

Select Board Letter

Re: Act 250 Impact Questionnaire

Dear Select Board member:

I request you consider the following concerns in your response to the Act 250 Commission about the municipal impact of a Hannaford development at Lot #15 on the municipality of Hinesburg. There are **real risks to the taxpayers of Hinesburg** that a number of **unmitigated costs** will be borne by the property taxpayers of Hinesburg. The Select Board should carefully review the DRB decisions and additionally identify and describe the existing situations to the Act 250 Commission to assure that there will not be a burden on the taxpayers of Hinesburg. The Select Board must anticipate the long term impact to local and state infrastructure that will necessitate coordination by the town with multiple state agencies to request the Act 250 Commission require that these mitigation efforts be undertaken prior to this development at Lot #15. Most of these are related to the road infrastructure of Hinesburg but some additional ones are regarding fire protection.

**Traffic projections and real life observation have shown how backups on southbound VT #116 in the evening** can become intolerable. This is before said development has even happened. Adding in longer traffic complicated by numerous vehicles turning left onto Commerce St and the dynamic of left turning from Commerce Street onto often stopped traffic of #116 because of vehicles entering from Mechanicsville Road. Those left turning vehicles going west on Commerce Street also need to yield right of way to Eastward bound vehicles on the other side of VT #116. It is likely that traffic will divert to Mechanicsville Road in order to go south on 116.

The DRB has conditioned this development with both immediate and possible future infrastructure changes that include lengthening and widening RT 116 and the need for a light at Mechanicsville Road. We know how long infrastructure improvements can take as evidenced by the Silver Street bridge over the LaPlatte River. The DRB decision calls for a phased approach to the widening and lengthening of turn lanes on RT 116 that will in its second phase extend as far as the Patrick Brook culvert. If we wait till traffic likely deteriorates further in the intervening two years to necessitate these improvements then we have to go through the long process of design, ANR hearings, and construction again with more disruption to traffic and quality of life in the village. **Design and construction of all these infrastructure changes should happen prior to this development and at the expense of the developer** so as not to become a burden for the town and state at a later date. Additionally the developer for Hannaford is seeking in their cross appeal of the DRB's decision to remove these conditions for future traffic mitigation. For many reasons, it is important that

these improvements, including the ones conditioned by the DRB be done prior to construction of the store.

While the **local roads** in Hinesburg are **likely to experience considerably heavier traffic and wear as traffic diverts** to CVU Road, Pond Road, Richmond Road, and North Road in a way that becomes an east side bypass. Clear evidence of this can already be seen when traffic is noticeably more backed up. This increased wear on town roads and the necessary costs to maintain are borne solely by the residents.

Another important **reason for necessitating all of the infrastructure improvements be done prior to development construction** is the consideration of the cumulative numbers of lost productive time and quality of life from being stuck in traffic congestion. This is not a cost to the municipal government but a real cost to its residents and one likely to increase significantly after the development if the conditioned road changes are not done prior to the construction of the development.

The **Lot #15 Committee** in its **report describes the likely effect of increased municipal costs not covered by property taxes or impact fees** paid by the developer. This careful analysis used municipal budgets over the past 20 years in Hinesburg and Williston that showed this effect. A significant part of the impact was in the fire department budget. Williston went from a volunteer department like Hinesburg to a paid fire department. Corresponding to the time of major expansion of commercial development in Williston, their fire department budget went from \$138,000 in 2000 to \$262,000 in 2003 to \$582,000 in 2006 to \$950,000 in 2010. Prior to 2000 and the boom in commercial development, fire department budgets in Williston were hovering around \$100,000 for most of the 1990's. What is a common element with municipal fire costs is that impact from commercial development can take a few years to start showing up in the budget as a significant escalation. During this time, costs of the fire department budget in Hinesburg and its annual increase have been much more modest. Williston has a local sales tax that has balanced the increased costs from commercial development to a degree that their town manager has reported that it is a wash between the 1% sales tax and the increased costs resulting from commercial retail development.

#### **Economic Impact of increased traffic with possible modeling of this:**

Some assessment details of traffic numbers, added length of time waiting in traffic, cost of gasoline can give a possible model of the economic costs to residents from increased traffic. With idling the consumption of gas / diesel is equal to driving down the road at a regular speed. The cost to maintaining the car is higher from idling as there are incomplete combustion products that wear much more on the engine. It is estimated that the costs to the car would be half again as much as the cost of gasoline.

If you added into this possible model some estimated numbers such as having 1000 vehicles spending 10 minutes more in traffic for 200 days a year, the cost of this at \$3.33 / gallon for gas and half again for vehicle repair = \$5.00. Assuming an average of 20 miles per gallon, or perhaps 20 minutes of driving for every gallon, you could consider \$2.50 as the cost of a vehicle to wait in traffic for 10 minutes. If 1000 vehicles did this, then the cost could be \$2,500 per evening. If this happened for 200 evenings a year, the cost would be \$500,000 in extra vehicle costs per year.

In addition, there is the human cost in terms of value of time. Assuming a figure of \$15 / hour as a possible average wage; assuming vehicles without any passengers; and assuming 1000 vehicles we can estimate the following. The 10 minutes of time spent idling in traffic will cost each individual \$2.50 per day. So for 1000 vehicles, that is again \$2,500. If looked at over 200 days, then this figure is also \$500,000.

The total of this is then one million additional dollars of cost by having a ten minute delay for 1000 vehicles that happens 200 times a year. This is not an insignificant amount and even if the modeling numbers were quite off in one direction or another, it would still show a very large economic impact to those traveling over this stretch of road.

Currently, we haven't seen the applicant's Act 250 application. Because of the complexity and scale of this project, it is **important that the applicant's full Act 250 application be available for the Select Board prior to completing the municipal impact statement** such that we have as much understanding as possible of the impact of this development.

**We need to think ahead to be sure that all of Hinesburg's needs are addressed through the Act 250 process.** This is more than department heads giving a casual ok that there won't be additional costs but it is the Select Board's job to think long term and big picture. Department heads are focused on day to day operations. As opposed to the DRB that has to work within the confines of regulations, the **Select Board can have a broader perspective and assure that the development doesn't become a burden.**

Sincerely,  
John Roos