

ERT SURVEY RESULTS

2004/2005

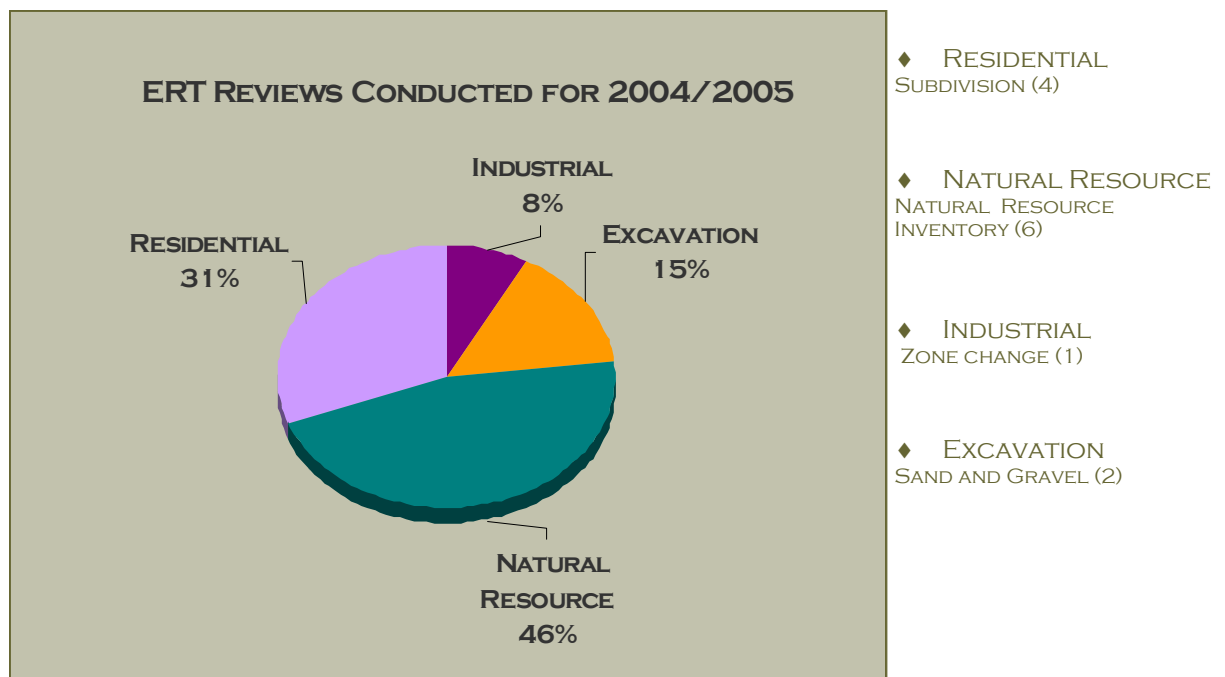
NOVEMBER 2006

Since 1996, the Environmental Review Team program has conducted an evaluation survey concerning ERT reports completed during the proceeding fiscal year. The survey is sent to the requesting agency after they have had time to read, review and use the report. The purpose of the survey is to determine the effectiveness of the ERT program in providing towns with natural resource information and an assessment of potential impacts of a project that can be used in their decision-making. The surveys provide information to us on how the towns use the reports, what aspects of the ERT process are most valuable to them, their perceptions of the quality of the report, what types of changes or improvements the ERT can make to the program and the overall effectiveness of the ERT process.

In fiscal year 2004-2005, 12 reviews were conducted and one report was completed for a review conducted during the previous year. The reports include review of six private development projects, five municipal projects and one zone change.

A total of 23 surveys were sent out. Thirteen completed surveys were returned, representing 11 of the completed 13 reports (85%). No surveys were returned from the town of Monroe for the Webb Mountain Park Extension and the town of Stafford for the Staffordville Lake and Watershed Update.

THE RANGE OF PROJECTS REVIEWED INCLUDED:



The request for reviews came from a variety of municipal officials and agencies. Several requests were made jointly by two or more agencies. Almost all of the towns that made requests had full or part time professional staff at the time of the ERT review. Staff positions include town planner, engineer, environmental planner, sanitarian, combined zoning and wetland officer full or part time, and separate zoning and wetland enforcement officers. Those who completed the ERT surveys included the town planner/town engineer (6), inland wetland commission (3), wetland enforcement officer (2), conservation commission staff (1), planning and zoning commission (1), open space commission (1), and environmental planner (1). It should be noted that some town staff serve in more than one capacity for the town.

ERT Reports for 2004-2005

Eastern CT

<u>Report #</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Type of Report</u>	<u>Review Date</u>	<u>Report Date</u>
586	Stafford	Staffordville Lake	Watershed	6/30/04	3/06
587	Windham	Frog Pond Excavation	Excavation	7/14/04	11/04
588	East Granby	Galasso Quarry Expansion	Excavation	9/22/04	12/04
589	Colchester	Commercial Zone Change	Zone Change	2/1/05	7/05
590	East Hampton	Skyline Estates	Subdivision	3/5/05	4/05
591	Portland	Chatham Ridge Subd. Phase II	Subdivision	4/6/05	6/05
592	Durham	Curtis Woodlands & Friendly Acres Farm	NRI	5/24/05	11/06

Kings Mark

<u>Report #</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Type of Report</u>	<u>Review Date</u>	<u>Report Date</u>
327	New Hartford	Jones Mountain Open Space	NRI, Open Space Acquisition	08/24/04	03/05
328	Harwinton, Litchfield, Thomaston	Naugatuck River Greenway Phase II	Greenway/Trail, NRI	11/03/04	11/05
329	New Milford	Walker Brook Farms Subdivision	Subdivision	01/11/05	03/05
330	Monroe	Webb Mountain Park Extension	NRI, Open Space	04/20/05	10/05
331	Sherman	Fairview Farms Re-subdivision	Subdivision	04/28/05	07/05
332	Guilford	East Guilford NRI	NRI	06/29/05	11/05

The current status of the projects reviewed by the ERT varies from project denial to acceptance. Several of the projects are in the planning stage and are still under review, while some have been modified either at the request of the agency or voluntarily by the applicant. The agency's decision has been taken to court in three circumstances.

In almost all cases, the ERT report was used to some degree by the agency in making its decision, with 43% of the respondents indicating the reports were partially used in making a decision and 50% stating they were used for general resource management and planning. Only 7% of the responses indicated that the report was not used at all. Because of this level of use of the reports in the decision-making process, a high percentage (84%) of the agencies found the reports to be helpful or very helpful. An additional 15% indicated that the reports were at least somewhat helpful. One limitation that was noted by one respondent was the report was only somewhat helpful because it took too much time to request a review and receive a completed report. Although the Team generally participates as a whole during the field review, Team members are often asked to provide additional assistance to the requesting agency. This request occurred for three reviews, with one additional agency anticipating a future request for additional help.

All respondents noted that the ERT report provided the information they had expected and most (92%) felt the information was easy to read and understand. An objective of the ERT process is to provide towns and agencies with information pertinent to the proposed project. It is also the intent to address the specific concerns the town has and offer viable recommendations. Based on the results of the survey, the majority (69%) felt the ERT met these objectives. However, two respondents noted that they felt the reports, although understandable, were somewhat technical, while one respondent thought the information was not technical enough in some areas. Other comments suggested that some of the information was too general, or that some sections were too brief. Overall, the ERT reports were rated excellent by 60% of the survey respondents and very good by 40%.

The respondents stated the following impacts were minimized or avoided because of information included in the ERT report:

- erosion and sedimentation (55%)
- water pollution (36%)
- wetland degradation (36%)
- wildlife habitat degradation (55%)
- fisheries habitat degradation (36%)
- flooding (18%)
- traffic problems (18%)
- sewage disposal or water supply problems (18%)
- incompatible land uses (8%)
- historical/archaeological degradation (18%)
- other (55%) Other included: ridgeline protected & open space public use trail protected, invasive plants.

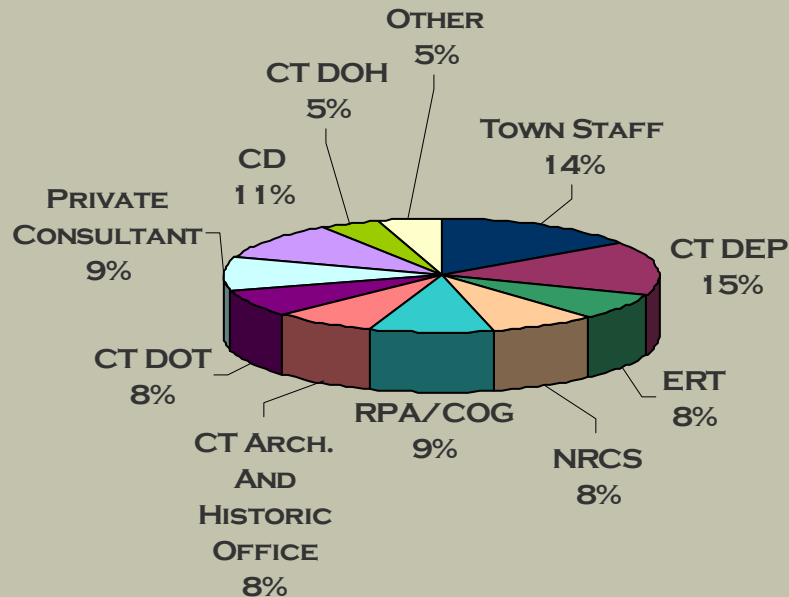
Many of the towns noted the changes were made to plans because of information provided in the ERT reports. These changes include: road/driveway layout (2), lot/ building layout (2), erosion and sediment control measures (3), storm water management plan (5), and open space (2). In some cases, the towns required additional information or testing based on ERT suggestions.

The following chart shows survey responses for which information was applicable from the ERT report.

<i>Type of Information</i>	<i>Used</i>	<i>Partially used</i>	<i>Did not use</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
Topography	7	1	1	1
Bedrock/ Surficial Geology	8	2	1	
Geological Limitations	6	2	2	1
Soil Resources/ Limitations/ Descriptions	8	2		
Watershed Perspective	7	4		
Water Quality Information	7	1	1	1
Storm Water Management	6	2		2
Wetland Resources	9	2		
Erosion and Sediment Control	6	3		1
Hydrology	7	4		
Water Supply	3	2	1	3
Sewage Disposal	2		1	4
Natural Diversity Database	6	2	1	
Vegetation/Forestry	7	4		
Wildlife Resources	8	2	1	
Fisheries Resources	4	3		2
Recreation Planning	4		1	5
Planning Review/ Land Use	3	3	1	2
Traffic/ Transportation Review	1	1		6
Archaeological Review	5	1		3
Education	3	1	1	3
Other				

AGENCIES RESPONDENTS USE FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Data in graph is based on survey response when asked what agencies respondents normally contact for technical assistance with the review of projects.



The participating agency typically was encouraged to request an ERT by various elected officials, municipal staff or commissions. Others encouraging the town to seek assistance from the ERT included a conservation district, RPA or COG, an affected neighbor or citizen's group, a neighboring town government or commission, and general town wide consensus that an ERT was needed. In one case, the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association suggested an ERT would be helpful.

A majority of the towns noted that they knew about the ERT program from prior use of the ERT. Several noted they also learned about the program from Town Staff, a Commission Member, Regional Planning Agency/Council of Government and Citizen/Citizen's Group.

In general, requesting agencies expressed satisfaction with the ERT report, with 62% replying that they were very satisfied with the report. The remaining respondents were either satisfied (23%) or somewhat satisfied (15%).

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to express specific comments on their ERT experience. These comments are useful in better understanding the value of the ERT as well as identifying areas that need some attention. Specific comments included:

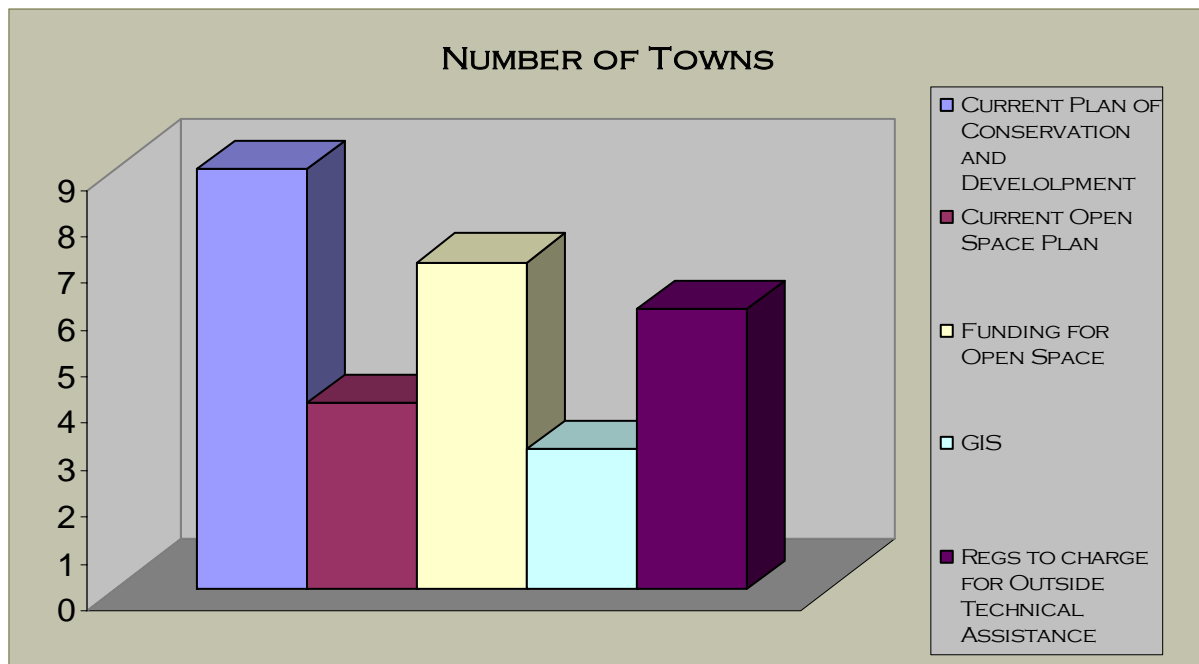
- ◆ "The report addressed all questions that had been posed"
- ◆ "Supplied info we could not supply"
- ◆ "The report was helpful because the information was collated by professionals and utilized in the review process. Overall the report was general in relation to the specific design of the project," " Report was extremely thorough and comprehensive"
- ◆ "Valuable resource which can be applied in consideration of development applications as well as the proposed regulation/zone change"
- ◆ "The report was approximately a month later than promised. The statutes do not provide enough time to complete the report."

The following chart shows the survey results on how satisfied respondents were with different areas of the ERT program.

ERT Service	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
ERT Webpage- (1 - No response - have not seen)		3	4 (1 - Have not used)		
ERT Brochure	2	5	3		
ERT Request Form	2	6	3		
Communication with ERT Staff	7	3	2		
Time Required to complete an ERT report	2	3	4	2	
Information contained in the report	9	4			
Objectiveness of the ERT report	9	4			
Maps, graphics, photos and illustrations in report	2	10	1 (More would have been useful)		
Format of the report	3	9			
Team member knowledge and professionalism	9	3			

A measure of the effectiveness of the ERT process is whether or not recent participants would be interested in requesting another ERT. About half said they would very likely request an ERT in the future and an equal number indicated they would likely request one. Only 10% of the respondents were unsure. In addition most (77%) said they would definitely recommend the ERT to others while 23% said they probably would. The ERT strives to bring together the right group of professionals needed to sufficiently address the specific areas of concerns. For the most, participants feel the ERT has achieved this objective and have indicated the Team is comprised of the appropriate individuals. However, some suggested the need for a GIS specialist, experienced land use planner, and legal expert on land use law.

About half of the respondents were aware that the ERT program has been in operation since 1969, but fewer knew how the ERT program is funded. As a follow-up question, respondents were asked if their Town agrees with funding the ERT through the Land Use Application Fees act, also known as the "Fee Bill." While six respondents agreed with the current funding set-up, two respondents answered no. One of these respondents felt state funding should be provided directly to the program and the other expressed a concern that the "fees are high for most applications that require no review."



Final comments and suggestions from the towns include -

- ◆ “We have used the report to apply for a DEP Open Space matching grant and, then, to inform the public regarding to the attributes of the project for Town Meeting vote. We received a \$450,000 grant for the project, and it was approved by Town Meeting vote. We next plan to use the report as a baseline for stewardship planning. The report was thorough, well written, just right re: technical detail, and extremely relevant and useful for all three purposes mentioned above. Thank you!” - New Hartford
- ◆ “This particular application was a little unusual and there were some constraints placed on the ERT scope by the applicant. Nevertheless, the overview provided by ERT was invaluable and added credibility to the public over the potential impacts. ERT was very helpful in getting the applicant to more formally commit to maintaining the Metacomet Trail through the property and entering into an agreement with CT Forest & Park Association.” - East Granby
- ◆ “Periodic re-education of town boards about the program, and especially about the need to start the process early.” - Sherman
- ◆ “More promotion of the ERT.” - Durham
- ◆ “Thank you for your support and keep up the fine work.” - Windham
- ◆ “Timeliness in terms of forwarding a report back to town.” - Colchester

Future Action:

Through a continuing process of evaluating the towns’ use of the ERT program we can improve and adjust the process and final products. While each ERT project is unique many issues and concerns remain the same across the State. Our goal continues to be to provide objective professional reviews of development proposals, natural resource inventories for planning and management and recommending guidelines for sound land use.

The statewide ERT subcommittee will continue to develop strategies to enhance current procedures so that towns can receive the information they need in a timely and useful manner in order to make decisions. The ERT relies on the voluntary participation of federal, state, and local agency personnel so interagency cooperation and communication is key in maintaining expert professional Team members.