



PLANNING & CODE ENFORCEMENT

DATE: March 24, 2025

Senator Chip Curry
Representative Traci Gere
Members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development - Room 206

RE: LD 970 - An Act to Prioritize Affordable Housing by Expediting Reviews for Affordable Housing Projects Applying for Funding from the Maine State Housing Authority

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jennie Poulin Franceschi. I am the Director of Planning and Code Enforcement for the City of Westbrook. I would like to provide testimony regarding LD 970, with the recommendation of NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST.

We see concerns with this bill as it sets deadlines for review of affordable housing projects that may or may not work with local noticing & review requirements and appears to push MDEP to conduct a 30 day SLODA review, when at the end of the day, they can deny a project they deem to be incomplete. We do find the SLODA process to be time intensive and is typically the longest lead item in any process we conduct, but unfortunately we feel this bill will not expedite our applicants review process.

The setting of the term “complete application” could be to the detriment of a project if a municipality affords flexibility allowing a project to be reviewed or posted before all elements are “deemed complete”. The proposed language would then remove the flexibility that some municipalities utilize in assisting applicants. Further, now a mandated decision must be made, even if the application is not “approvable”, but has met the definition of “complete”. The definition of complete is to allow the review process to start, however if an error was made by the applicant and they need to address it to be approvable, how does this work with the 120 days stated in the language? I can appreciate an applicant wanting an end to their process, I just would not want to see projects denied because the Statute gave the permitting authority no other option.

As an aside, Westbrook proposed a bill expanding the exemption process in SLODA permits two sessions ago, that we would be happy to resubmit for consideration to help expedite any MDEP review process for applicants.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennie Poulin Franceschi, P.E.
Director of Planning
and Code Enforcement