

## Town of Columbia Falls, Maine

To the Honorable Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name Tony Santiago, Chair of the Columbia Falls Select Board. I am here today representing the Full Select Board in Columbia Falls to voice support for LD 2011, *An Act to Allow the Annexation of Certain Lands by Columbia Falls*

**Maine is often stuck between a ‘rock and a hard place’ when it comes to economic development** – residents are inclined to resist change but want better economic opportunities. In Washington County, we are one of the most rural, most economically challenged in the state. Our younger generations are leaving to find work, and our older folks are aging out of the workforce. We have a population decline, which is creating a workforce crisis.

Without a solution to create year-round economic stability, I’m afraid Washington County could have a hard road in front of it.

**That is why the full Select Board in Columbia Falls supports the annexation of these 11,000 acres from Centerville Township and a portion of T19 MD BPP into the local governance of Columbia Falls.**

I speak to you today in my Select Board capacity, but of course, the citizens of Columbia Falls will have an opportunity to vote on this bill should it make it successfully through the legislative process. What follows are the reasons we hope it will.

When I first heard about the Flagpole of Freedom Park, it was from Morrill Worcester himself. Mr. Worcester is a dedicated resident and patriot, who founded Wreaths Across America – a national non-profit with a noble mission to honor all American veterans. That organization put our beloved town on the map. When he sat across from us, and shared the details of his next endeavor, the Flagpole of Freedom Park, I was hopeful for our town’s future.

The Park will stabilize and extend the tourism season, mitigate crowds away from over-crowded Acadia, create jobs, and successfully build an economic engine in DownEast Maine.

**And with Maine being one of the most veteran-rich states in the nation**, vets will be incentivized to move here. The Park will honor our veterans, create opportunities for them, and solve Maine’s economic and workforce challenges. For months, the Worcesters have been keeping the Selectmen informed and residents fully informed throughout the process. Their plans for the Park have been met with support and positivity.

**Adding this taxable land into our town taxable property will benefit the existing taxpayers** by lowering the tax requirements for all other property owners.

The Town recently approved a Comprehensive Plan in 2019 and has the resources to address the land use permitting associated with this project.

**It’s no secret that the youth in our county look to other areas of the state as well as other states in the nation for sustainable income – this project will provide them a future right here.**

We feel that Washington County needs this and it will create something the State of Maine is proud of.  
**Please consider passing LD 2011 and please give the power to Columbia Falls residents to make this final annexation decision.**

Tony Santiago