

Vehicle Fueling Station – Proposed Rationale for Maximum of 4 Pumping Islands

In the course of updating and modernizing our vehicle fueling station definition and regulations, we have considered the issue of the number of pumping islands that might be incorporated into such a facility, and concluded that, for Richmond, the maximum number of islands should be four. The reasons for this fall into two categories: scale and energy transition.

Scale is relevant both in reference to the size of our region (Rt 2 corridor), our village, and to the size of the site. This location is not strictly “on” the interstate highway (I-89), although it is accessible from Exit 11, as is the Lucky Spot fueling station nearby on another state road, Rt 117. Fueling stations along Rt 2 between Richmond and Burlington, including at Exits 12 and 14, tend to have 2 – 4 pumping islands, generally in the stacked configuration (if 4). In this corridor, there are 2 stations with 5 pumping islands, both with 3 islands on one side of the convenience store building, and 2 on the other. This configuration reduces the massing effect which would occur if all islands were arranged together. These smaller stations along Rt 2 contribute to the sense that our region is a chain of villages linked by a local road to our small city. For those drivers that exit the interstate seeking fuel, they can feel that they are entering into the world of Vermont villages, even as they enjoy the proximity of the station close to the highway.

The section of Rt 2 between Exit 11 and Richmond’s downtown has long been fiercely protected by Richmond citizens from excessive commercialization. Commercial uses have been welcomed, but a maximum footprint size and other restrictions have attempted to prevent “strip development” in this area, and continue to create a village-scale, welcoming, entrance to Richmond from the north and west with a mix of local businesses and housing. We feel that permitting a fueling station that exceeds the size of others in this area does not contribute to the desired village “character of the area.”

The third point about scale is that the site itself is a small island created out of a wetland. The proposed design already pushes out into the wetland buffer and extends close to the edge of this island. This does not seem a suitable location for station that is a larger than usual for the region, with less of a buildable area.

The second category, energy transition, speaks to the fact that at the same time as this Mobil application is seeking approval for a 30% increase in gasoline pumping capacity, the state of Vermont is striving to reduce gasoline usage by electrifying a significant portion of our vehicle fleet. Currently, the transportation sector accounts for approximately 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont. The Global Warming Solutions Act, approved by the Vermont Legislature in 2020, mandates large greenhouse gas reductions by target dates of 2025, 2030 and 2050. The Climate Council is currently nearing completion of the first draft of the Vermont Climate Action Plan, mandated by the GWSA and due December 1, 2021, which includes, as a high priority, replacing a large portion of the cars on the road with electric vehicles. The LEAP modelling completed by the consultant (Cadmus) indicates that to meet the mandated goals, the EV share of automobile sales in Vermont needs to be 40% by 2025 and >80% by 2030. There is a serious commitment in this state to address the climate crisis, and even if we cannot get to these numbers, there will be, at the very least, significant movement in this direction.

The Mobil station applicant has clearly acknowledged this projected trajectory by committing to the installation of 3 DC fast charging EV chargers at the renovated station. As the Planning Commission has only recommended that a single fast charger be required at any new or renovated fueling station within Richmond, we applaud this applicant for thinking further ahead to this coming electrification. Since EV’s will be replacing gasoline vehicles, we feel that the need for additional gas pumping islands will decrease rather than increase over the next decade. The 8 pumps plus the 3 chargers will allow a total of 11 vehicles to be fueled at any one time, which is an increase over the current situation.