the Town Development Review Board. Additionally, many rural landowners in Sheldon have voluntarily conserved their property through restrictive easements and/or enrollment in the state's Current Use program.

The Town is supportive of the Tier 1A & 1B provisions of Act 181 which reduce the impact of Act 250 in village centers to promote housing development. These were implemented through a collaborative process involving regional planning commissions and their member municipalities, including local and regional public meetings as well as community outreach efforts. Critically, the consent of the local legislative body was required in order to relax the restrictions of Act 250 in Tier 1B areas of a municipality, and future changes can be made through the regional planning process. In contrast, implementation of Tiers 2 & 3 is assigned to a newly created statewide board, with no formal role for local municipalities.

We are fortunate that Sheldon is still home to several working farms. There are also many landowners who engage in limited or seasonal agricultural and forestry ventures, as well as residents who value the quality of life which a rural community affords and have chosen to locate here. Whether they are a multi-generational farm families or more recent immigrants, all value Vermont's natural beauty and working landscape, and wish to see them preserved.

We believe that full implementation of Act 181 will inhibit rather than support the good stewardship of rural land by greatly increasing the scope of activities requiring Act 250 review. We are especially concerned that this will have a disproportionate impact on landowners who lack the economic resources to sustain an application through the Act 250 process. Besides the interests of our rural landowners, the Town is attentive to the maintenance and growth of our local grand list which supports essential government services through our municipal budget and the education system. We ask state lawmakers to reconsider the impact that wide and rapid expansion of automatic Act 250 jurisdiction may have on property values and grand lists throughout the state.

In conclusion, development in the rural areas of Sheldon is already strongly restricted by local zoning, with conservation efforts supported by voluntary private action as well as state programs. Many rural landowners already face a significant economic challenge in maintaining their property while bearing the burden of compliance with existing state agricultural and environmental regulations. We feel that full implementation of the Tier 3 and “road rule” provisions of Act 181 would not only unduly burden all but the wealthiest rural landowners but would also undermine the authority of municipalities to implement local planning and zoning. The Town of Sheldon strongly advocates that these provisions be repealed and respectfully requests that the concerns of rural communities be considered in any further amendments to Act 250 jurisdiction.

Respectfully,

Town of Sheldon Selectboard

Stephen Dodd, Chair

Richard Piaseczny, Vice Chair

Maria Davison, Secretary

Nicholas Norris

Porsche Trombley