

Vermontasaurus vs. The Zoning Board

Post Mills, Vt., resident Brian Boland is an inventor, hot-air balloonist, and antique-car museum curator who also owns and operates a small airport. When heavy snows flattened one of his storage buildings a couple of years ago, he was left with a small mountain of salvaged lumber and a longtime dream. The two reached critical mass this past June, when Boland and about 100 volunteers armed themselves with hammers, a bucket truck, and several hundred pounds of assorted nails, and began banging together what eventually developed into a 122-foot wooden dinosaur that was quickly dubbed Vermontasaurus.

Thanks to some time-saving ground rules imposed by Boland, few tools or building skills were needed, and the entire process took a mere eight days. “The deal was that you weren’t allowed to cut anything to length,” he says. “No measuring, and no removing or rearranging

anything already nailed in place. It speeded things up tremendously.”

As it turned out, building the dinosaur was the easy part. The structure came to the attention of town officials, who — upon learning of its builder’s plans to put picnic tables in the shaded space beneath — classified it as a building, calculated its area at 875 square feet, and presented Boland with a bill for \$275.50 before inviting him to stop by the town offices to file a retroactive application for a building permit. “How do you calculate the square footage of a dinosaur?” asks Boland.

Recovering quickly, he claimed that Vermontasaurus was in fact an artwork and therefore needed no building permit. To bolster his case, he erected an informational kiosk and enclosed the area beneath the structure with caution tape (a wise move, given the difficulty of assessing the load-carrying ability of a mass of random lengths of ungraded

lumber randomly fastened to one another with an unknown number of spikes, common nails, finishing nails, and brads).

Wire services and Internet news sites picked up the story. A steady stream of sightseers with cameras began flowing through, annoying the neighbors and perhaps making some of them wish they hadn’t

opposed Boland’s earlier plan to simply burn the scrap pile. The state environmental agency weighed in, suggesting that the increased traffic might trigger a requirement for a so-called Act 250 permit.

Then, with the speed and finality of a departing Vermont summer, it was over. At a packed mid-August meeting, the town zoning board voted to accept Vermontasaurus as an unpermitted artwork. The district environmental commission decided the traffic wasn’t really so bad and went off to pester someone else. The neighbors, if not actually delighted to be living next to a scrap-lumber dinosaur, kept their complaints to themselves.

For now, at least, Vermontasaurus appears to be out of danger — although how it will handle the approaching winter snows remains to be seen. — *Jon Vara*



At 122 feet long and about 25 feet high, Vermontasaurus is substantially larger than most real dinosaurs. Its “backbone” is a roof truss salvaged from a building collapsed by heavy snow. Also included in its bulk are window frames, broken furniture, an old toboggan, a smashed acoustic guitar, and at least three nests built by local birds. Brian Boland (left) assembled the creature last summer with the help of 100 volunteers. He’s been fending off town officials and media types ever since.