

TESTIMONY TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

WRITTEN TESTIMONY PROVIDED IN SUPPORT, WITH CHANGES FOR LD 1976

“An Act to Update the Growth Management Program Laws”

DATE OF HEARING: Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Honorable Senator Piece, Honorable Representative Gere, Distinguished Members of the Committee on Housing:

November 13, 2023

My name is Ben Smith, Principal Planner at North Star Planning. I started NSP six years ago, after planning for more than eleven years in the Town of Windham. We currently have a staff of four professional planners, and provide long-range planning and ordinance and policy development services as well as planning board support services to communities around Maine. Since 2018, I personally have been involved with the completed or ongoing process for drafting updates to more than a dozen Comprehensive Plans for Maine communities.

Volunteers began work last year to update the Growth Management statute, with a few goals:

- Simplify requirements so that planning would not be such a daunting task for smaller communities that lack access to resources and staff,
- Shift the balance of effort from a focus on inventory and existing conditions to a focus on the future needs and opportunities each community will be facing, and
- Encourage more regional land use and resource planning, and regional planning to be the foundation for local plans.

I do not believe the proposed changes further any of these goals, but do believe that now is the time to elevate the discussion around changes to the statute, as well as the rules, as a positive step forward for planning in Maine.

To that end, I recommend the formation of a stakeholder working group in the style of that tasked with carrying out implementation of LD 2003, led by the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning (BRILUP). This group should review both the Law as well as the Rule that form the framework for local Comprehensive Plan work in Maine. Building on the work already done, it is possible to expect that work to be complete and ready for action within the current legislative session.

Sincerely,

Ben Smith, AICP, Principal
North Star Planning