

Connecticut Environmental Review Team

2008-2009 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 2008/2009, 6 reviews were conducted. There were 4 completed surveys, representing 4 of the 6 completed reports. 2010 was the first year that the ERT survey was available to be completed online.

The request for reviews came from a variety of municipal officials and agencies. Those who completed the survey included: First Selectman, Town Planner, Land Trust Executive Director and Lake Authority Executive Director.

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 (1), environmental planner (1), town sanitarian (1), zoning enforcement officer (1) and wetland enforcement officer.

ERT Reports for 2008/2009

| <u>Report #</u> | <u>Town</u> | <u>Project Name</u> | <u>Type of Report</u> | <u>RC&D Area</u> | <u>Report Date</u> |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 349 | New Fairfield | Candlewood Lake | NRI | King's Mark | 08/2009 |
| 350 | Milford | Eisenhower Park Revitalization | NRI | King's Mark | 06/2010 |
| 624 | Mansfield | Ponde Place | Subdivision | Eastern CT | 04/2009 |
| 351 | Darien | Selleck's & Dunlap Woods | NRI | King's Mark | 11/2009 |
| 622 | Franklin | CRRA Ash Landfill | Commercial /NRI | Eastern CT | 03/2009 |
| 623 | Enfield | The Village at Scantic | Subdivision | Eastern CT | 01/2009 |

The following are the results from the completed ERT surveys in relation to the ERT report that was completed for the respondent's town.

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

- 1 No action taken
- 2 Project in planning stage
- 2 Private
- 2 Other - ERT Report used in CT I-95 rest area restoration plans for Darien North.
Aided in adoption of language in zoning regulations mitigating impacts of impervious surfaces on water resources.

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

- 0 ERT report was the basis of the final decision
- 3 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
- 1 ERT report was used for general resource management and planning

When asked how helpful was the ERT study in decision making 75% responded very helpful, and 25% stated it was helpful.

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

- 2 Erosion and sedimentation
- 4 Water pollution
- 4 Wetland degradation
- 4 Wildlife habitat degradation
- 3 Fisheries habitat degradation
- 2 Flooding
- 2 Traffic problems
- 2 Incompatible land uses
- 1 Sewage disposal or water supply problems
- 1 Historic/ archaeological degradation
- 2 Other - Stormwater runoff from rest area site
- The ERT study is expected to have a significant influence on all items above

Modifications resulting from the ERT report included modification of a stormwater management plan.

When asked if the ERT report provided them with the information they expected it to have, 100% of respondents said yes.

The information provided by the ERT report was:

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

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, another said yes that a public event was held where several team members presented portions of their contributions in the report to the public. Lastly, a third comment was that the project is being redesigned and is expected to be submitted for approvals in the fall of 2010, once submitted additional ERT member assistance may be appropriate.

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

- 4 Very satisfied
- 0 Satisfied
- 0 Somewhat satisfied
- 0 Neutral
- 0 Somewhat dissatisfied
- 0 Dissatisfied
- 0 Very dissatisfied

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

- 3 Excellent
- 1 Very Good
- 0 Good
- 0 Fair
- 0 Poor

100 % of survey respondents definitely would use the ERT again and they would recommend the ERT program to others.

How respondents found out about the ERT program:

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

Was familiar with ERT from past dealings. NRCS suggested ERT Participation as 3rd party in recent issue they helped with.

Survey results of how satisfied respondents were with different areas of the ERT program.

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

(Numbers represent responses)

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

- 3 Town staff
- 3 Connecticut DEP
- 0 ERT
- 2 Conservation District (CD)
- 1 NRCS
- 1 RPA / COG
- 0 Connecticut State Archaeology / Historic Preservation Office
- 1 Connecticut Department of Public Health
- 1 Connecticut Department of Transportation
- 1 Connecticut Department of Agriculture
- 1 Private Consultants
- 1 USDA NRCS
- 1 USDA RD
- 1 Other: All of the above agencies have been contacted at one time or another but they are not “normally” contacted for project reviews.

The ERT has been funded by several mechanisms throughout the years since its inception in 1969. When asked respondents replied the ERT should be funded through the "The Fee Bill" (4) and/or a line item in DEP's budget (1).

- 3 Towns have a current Plan of Conservation and Development
- 1 Town has a current Open Space Plan and 1 Town does not.
- 1 Town has funding for open space and 2 Towns do not.
- 2 Towns have regulations that allows them to charge for outside technical assistance
- 3 Towns have GIS

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

1. Economic Development
2. Lack of public infrastructure, particularly public water, need to implement important Plan of C&D goals.
3. Affordable housing and flooding.
4. Speaking from the perspective of Lake Management.....polluted runoff.

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

1. "The information provided by the ERT can be very helpful but the benefits necessitate a willing developer and, for the most part, are limited to pre-application reviews of preliminary plans. Due to statutory action deadlines for Regulatory Agencies (PZC/IWA etc) utilization of ERT participants is very problematic once an application has been submitted. If ERT participants were available to provide expert testimony in association with a project's public hearing process, Town's could consider using applicant funds to hire ERT experts for peer reviews of submitted plans."
2. "Incredibly useful Report both to the Darien Land Trust and the Town of Darien. Timing could not have been better with the re-development of the I-95 Rest Area directly behind the report area. We have used the ERT Report in our comments to the developer regarding the lake and watershed directly behind the Rest Area. This is an environmental issue that the DLT has been dealing with for 20 years-and finally we believe that we may have a solution to the polluted run-off. Your report gave our concerns credence and authority-thank you."
3. "The ERT and Conservation Districts play an important role in protection of CT's natural resources."

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

The Connecticut Environmental Review Team
1066 Saybrook Rd, Po Box 70
Haddam, CT 06438
860-345-3977
www.CTERT.org