

2006/2007 ERT Survey Results

Since 1996, the Environmental Review Team Program has conducted an annual 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 for ERT staff and the ERT Subcommittee 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 2006/2007, 15 reviews were conducted. There were 18 completed surveys returned, representing 14 of the 15 completed reports (93% return rate). There were 3 projects that returned more than one survey. The request for reviews came from a variety of municipal officials and agencies. Those who completed the survey included: Chair of Planning Commission, Chair of Inland Wetland Agency, Chair of Inland Wetland and Water Course Commission, Selectman, Town Planner, Environmental Planner, ZEO, WEO and Conservation Officer.

Most of the towns that made requests had full or part time professional staff at the time of the ERT review. Staff positions included: town planner (10), environmental planner (2), town engineer (6), town sanitarian (3), zoning enforcement officer (5), wetland enforcement officer (5) and combined zoning & wetland officer (4). Others noted their use of hired private consultants (2) and other staff they had which included a conservation officer/wetland officer (1). Of the 18 respondents 13 replied that they had originally requested the ERT.

Projects Reviewed:

Residential

Subdivision (3), Active Adult (2)
Mobile Manufactured Homes (1)

Natural Resources

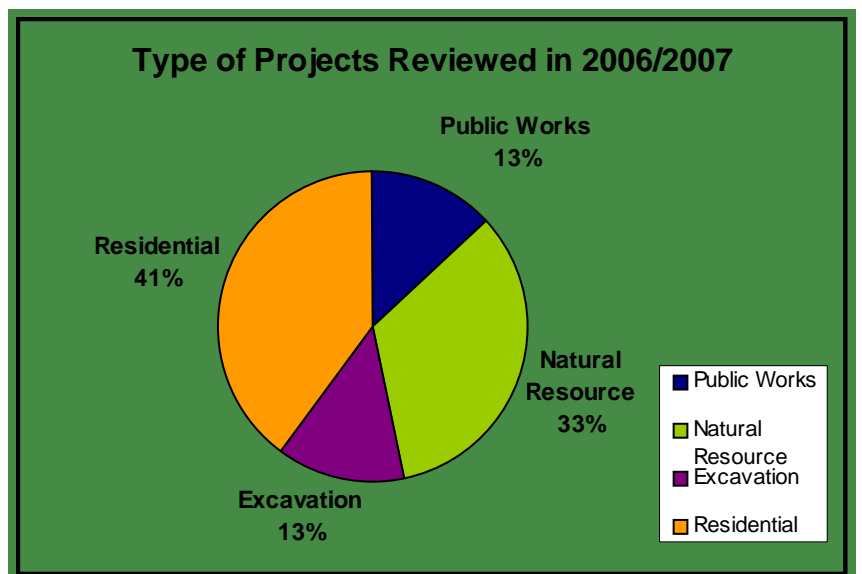
Natural Resource Inventory (5)

Excavation

Sand and Gravel (2)

Public Works

Roadway (1), Athletic Fields (1)



ERT Reports for 2006/2007

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>
606	East Lyme	Oswegatchie Hills	NRI	8/23/06	5/07
607	Canterbury	River Junction Estates LLC	Recreation	9/7/06	11/06
608	Sterling	Fallon Subdivision	Subdivision	9/19/06	11/06
609	Groton	Mystic Woods Subdivision	Subdivision	10/25/06	3/07
610	Brooklyn	Brooklyn Sand and Gravel Excavation	Excavation	10/31/06	2/07
611	Killingworth	Lover's Lane	Municipal Road	11/28/06	3/07
612	Sterling	The Village at Gibson Hill	Subdivision	12/13/07	2/07
613	Thompson	Jerry's Swamp & Little Pond NRI	NRI	3/27/07	2/08
614	North Stonington	Shunock River Non-Infringement Area	NRI	6/19/07	5/08

King's Mark

<u>Report #</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Type of Report</u>	<u>Review Date</u>	<u>Report Date</u>
339	Hamden	Sunwood Dev. Corp Special Permit Sand & Gravel Mining	Excavation	07/12/06	09/06
340	Oxford	Oxford Commons	Residential	07/13/06	08/06
342	Naugatuck	Long Meadow Brook, LLC Development	Active Adult	02/07/07	06/07
343	Waterbury	Stonebridge Commons Residential Development	Residential	02/28/07	05/07
344	Cornwall	Town of Cornwall NRI and Assessment	NRI	04/24/07	12/07
345	Cheshire	Boulder Knoll Property NRI	NRI	05/24/07	12/07

The following are the results from the returned ERT surveys in relation to the ERT report that was completed for the respondents town.

Below are the actions taken concerning the project / development the ERT reviewed:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p><u>1</u> No action taken</p> <p><u>3</u> Project in planning stage</p> <p><u>1</u> Project under review</p> <p><u>4</u> Proposal accepted</p> <p><u>2</u> Proposal denied</p> <p><u>6</u> Private project</p> <p><u>3</u> Municipal project</p> <p><u>1</u> Other - (Town Plan of C&D)</p> | <p><u>2</u> Proposal modified by request agency</p> <p><u>2</u> Proposal withdrawn voluntarily</p> <p><u>2</u> Proposal modified voluntarily</p> <p><u>1</u> Decision taken to court</p> <p><u>0</u> Decision changed in court</p> <p><u>1</u> Report used in requesting federal/ state/ local funding</p> <p><u>0</u> Received funding</p> <p><u>2</u> Other - (Application returning in new form, revision of regulations)</p> |
|---|--|

How the ERT was used in the decision-making process:

- 1 ERT report was the basis of the final decision
- 7 ERT report was partially used in the decision
- 1 ERT report was not used in the decision
- 1 ERT report was used as a learning tool only
- 8 ERT report was used for general resource management and planning

When asked how helpful was the ERT study in decision making 6 responded very helpful, 8 said helpful, 3 said somewhat helpful. One noted that the ERT report was not helpful because it took too much time to request a review and receive a report.

Below are the number of respondents that said impacts were minimized or avoided because of information included in the ERT report.

8 Erosion and sedimentation

4 Water pollution

12 Wetland degradation

10 Wildlife habitat degradation

5 Fisheries habitat degradation

4 Flooding

1 Traffic problems

3 Incompatible land uses

1 Sewage disposal or water supply problems

4 Historic/ archaeological degradation

3 Other - (public safety, recommended pedestrian trails were installed, no habitat improvements made that would have adverse impacts)

Modifications resulting from the ERT report included : 3 had a decrease in density/size, 1 had a change in road/driveway layout, 1 had a change in lot/building layout, 2 had modifications in erosion & sediment control measures, 2 had modification of storm water management plan, 1 had additional testing and/ or information required (for sewage disposal, water, bed rock, soils, wetlands, wildlife, fisheries) and other comments included: extension of conservation easement, waiting for new application based on ERT report, habitat improvement, ERT was used as basis for natural resource section of Town Plan of C&D.

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

Type of Information	Used	Partially used	Did not use	Not Applicable
Topography	11	-	3	-
Bedrock/ Surficial Geology	8	2	2	-
Geological Limitations	8	1	2	2
Soil Resources/ Limitations/ Descriptions	7	2	1	1
Watershed Perspective	7	4	2	-
Water Quality Information	5	4	1	1
Storm Water Management	4	5	1	2
Wetland Resources	10	2	-	-
Erosion and Sediment Control	7	4	-	2
Hydrology	11	1	-	-
Water Supply	5	2	-	5
Sewage Disposal	-	1	3	6
Natural Diversity Data Base	8	1	1	3
Vegetation/ Forestry	6	2	2	2
Wildlife Resources	9	2	1	2
Fisheries Resources	8	-	-	5
Recreation Planning	5	-	3	3
Planning Review/ Land Use	4	2	3	1
Traffic / Transportation Review	3	2	2	2
Archaeological Review	5	1	3	2
Education	1	-	2	6
Other	-	-	-	-

When respondents were asked if they requested additional help from ERT team members after receiving the ERT report 1 said yes and noted the team member was helpful and 13 said they did not request additional information. When asked why they didn't request additional information 2 responded by saying the report was considered adequate and complete. When asked if the ERT report provided them with the information they expected it to have, 17 said yes and 1 said no. The no respondent said that soil testing was missing (*the ERT does not perform testing*).

The information provided by the ERT report was:

- 16 Easily read and understood
- 2 Mostly understandable but somewhat technical
- 0 Too technical
- 3 Not technical enough (1. some aspects)
- 12 Pertinent to the proposed project
- 1 Too general
- 8 Able to answer specific questions adequately
- 3 Inconclusive, the information could be interpreted differently by individuals to arrive at different conclusions
- 10 Able to cite specific concerns and make recommendations
- 0 Other

When asked to think about their most recent report prepared for their town (commission) how satisfied were they with the final report:

- 6 Very satisfied
- 9 Satisfied
- 1 Somewhat satisfied
- 1 Neutral
- 0 Somewhat dissatisfied
- 0 Dissatisfied
- 0 Very dissatisfied

When asked if they were, or were not satisfied, additional responses included: "hydrologist not included even though one was requested," "report gave insight we sought," "have guidance for the town and landowners within the subject area."

Respondents were asked to judge the quality of the ERT study:

- 6 Excellent
- 8 Very Good
- 4 Good
- 0 Fair
- 0 Poor

When asked what discipline / professional that is not now available, would they want to have as an ERT Team member in the future the following responses were given: 1. Hydrologist, 2. Core sample specialist, 3. Seem to have it well covered, 4. Certified soil scientist, 5. Civil engineer, GIS professional.

The following suggestions were given to improve the ERT program:

1. More forceful, with conclusion and recommendations, 2. Shorten time frame to complete ERT report, 3. Report could be more useful with an executive summary that incorporates recommendations from all reports, 4. include some recommendations, 5. Finish report in a timely manner, 6. Decrease time required to complete report, 7. Keep up excellent work- your work has made our projects better, continue to stay flexible to accommodate changing needs, 8. Promotional information should include details of ERT deliverables.

How respondents found out about the ERT program:

- 3 ERT brochure mailing to your town
- 3 ERT Webpage
- 1 ERT display at a meeting/conference
- 0 Newsletter
- 0 DEP Staff
- 0 Conservation District (CD)
- 0 Natural Resources Conservation Service
- 1 Regional Planning Agency / Council of Government
- 4 Town Staff
- 1 Commission member
- 1 Citizen/Citizen's group
- 9 Have used the program before
- 1 Other (Inland Wetland Commission)

All things considered 14 survey respondents were very likely to use the ERT again in the future, 3 likely and 1 unlikely. When asked if they would recommend the ERT to others, 16 said definitely, 1 probably, and 1 probably not.

The following table shows the survey results of how satisfied respondents were with different areas of the ERT program. (Numbers represent responses)

ERT Service	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
ERT Webpage	6	6			
ERT Brochure	5	5	1		
ERT Request Form	7	7			
Communication with ERT Staff	8	5			
Time Required to complete an ERT report	5	6	3	2	1
Information contained in the report	5	7	2		
Objectiveness of the ERT report	11	5			
Maps, graphics, photos, and illustrations in report	7	8			
Format of the report	9	6			
Team member knowledge and professionalism	13	2			

Of the respondents 2 noted that someone tried to discourage them from requesting an ERT while 15 said no one discouraged them from requesting. The project applicant or developer were identified as the individual discouraging a town from applying for ERT assistance.

They were also asked if anyone encouraged them to request an ERT, 13 said yes and 4 said no. Those who were encouraging to request an ERT included: town staff (6), elected official (1), commission member (7), citizen/citizens group (5) and the conservation district (1).

Below are the agencies the towns normally contact for technical assistance with the review of projects:

- 12 Town staff
- 8 Connecticut DEP
- 8 ERT
- 3 Conservation District (CD)
- 4 NRCS
- 2 RPA / COG
- 5 Connecticut State Archaeology / Historic Preservation Office
- 2 Connecticut Department of Public Health
- 2 Connecticut Department of Transportation
- 7 Private Consultants
- 0 Other

When asked if they were aware that the ERT program has been functioning in Connecticut since 1969, 10 said yes and 8 said no. Respondents were asked if they knew how the ERT program was funded 10 responded yes they knew how ERT was funded and 8 said they did not know how ERT was funded. Of those respondents 12 said their Town agreed with "The Fee Bill" form of funding the ERT and 1 said they didn't know.

Other questions asked were unrelated to the ERT Program but are of interest to the Connecticut RC&D Councils. 14 Towns had a current Plan of Conservation and Development. Year's include: 1981, 1997, 1999 (3), 2001, 2003 (2), 2004, 2007, 2009

8 Towns had a current Open Space Plan. Year's included: 1993, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007

8 Towns have funding for open space? Amount's include: \$35,000, \$46,372, \$300,000, \$468,000, \$2 million.

10 Towns have regulations that allows them to charge for outside technical assistance.

9 Towns have GIS, and 4 of those Towns replied it is used regularly. Versions being used included: 9.1 (2), 9.2, 3.3.

When asked what is/are the most pressing land use issue(s) your town is currently facing the responses included:

1. Diminishing amount of land suitable for development creates increased pressure to develop marginal land.
2. Stormwater management, water supply, affordable housing.
3. Lack of committed open space, drafting revised zoning & subdivision regulations, and update Plan of Conservation & Development.
4. Protection of wetlands & open space.
5. Rapid growth of residential.
6. Pressure on marginal building area to develop.
7. Residential growth.
8. Diversity of housing and McMansions.
9. Density of residential homes & open space.
10. Development, land use regulation, lack of zoning.
11. Open space planning; updating zoning regulations/maps, greenway planning.
12. Revision of planning & zoning regulations, need to have a vision of the future of the town & regulations to support the vision. We need to get beyond denying applications as a means of preventing what we don't want.
13. Open space & farmland protection, sprawl.
14. Development of unsuitable land for housing/construction, management of open space.

Other comments, suggestions, or opinions that were received include:

1. *"Our experience with the ERT team has always been one in which the team members were dedicated to serving and assisting the town in it's need for technical expertise. The team is very patient and generous in it's communications. It delivers information to be considered in the town's decision making; it does not decide for the town. We are grateful to have this resource available."*

2. *"The problem I see is that the timeframe to accept, review and approve a IWWC application is too short to receive input from an ERT report. Even with a public hearing process with extensions from the applicant. As a wetlands commission, it is very rare that we learn of large subdivision projects prior to their submission. We do understand that it takes a large amount of time to prepare and publish an ERT report. Thanks for your help."*

Future Action:

Through a continuing process of evaluating the use of the ERT program we can improve and adjust the process and final product. 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.

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