

# 2007-2008 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 2007/2008, 10 reviews were conducted. There were 10 completed surveys returned, representing 9 of the 10 completed reports. There was 1 project that returned more than one survey, and 1 project that returned no survey. The request for reviews came from a variety of municipal officials and agencies. Those who completed the survey included: Chair of Conservation Commission, Grant writer, Town Planner, ZEO, Wetlands Agent, Parks & Recreation Director, First Selectman, and Assistant to the First Selectman,

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 (3), environmental planner (1), town engineer (1), town sanitarian (1), zoning enforcement officer (2), wetland enforcement officer (1) and combined zoning & wetland officer (2). Others noted their use of hired private consultants (1) and other staff they had which included a grant writer (1). Of the 10 respondents 8 replied that they had originally requested the ERT.

## Projects Reviewed:

### Residential

Subdivision (2)

### Natural Resources

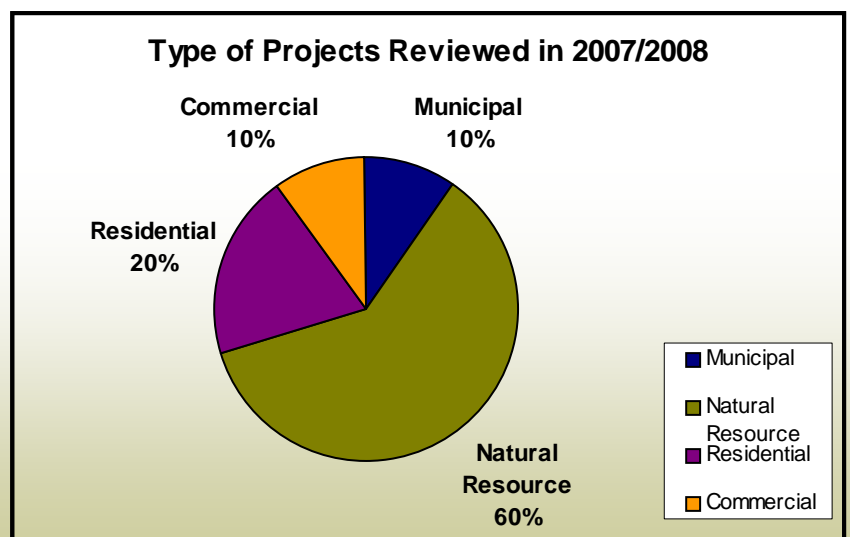
Natural Resource Inventory (6)

### Municipal

Town Garage (1)

### Commercial

Development (1)



## *ERT Reports for 2007/2008*

<u>Report #</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Type of Report</u>	<u>Review Date</u>	<u>Report Date</u>
615	Sprague	Mukluk Preserve Property	NRI	08/01/07	01/08
616	Woodstock	Keach Pond View Subdivision	Subdivision	09/26/07	11/07
617	Chaplin	Kimball Woods Subdivision	Subdivision	10/24/07	07/08
618	Hampton	Town Garage Site	Municipal	03/25/08	06/08
619	Chester	Open Space Acquisition	NRI	04/03/08	05/08
620	Bolton	Cider Mill Village, Concept Plan	Commercial	05/22/08	09/08
621	North Stonington	Mystic Seaport Hewitt Property	NRI	06/05/08	08/08

### **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>
346	Norwalk	Cranbury Park	NRI	07/25/07	03/08
347	Wallingford	Bertini Park	NRI	01/17/08	04/08
348	Southbury	Transylvania Pond	NRI	05/01/08	09/08

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>3</u> No action taken</p> <p><u>6</u> Project in planning stage</p> <p><u>2</u> Project under review</p> <p><u>1</u> Proposal accepted</p> <p><u>0</u> Proposal denied</p><br><p><u>2</u> Private project</p> <p><u>7</u> Municipal project</p> <p><u>1</u> Other - (Combination)</p> | <p><u>1</u> Proposal modified by request agency</p> <p><u>1</u> Proposal withdrawn voluntarily</p> <p><u>2</u> Proposal modified voluntarily</p> <p><u>0</u> Decision taken to court</p> <p><u>0</u> Decision changed in court</p><br><p><u>3</u> Report used in requesting federal/ state/ local funding</p> <p><u>2</u> Received funding</p> <p><u>2</u> Other - (ERT helped Town decide next steps in maintenance of pond, helped in the purchasing of 104 acres)</p> |
|---|--|

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

- 0 ERT report was the basis of the final decision
- 5 ERT report was partially used in the decision
- 0 ERT report was not used in the decision
- 2 ERT report was used as a learning tool only
- 5 ERT report was used for general resource management and planning
- 1 noted that the ERT report will be used if the project is submitted again.

When asked how helpful was the ERT study in decision making 7 responded very helpful, 1 said helpful, 1 said somewhat helpful. One noted that the ERT report was not helpful because the review was to look at a specific piece of property in relation to the project and one of the report writers suggested another piece of property that was not available.

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

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>4</u> Erosion and sedimentation     | <u>1</u> Traffic problems  |
| <u>3</u> Water pollution               | <u>3</u> Incompatible land uses  |
| <u>5</u> Wetland degradation           | <u>3</u> Sewage disposal or water supply problems  |
| <u>4</u> Wildlife habitat degradation  | <u>2</u> Historic/ archaeological degradation  |
| <u>2</u> Fisheries habitat degradation | <u>3</u> Other - (Town accepted Ag Funds and placed conversation easement on Property, report was used to facilitate towns application to purchase open Space, avoided neglect of pond and unnecessary maintainence expenditures ) |
| <u>1</u> Flooding                      |  |

Modifications resulting from the ERT report included : decrease in density/size (1), change in lot/building layout (1) and modifications in weed control (1).

*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	4	1	-	-
Bedrock/ Surficial Geology	2	3	-	-
Geological Limitations	4	1	1	-
Soil Resources/ Limitations/ Descriptions	4	1	-	-
Watershed Perspective	5	-	1	-
Water Quality Information	3	2	1	-
Storm Water Management	2	1	1	1
Wetland Resources	6	-	-	-
Erosion and Sediment Control	4	-	1	2
Hydrology	3	1	-	-
Water Supply	3	2	-	2
Sewage Disposal	1	1	-	2
Natural Diversity Data Base	7	-	-	-
Vegetation/ Forestry	6	-	-	-
Wildlife Resources	5	1	-	-
Fisheries Resources	6	-	-	1
Recreation Planning	6	-	-	1
Planning Review/ Land Use	7	-	-	1
Traffic / Transportation Review	-	1	-	4
Archaeological Review	3	-	1	1
Education	3	1	1	-
Other – Habitat Management	1	-	-	-

When respondents were asked if they requested additional help from ERT team members after receiving the ERT report 2 said yes and noted the team member was helpful and 6 said they did not request additional information. When asked if the ERT report provided them with the information they expected it to have, 7 said yes and 1 said no. The no respondent said that due to one of the report writers suggestion to look at another piece of property that was not available to the Town overshadowed the whole report.

The information provided by the ERT report was:

- 9 Easily read and understood
- 3 Mostly understandable but somewhat technical
- 0 Too technical
- 1 Not technical enough
- 7 Pertinent to the proposed project
- 1 Too general (A bit)
- 7 Able to answer specific questions adequately
- 0 Inconclusive, the information could be interpreted differently by individuals to arrive at different conclusions
- 6 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
- 2 Satisfied
- 0 Somewhat satisfied
- 0 Neutral
- 0 Somewhat dissatisfied
- 1 Dissatisfied
- 0 Very dissatisfied

When asked if they were, or were not satisfied, additional responses included: "previous concern noted about the suggestion of another piece of property rather than the one being reviewed."

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

- 4 Excellent
- 1 Very Good
- 3 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. Economic impact, 2. CEQ, 3. FOI, 4. CFE, 5. CACIWC, 6. EPA, and one noted they were satisfied with the makeup of the team.

The following suggestions were given to improve the ERT program:

1. The Role of the ERT should be explained better so that one can understand what the ERT can and cannot do for them, 2. decrease the time required to complete a report– unless an ERT is requested 3-4 months before plans/ applications are accepted, report arrives after commission has made a decision, 3. do more thorough research, 4. none was excellent, 5. add a separate application and survey for conceptual plans. Add information importance of supplying list of past studies associated with request to prevent duplicity. Add names of Team members in Table of Contents next to study they contributed. Supply each town more copies (hard and CD's) and encourage requesting Commission with supplying library with public copy. 6. no suggestions.

How respondents found out about the ERT program:

- 3 ERT brochure mailing to your town
- 2 ERT Webpage
- 0 ERT display at a meeting/conference
- 0 Newsletter
- 0 DEP Staff
- 1 Conservation District (CD)
- 0 Natural Resources Conservation Service
- 0 Regional Planning Agency / Council of Government
- 3 Town Staff
- 1 Commission member
- 1 Citizen/Citizen's group
- 5 Have used the program before
- 2 Other (Eastern CT RC&D Chairman, Work in the same building as ERT)

All things considered 9 survey respondents were very likely to use the ERT again in the future, and 1 likely. When asked if they would recommend the ERT to others, 9 said definitely, and 1 maybe.

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

<b>ERT Service</b>	<b>Very Satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Dissatisfied</b>	<b>Very Dissatisfied</b>
ERT Webpage	2	3	1	-	-
ERT Brochure	5	2	1	-	-
ERT Request Form	4	2	1	1	-
Communication with ERT Staff	6	1	-	1	-
Time Required to complete an ERT report	6	-	2	-	-
Information contained in the report	5	1	-	1	1
Objectiveness of the ERT report	5	2	-	-	-
Maps, graphics, photos, and illustrations in report	6	2	-	-	-
Format of the report	6	2	-	-	-
Team member knowledge and professionalism	6	2	-	-	1

Of the respondents 4 noted that someone tried to discourage them from requesting an ERT while 6 said no one discouraged them from requesting. The town staff, economic development commission and planning & zoning commission 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, 8 said yes and 2 said no. Those who were encouraging to request an ERT included: applicant/developer (1), town staff (2), elected official (2), commission member (5), citizen/citizens group (4), conservation district (2), conservation commission (1), and previously used ERT (1).

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

- 8 Town staff
- 6 Connecticut DEP
- 2 ERT
- 2 Conservation District (CD)
- 1 NRCS
- 4 RPA / COG
- 4 Connecticut State Archaeology / Historic Preservation Office
- 6 Connecticut Department of Public Health
- 3 Connecticut Department of Transportation
- 4 Private Consultants
- 2 Other: USDA, Town Boards & Agencies

When asked if they were aware that the ERT program has been functioning in Connecticut since 1969, 4 said yes and 5 said no. Respondents were asked if they knew how the ERT program was funded 4 responded yes they knew how ERT was funded and 5 said they did not know how ERT was funded. Of those respondents 5 said their Town agreed with "The Fee Bill" form of funding the ERT and 1 said they didn't, that a more direct form of funding should come from the State and users should pay additional costs.

Other questions asked were unrelated to the ERT Program but are of interest to the Connecticut RC&D Councils.  
9 Towns had a current Plan of Conservation and Development. Year's include: 2002 (2), 2003 (1), 2007 (1)  
6 Towns had a current Open Space Plan. Year's included: 2002, 2003, 2007  
5 Towns have funding for open space.  
5 Towns have regulations that allows them to charge for outside technical assistance.  
6 Towns have GIS, and 2 of those Towns replied it is used regularly. Versions being used included: 9, 9.1, 9.2 (2), 3.1.

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

1. The potential rejection of the land acquisition grant and the convincing of the Town by a misguided few to develop 230 acres Mukluk Preserve and turn it into a gravel mine. Redevelopment of the Baltic Mills.
2. Struggling with how to retain farmland and accommodate growth. Currently non-residential growth is only through special permit process with no guidance on where or how to go about planning and locating a business. This method results in development with no rhyme or reason to layout, also many businesses fail as a result.
3. Loss of open space, encroachment/impacts on wetlands.
4. Managing the inventory of open space.
5. Whether or not to allow commercial property.
6. High tax burden, high cost of homes.
7. Traffic, balance of housing, and preservation of farmland.
8. Sprawl from the installation of sewers. Unchecked development and aquifer contamination.
9. Land use planning zoning regulations, implementing land purchases to protect critical/sensitive/natural diversity and to connect open space & conservation easements.

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

1. *" This is a great service and very valuable."*
2. *" This is one of the most important services a Conservation Commission can utilize and we truly thank you for such an outstanding report!"*

## 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.

## Contact Information:



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