

ERT Survey Results

2005/2006

November 2007

Since 1996, the Environmental Review Team program has conducted an annual evaluation survey concerning ERT reports. The survey is sent to the requesting agency after they have had time to read, review and make use of the report. The purpose of the survey is to determine the effectiveness of the ERT program in providing towns with natural resource, planning and assessment information to be used in municipal decision-making. The surveys provide information to the RC&D boards, ERT staff and Team members 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 the 2005-2006 season 10 reviews were conducted. The reports include review of six private development projects, three municipal projects and one project that was both private and a municipal project. Of the reviews two used the ERT Report to request federal/state/local funding, and one received funding. Fifteen surveys were returned, representing 9 of the completed 10 reports. No surveys were returned from the town of Deep River for the 411 Main Street LLC Business Park Access Report because the project proponent has yet to submit an application to the town.

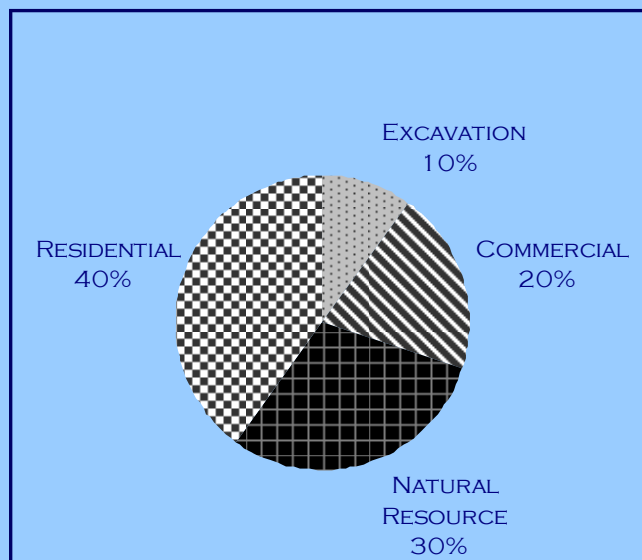
THE RANGE OF PROJECTS REVIEWED INCLUDED:

◆ RESIDENTIAL
SUBDIVISION (4)

◆ NATURAL RESOURCE
NATURAL RESOURCE
INVENTORY (3)

◆ COMMERCIAL
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT (2)

◆ EXCAVATION
SAND AND GRAVEL (1)



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 included town planner, environmental planner, town engineer, town sanitarian, zoning enforcement officer, wetland enforcement officer, and combined zoning and wetland officer. One respondent noted that most of the professional staff is contracted from private firms. Those who completed the ERT surveys included an environmental planner (1), inland wetland commission chair (2), inland wetland commission member (3), wetland enforcement officer (1), conservation commission chair (2), conservation commission member (3), conservation and zoning officer (1), town staff (1), and president of non-profit group (1). The survey respondents were involved with requesting the ERT.

ERT Reports for 2005-2006

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>
593	Deep River	411 Main Street LLC	Business Park Access	8/17/05	12/05
595	Middletown	Jonah Center for Earth and Art	NRI, Recreation	12/22/05	05/06
596	Pomfret	Sheldon Gravel Excavation	Excavation	2/22/06	04/06
597	Durham	Mount Pisgah	NRI, Open Space	3/14/06	01/07
598	Simsbury	Ethel Walker School Subdivision	Subdivision	3/29/06	08/06
599	Thompson	Spicer Rd Realty Subdivision	Subdivision	5/12/06	06/06

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>
333	Southington	Perillo Queen Street Development	Commercial	7/13/2005	08/05
334	Waterbury	Naugatuck River Greenway	NRI, Greenway	10/12/05	06/06
335	Waterbury	Platts Meadow	Subdivision	01/18/06	03/06
338	Beacon Falls	Chatfield Farms II Active Adult Community	Residential, Active Adult	05/16/06	06/06

The current status of the projects reviewed by the ERT varies. Four projects are in the planning stage, five under review, four projects were denied, one proposal was modified by the requesting agency, four proposals were withdrawn voluntarily, two proposals were modified voluntarily and one decision was taken to court.

In all cases, the ERT report was used to some degree by the agency in making the decision. Six respondents indicated that the report was used as the basis of the final decision, and 8 respondents said that the report was partially used in making a decision. Another two used the ERT Report as a learning tool and four used it for general resource management and planning. Due to the level of use of the reports in the decision-making process, a high percentage (66.5%) of the agencies found the reports to be very helpful and the remaining agencies (33.5%) found it helpful. When asked why the ERT Report was not helpful one individual noted that the ERT report "did not tell us what to do."

Fourteen of the fifteen respondents noted that the ERT report provided the information they had expected it to have. Most respondents (87%) felt the information was easy to read and understand. An objective of the ERT report is to provide towns and agencies with information pertinent to the proposed project, and a majority of the respondents (87%) agreed the report did just that. It is also the intent of the ERT to address specific concerns the town has and to provide specific answers and recommendations. Based on the results of the survey, a large number of respondents (73%) felt the ERT report was able to cite specific concerns and make recommendations. However, three respondents noted that they felt the reports, although mostly understandable, were somewhat technical, while one respondent thought the information was not technical enough, another said the report was too technical. A third of respondents thought the report was inconclusive, that the information could be interpreted differently by individuals to arrive at very different conclusions. Just under half of the respondents (47%) felt the report was able to answer specific questions adequately. Finally two noted other with their comments stating they wouldn't be where they are today without the ERT report and the help of the staff, and the second one stated the ERT report was an excellent resource for use in future projects in the area.

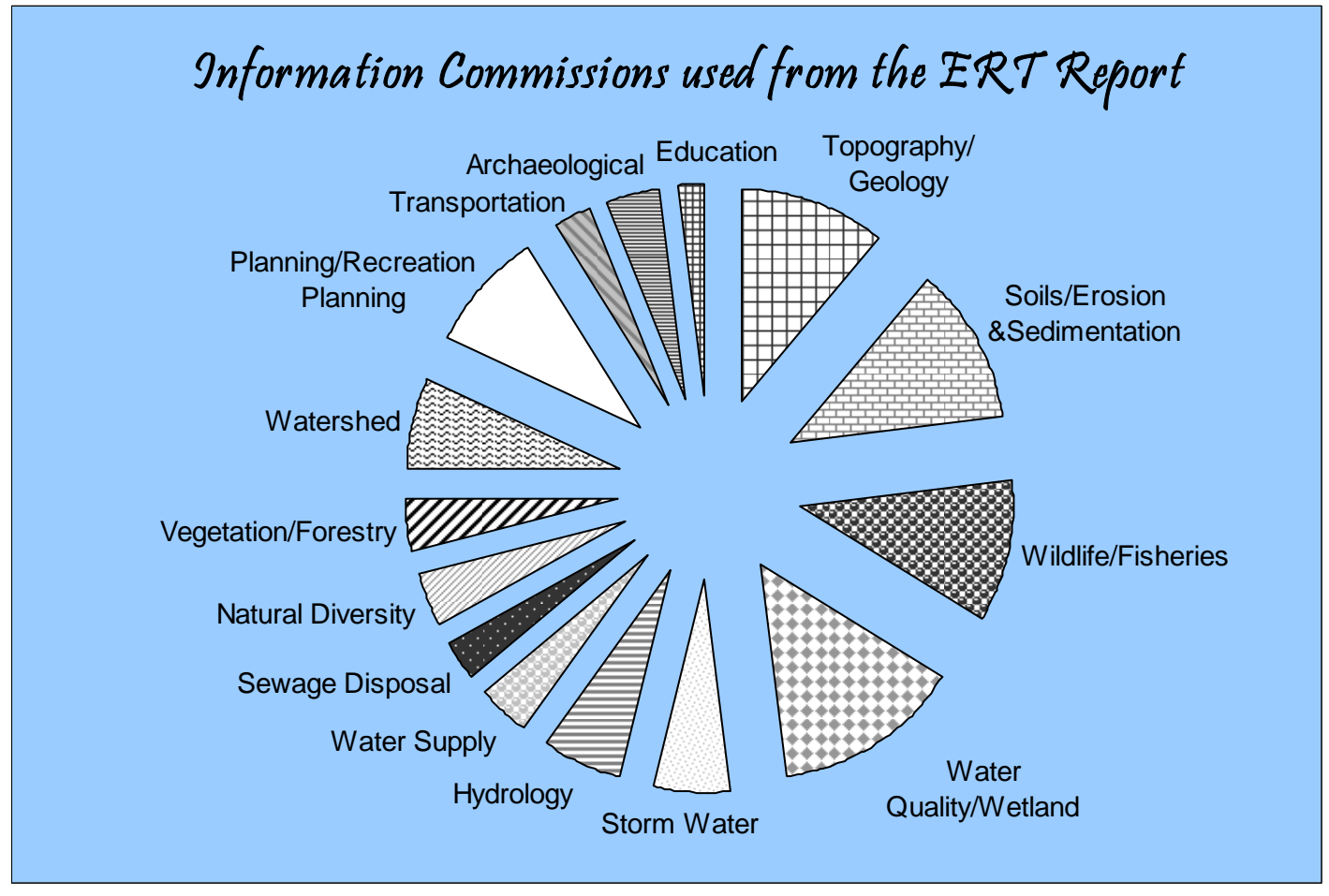
The following impacts were minimized or avoided because of information included in the ERT report .

(1 response was calculated for each of the 10 reviews):

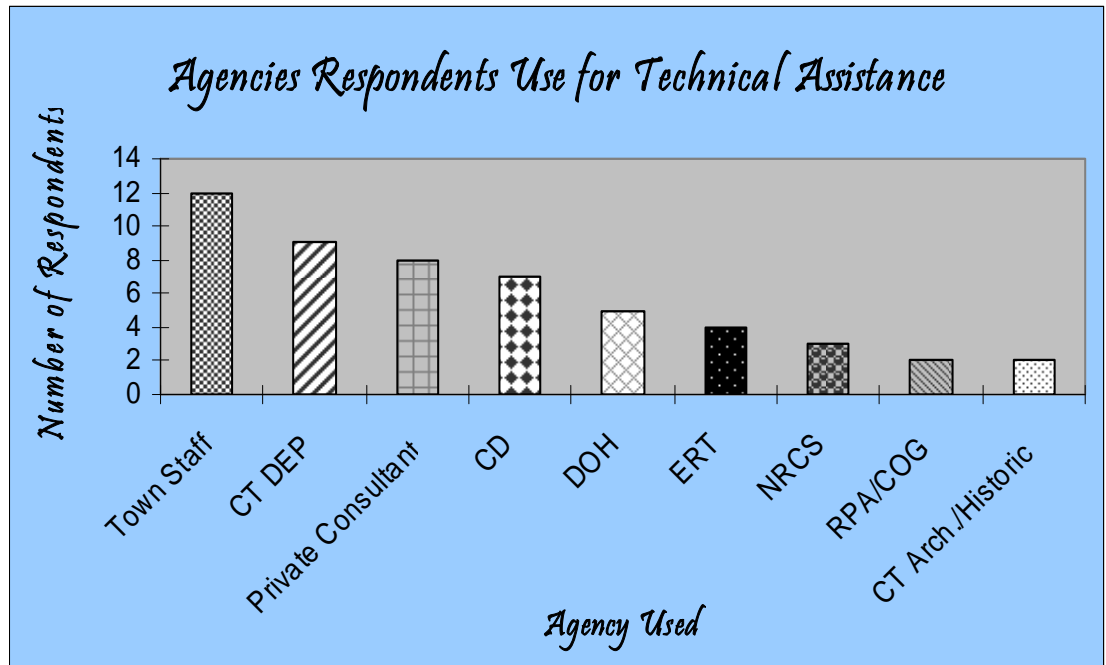
- erosion and sedimentation (80%)
- water pollution (70%)
- wetland degradation (90%)
- wildlife habitat degradation (50%)
- fisheries habitat degradation (60%)
- flooding (40%)
- traffic problems (40%)
- sewage disposal or water supply problems (40%)
- incompatible land uses (50%)
- historical/archaeological degradation (50%)
- other (10%) Other included: ERT is being used as a planning tool for a greenway project.

Many of the towns noted changes were made to plans because of information provided in the ERT reports. These changes include: decrease in density/size (1), road/driveway layout (1), lot/ building layout (1), erosion and sediment control measures (2), storm water management plan (3), and open space (1). In one case, the town required additional information or testing based on ERT suggestions. One respondent noted that the project is moving forward due to ERT.

The following chart shows survey responses for which information was applicable from the ERT report. One respondent noted they did not respond because it was too soon to tell.



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



All of the respondents were encouraged to request an ERT by either town staff, elected officials, commission member, citizen/citizen's group, DEP staff, Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Regional Planning Agency/ Council of Government. At the same time one third of the respondents noted they were discouraged by either the applicant/developer, town staff or an elected official from requesting an ERT.

Some respondents knew about the ERT program from prior use of the ERT (27%). Still others noted they learned about the program from Town Staff (20%), a Commission Member (27%), ERT Display at a meeting/conference (20%), ERT mailing to their town (13%), or Conservation District (13%). Other sources for finding out about the ERT program included the ERT webpage, DEP staff, NRCS and a citizen's group.

In general, requesting agencies expressed satisfaction with the ERT report, with 60% replying that they were very satisfied with the report, the remaining 40% of respondents were satisfied. One person commented that the ERT report needs more science and detail. Overall, the ERT reports were rated excellent by 47%, very good by 47%, and the remaining 6% rated it good.

A measure of the merit of the ERT process is whether or not recent participants would be interested in requesting another ERT review. About 73% said they would be very likely request an ERT in the future and 20% indicated they would likely request one. Only one of the respondents was not sure. In addition most (80%) said they would definitely recommend the ERT to others and the remainder (20%) said they probably would.

The ERT strives to bring together the right group of professionals needed to sufficiently address the specific areas of concern. For the most, participants felt the ERT had achieved this objective and that the Team is comprised of the appropriate individuals. However, some suggested the need for an engineer, environmental education planner, hydrologist and soil scientist. Also the suggestion was made to provide more of a summary and conclusion for the reports. When asked if they had requested additional help from ERT Team members after receiving the report ten said that they had contacted Team members. One respondent noted the team member was very helpful. Reasons for not requesting additional help were that the report was conclusive or that they didn't know they could seek additional assistance.

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

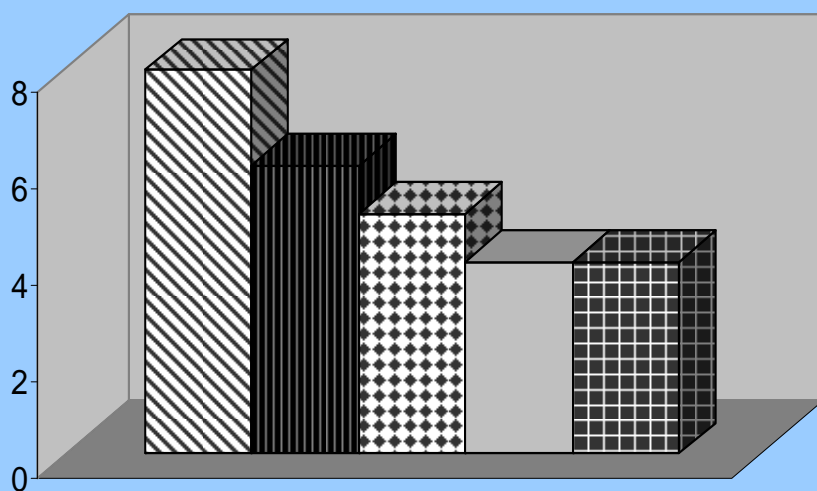
ERT Service	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
ERT Webpage (1: n/a- neutral)	5	6	2		
ERT Brochure (1: n/a- neutral, 1: n/a)	7	3	2		
ERT Request Form	6	5			
Communication with ERT Staff	9	3	1		
Time Required to complete an ERT report	7	4	3		
Information contained in the report	8	6	1		
Objectiveness of the ERT report	9	4	1		
Maps, graphics, photos and illustrations in report	5	6	2	1	
Format of the report	5	8	1		
Team member knowledge and professionalism	11	4			

The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to express their suggestions on how the ERT program could be improved. These comments are useful in better understanding the value of the ERT, as well as identifying areas that need some attention.

Specific comments included:

- ◆ "More ability to use ERT experts on more applications."
- ◆ "We've been very happy with our ERT experience."
- ◆ "Can you or a representative be available if need be at a Town land use meeting."
- ◆ "The report suffers from "specialist syndrome" in that each section is very different from any other, because the report is authored by many people. As a result, some sections can be filled with jargon. With each author taking a slightly different approach, pertinent information is often buried or difficult to find. In some cases, there is lots of overlap (e.g. general property descriptions) and occasionally conflicting advice. Structure of each section should be standard with a brief overview of methods, findings, discussion and recommendations."
- ◆ "Response time on time restricted applications can be tricky, however the ERT was able to accommodate time restrictions we had with this application."
- ◆ "On the occasions when the town has used it over the many years (4 or 5 times) it has been very helpful. Did the town officials/commissions/boards use the information that was provided to its fullest extent? That is another issue. But for volunteer members everyone is learning and trying."
- ◆ "Time response and who to call for help."
- ◆ "We could have used more traffic impact information, including impact on town roads."

Number of Towns



- Current Plan of Conservation and Development
- Funding for Open Space
- GIS
- Current Open Space Plan
- Regs to charge for Outside Technical Assistance

In order to better understand the towns we serve we asked respondents what their towns already have in place.

In order to better understand the towns we serve we asked each survey respondent to indicate whether or not their town had a current plan of conservation & development, an open space fund, GIS, a current open space plan and the ability to charge applicants for outside technical reviews.

About one third of the respondents were aware that the ERT program has been in operation since 1969, but more 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 twelve respondents agreed with the current funding set-up, one respondent answered no and another answered don't know. Of the respondent that answered no they explained their reasoning as they doubted the town has a position with respect to funding.

Final comments and suggestions from the towns included -

- ◆ "Keep it up!"
- ◆ "Main values and positive outcomes of ERT report: 1. Walking and conversing with Team Members, 2. The report is a good reference work on our location, but we haven't put the written report to work yet."
- ◆ "We have used the ERT to prepare reports and conduct Natural Resource Inventories for other open space parcels, and we will continue to do so provided the service is available."

Future Action:

Through a continuing process of evaluating the towns' 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.