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October 7, 2021

Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine
by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions
c/o Senator Craig Hickman, Chair and Speaker Ryan Fecteau, Chair

**RE: Support for the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine
by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions**

Dear Commission Chairs,

Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission (LCRPC) has provided land-use planning for the past three (3) decades to the municipalities located within Lincoln County. We are a rural area with nineteen (19) municipalities ranging in population from 30 to about 5,000. Our support consists of broad-range planning support and specific technical assistance, such as ordinance review and recommendations, comprehensive planning assistance, economic and community development, coordinating regional initiatives, etc.

Over the past few years, we have heard from municipal leaders, County residents, and regional legislators about the lack of housing opportunities in Lincoln County. The need for affordable and workforce housing has come to the forefront of conversations over the past eighteen (18) months as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many types of Lincoln County and Maine residents lack affordable housing: people in transition (from recovery, incarceration, domestic violence, for example); low-income residents; moderate-income residents; seniors; disabled individuals; and seasonal employees, to name a few. Many of these residents are locally employed and, depending on their living situation, may have moved out of the area (or will have to) to find more affordable housing. This creates significant inequities across the County and instability in overall employment, in staffing our emergency and critical services, the tourism industry our economy relies upon, and in communities looking to grow with new families to sustain schools and services.

Data from Maine Housing¹ shows that in 2020:

- **Lincoln County became the most unaffordable county for housing in the State.** There are virtually no affordable rents or homes in most of our coastal communities.
- Lincoln County has an affordability rating of 0.77 (compared to a statewide rate of 0.91). The affordability calculation is based on the ration of area median home prices and median two-bedroom rent costs to area median household and rental household incomes. A ration of one (1) or above indicates affordability.
- Lincoln County's median home price was \$305,000 and the median household income was \$61,390. The income needed to afford the median house is \$79,891. **62.2% of Lincoln County households were not able to afford the median-price home.** Instead, with their median-income, households could afford a house priced at \$234,368.

Earlier this year, the Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission identified 'Housing' as the top priority in our five-year Strategic Plan. As a result, LCRPC is seeking county funding to perform a countywide housing assessment to provide concrete numbers about available housing, housing conditions, household and family housing expenses, employment and construction trends, and an appraisal of any town policies and ordinances that are barriers to or could increase opportunities for housing in the county. We are also looking forward to participating in Maine Housing and DECD's workforce housing initiatives.

While our work in the housing sector is Lincoln County-specific, **we believe a continued statewide initiative by your Commission and the Legislature is necessary.** It is important to analyze, from both the state and local level, current land-use ordinances and zoning restrictions that may hinder development of housing solutions, which are affordable, sustainably built, and designed to fit people of all ages (i.e., [universal design](#)), as well as learn from successful initiatives in Maine and surrounding states. We also hope the Commission will expand its initial study and develop actionable recommendations to be undertaken municipalities and the State, and we look forward to building upon your work to collaborate and design solutions addressing this issue.

Respectfully submitted,



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Sandy Gilbreath
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Emily Rabbe
County Planner

¹ <https://www.mainhousing.org/policy-research/housing-data>