The undersigned conservation, forestry and planning organizations and individuals support S.234, an act that updates Act 250 to support smart growth, affordable housing, healthy forests, working lands, and an improved governance structure.

For years, the Vermont Legislature has worked to modernize Act 250, building on the recommendations of the *Commission on Act 250: the Next 50 Years Report*. S.234 implements many of the recommendations included in that report, and also creates the necessary foundation for addressing additional Act 250 policies that need attention.

In particular, **S.234 facilitates smart growth housing development** by making state incentives more accessible for designated downtowns and villages. The bill **promotes mixed-income and affordable housing developments in smaller towns** to facilitate state incentives with increased density, and the bill provides funding for towns to modernize their bylaws to implement smart growth measures.

Furthermore, in response to calls to fully streamline Act 250 in designated growth areas, S.234 allocates $150,000 to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to hire a consultant to develop recommendations on how to improve Designated Areas and state incentives to support development in compact centers. S.234 also requires a report on how Act 250 could transition to location-based jurisdiction to reduce Act 250 regulation and promote development in growth areas while better protecting our rural land base and sensitive resources.

In order to help maintain our rural land base now, recognizing that Vermont is losing up to 14,700 acres of forests every year due to development pressure, S.234 would **promote proactive site design for large developments in intact forest blocks, working forests, and habitat connectivity areas.** Furthermore, S.234 includes provisions to **support wood products manufacturing**, including allowing more flexible hours of operation for the delivery of wood products and wood heat fuel, and the bill furthers work on how to promote accessory on-farm businesses in Vermont. Please see a letter from foresters in support of the forest based provisions in S.234.

S.234 also builds on the recommendations of the Commission on Act 250 by **restoring an expert Board to administer Act 250 and hear Act 250 appeals.** The expert Board would create consistent policy and provide guidance to District Commissions, applicants and other participants in Act 250. Please see a letter from previous chairs of the Natural Resources Board in support of this provision in S.234. Please also see a letter from the Vermont Planners Association in support of this provision and other aspects of S.234.

We would like to note that S.234 includes Act 250 housing provisions supported by many stakeholders, but other bills in the Vermont Legislature would address housing needs through a multifaceted approach. For example, S.226, an act relating to expanding access to safe and affordable housing, is also moving through the Legislature with our support.

Finally, S.234 has recently been criticized by some mayors and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns as not relaxing Act 250 enough to accommodate housing. S.234, however, takes important steps now to create affordable housing, and builds the necessary foundation to do more, but this cannot happen overnight without making important improvements to our Designated Areas programs. S.234 takes this important step, and we support S.234 for modernizing Act 250 in a thoughtful way.

In sum, we cannot afford another year of stymied progress on Act 250. We are grateful for the Legislature's hard work this year, and **we urge you to support S.234 so we can take important steps forward on smart growth housing, healthy forests, working lands, and improved governance and consistency for Act 250.**

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