

Senator Pierce, Representative Gere, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Housing:

My name is Anne Gass and I'm writing to support LD 1673, An Act to Encourage Affordable Housing and Mixed-use Development by Establishing a Thriving Corridors Program.

I am a former Vice-Chair of the Gray Town Council, founder and chair of the Gray Bike-Ped Committee (2012 – 2019), lead author of Gray's Bike-Ped Plans (adopted by the Council in 2013 and updated in 2018), and of Gray's Complete Street Policy, among other things. I have a Masters in Community Planning. My testimony is submitted on my own behalf, not the Town of Gray's.

For over ten years I and others have been working to revitalize Gray's village center, and in recent years we've been making great progress. In November 2020 almost 80% of voters approved our latest Comprehensive Plan, which prioritizes building more housing within a half mile of the village center. This is precisely the sort of development pattern LD 1673 is designed to support.

In July 2022 over 200 residents participated in a three-day planning charette designed to obtain input into, and build consensus around, a housing, commercial, and transportation vision for Gray village. We emerged from this process with a very solid consensus around what needed to happen both in the village and in the corridors leading into it. We need more housing, better bike-ped infrastructure, on-street parking to support local businesses, and traffic calming to slow down cars and trucks commuting through the village.

We have begun putting the pieces in place to implement this vision. Steps to date include acquiring vacant parcels for future redevelopment, re-working our ordinances to support the vision of denser development patterns, and working with MaineDOT on plans to rebuild village streets to make them more walkable and bikeable.

As you know, costs have soared dramatically since the pandemic, which has severely challenged our ability to continue planning and funding the improvements we want to see. Additional funding and technical assistance, such as that envisioned in LD 1673, is critical to help make our vision succeed. These improvements will improve livability for Gray residents living in and near the village, and support local business development.

I've included below some photos that illustrate the current state of Gray's village center, and why funding for LD 1673 is so necessary.



Figure 1: Gray Village, July 2022

Note the wide lanes and turning angles that make crossing the street dangerous for walkers and bikers. They also allow vehicles to move through the village at high speed.

Figure 2 Gray Village, Reimagined

This is our vision for a redesigned Gray Village. Narrower road lanes allow for wider sidewalks; these and street trees make walking & biking more possible! Note the vision for denser housing development.



Figure 3: Poor sidewalk design discourages walkability.

This inadequate sidewalk on Main Street narrows down to nothing by the end of the building. At that point bikers and pedestrians must compete with traffic rushing to the turnpike interchanges a short way ahead.

Figure 4: Current sidewalk on Main Street in Grav Villaae

How is a person in a wheelchair, or a parent pushing a child in a stroller, supposed to navigate this sidewalk with cars and tractor trailers barreling by at speeds of up to 40-50 mph?



Figure 5: A wholly inadequate ramp and crosswalk on the corner of Main St. and Yarmouth Rd.

Another ridiculous short section of sidewalk on Main Street that meets the letter of the law (ramps down to crosswalks) but is difficult and unsafe to use, especially for someone in a wheelchair, pushing a stroller, or trying to navigate the intersection with small children. Note that the ramp essentially dumps walkers onto the street before they can even access the crosswalk.



Figure 6: Current sidewalks on Main St. in Gray discourage use by walkers and bikers and offer little safety.

This very narrow section of sidewalk on Main Street is unsafe and unattractive; really little more than an afterthought. It is almost lost in vast curb cuts. It is right on the street with very little buffer from cars racing through the intersections at speeds up to 40-50mph.

The wide curb cuts serve a Thai restaurant.