



Colchester
VERMONT

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May 25, 2023

Governor Phil Scott
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Re: Request for Veto of H.480

Dear Governor Scott:

I'm writing on behalf of the Town of Colchester to request that you Veto H.480.

This bill is essentially a study that auto-implements the removal of real estate assessments and appeals from cities and towns and their elected officials and places it in the hands of the state department of property valuation. This change will increase inequity, remove local control and accountability, enlarge bureaucracy, decrease opportunities for small and minority businesses, concentrate opportunities for large national data firms, depersonalize the process, make appeals less accessible, particularly to those with limited economic means, and increase costs to Vermonters.

The House Ways and Means Committee took up a topic based on the market anomaly of increased housing values in Vermont due to COVID and chose to throw out our real estate appraisal system instead of adding a few needed changes. Challenges with the current re-appraisal system could be solved with simple changes such as requiring reappraisals every ten years in each community and the coordination of re-appraisal service for communities which need assistance.

Moving responsibility for setting the value of property for state education and municipal service taxes in cities and towns from local government to the state will:

1. Require that large regional and national firms are hired to do the work vs. local individuals and New England based firms reducing opportunities for small economically disadvantaged and minority firms.
2. Removes the "Vermont Way" for citizens to participate in local government and resolve appeals within their own community by removing appeals from accountable locally elected officials who perform physical inspections moving them to contractors and State staff who will not perform physical inspections of all properties making them less accessible physically and interpersonally.

3. Make appeals more legalistic requiring experts to represent appellants, making appeals less viable for lower income Vermonters which will result in fewer appeals from people of less means. This will result in mostly higher income people appealing and making the property tax system regressive (higher taxes on lower income people) the exact opposite of what this bill claims to be correcting.
4. Require a large up-staffing of a state department that is already short staffed, and which does not agree with the majority of the changes proposed in H.480.

This bill went through very quickly and quietly and did not include enough local input given the enormous impact on cities and towns. The majority of it the bill was opposed by the Vermont Assessors and Listers Association and is opposed by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. The State of Vermont, Department of Property Valuation and Review is opposed to taking on the responsibility of contracting for or conducting property reappraisals before the Department has undertaken its study, creating an implementation plan including deliverables and a report back to the legislature.

We appreciate your consideration of the equity, accessibility and affordability concerns we have raised regarding this bill.

Regards,



Pam Loranger
Chair and on behalf of the Colchester Selectboard

CC: Senator Dick Mazza; Colchester Representatives Brennan, Taylor, Austin and Chase; Vermont League of Cities and Towns, and Vermont Assessors and Lister's Association